

A vibrant, stylized illustration featuring a group of diverse women in professional settings. In the center, a woman with dark skin and curly hair, wearing a white lab coat, has her hands clasped together. To her left, a woman with dark skin and glasses, also in a lab coat, looks forward. In the foreground, a woman with dark skin and long hair, wearing a black suit and tie, looks directly at the viewer. To the right, a woman wearing a black hijab and a lab coat smiles. Other women are visible in the background, some in lab coats and others in business attire. The color palette is dominated by warm tones like reds, oranges, and yellows, with some cooler tones like blues and greens. The style is modern and graphic, with bold outlines and flat colors.

WOMEN'S **WORK**, WOMEN'S **WORTH**

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY **TOOLKIT**

MadiEM



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS

We extend our sincere gratitude to all of the organizations that have contributed to the success of this project. Your collective efforts have played a vital role in amplifying the voices of Black, Indo-Caribbean, and South Asian women. We appreciate your commitment to advancing equity and inclusion.

We thank all participants for placing their trust in us by sharing their experiences, and for expressing their appreciation and support for the project. Your voices have been invaluable in shaping this work and creating equitable pathways to economic advancement for all.

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NerdyLazorz

"My idea for this piece was invisible ties that connect women in the workplace. Though we each walk many different paths, our experiences and struggles create an invisible connection in the background, that sometimes, with a knowing glance, is acknowledged."

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Women and Gender
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WHAT IS EMPLOYMENT EQUITY?

Employment equity goes beyond creating a discrimination-free work environment. It's about employers taking action to remove and prevent barriers at work for workers who belong to groups that have often been treated unfairly, for example, because of their **race**, **age**, **gender** or **disability**.

Sometimes to have fair and inclusive workplaces, employers need to look at treating their workers differently rather than the same. Employment equity addresses inequities in the workplace so we can build a more inclusive society respectful of human rights.

More than three decades after the term “**employment equity**” was coined, the effects of systemic discrimination continue to be seen across the labour market. Gaps in representation and pay for marginalized groups remain stubbornly high.

Many employers want to be part of the solution. They know that promoting **equity** makes good business sense and that it's the right thing to do, but they may not have the time or expertise to know where to start.

WOMEN'S WORK, WOMEN'S WORTH TOOLKIT DEVELOPMENT PROCESS

The Women's Work, Women's Worth report was developed from October 2024 to May 2025. The contents of each of the tools were built out through various forms of data and insight collection, including:

- 1. Survey:** 200 Black, South Asian and Indo-Caribbean women shared their workplace experiences through a comprehensive survey. Their insights shed light on the barriers they encounter in professional settings and their vision for an equitable workplace. Data was analyzed using a GBA+ lens.
- 2. Guided Dialogues:** We held guided dialogues to inform, listen and learn, supporting survey data collected, and ensuring our toolkit was shaped by the voices and lived experiences of those most affected.
- 3. Leading Practice Research:** Thorough primary and secondary research was conducted to ensure that the tools are evidence and fact based. Leading practice research provided a deeper understanding to the complexity of the equity, diversity and inclusion journey as well as practical actions that organizations can take.

BENEFITS OF IMPLEMENTING THE **WOMEN'S WORTH, WOMEN'S WORTH** TOOLKIT

INCREASE INNOVATION AND CREATIVITY

Diverse women bring distinct experiences, ideas and viewpoints, leading to increased innovation and **fresh approaches** to problem-solving.

ENSURE **WORKPLACE SAFETY**

Build a space that is free of bias, based on respect, supportive work environment, **zero tolerance for mistreatment** by other employees or customers as a result of discrimination.

MORE INFORMED DECISION-MAKING

Diverse teams of women can provide a more **comprehensive understanding** of the market, customers and community.

IMPROVE **EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT**

Diverse women in leadership positions can **inspire** and **motivate** other employees, foster a sense of belonging among employees, leading to increased job satisfaction and retention.

BETTER REPRESENTATION OF CUSTOMERS AND COMMUNITY

Mirror your market, reflect the demographics of your customer base and community, diverse women can provide **valuable insights** into the needs and preferences of diverse customer groups.

ENHANCED REPUTATION AND TRUST

Demonstrate a commitment to diversity and inclusion can enhance your brand and **build trust** with customers, partners, and stakeholders from diverse backgrounds.

COST SAVINGS

Foster inclusive environments and reduce costs associated with turnover, absenteeism, and recruitment.



HOW TO USE THE **WOMEN'S WORK,** **WOMEN'S WORTH** TOOLKIT



HOW CAN I GET STARTED?

The Women's Work, Women's Worth Toolkit offers resources, supports and action items to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion within your workplace.

There are many ways to use the Women's Work, Women's Worth based on your needs and priorities as an organization.

INGREDIENTS FOR SUCCESS

How you choose to embark on the journey of improving equity in your organization will help determine the success of your efforts. The following suggestions may be helpful as you plan your journey.

- **Commit** to change
- **Collaborate** with your employees
- **Build** effective structures and processes
- **Commit** to ongoing education

START THE CONVERSATION

Participate and Listen to Others



Focus Group Insight

"I just feel like people really need to start appreciating and respecting individuals and to have those compassionate conversations at workplaces, to actually hear the voices of those that are creating their visions..."

Reflect on your own **identity** and **unique perspective**, and how that influences your experiences. Think about how that is the case for each person, making each of our perspectives and experiences different.

Participate in discussions and workshops about how to make your workplace a space where everyone feels welcome, safe and respected.

- Create a space for employees to **openly share their experiences** so that they can build trust with one another
- Dedicate time within an employee's working day to participate in **activities and workshops**

Take the time to discuss with your colleagues how to further build a space where everyone feels welcome, safe and respected at work.

- Grow your network! Reach out to colleagues who you may not normally connect with

Pay attention – do you feel that everyone is being held to the same standards at work and being treated fairly?

- If the answer is “no”, are you pointing it out and speaking up to make sure people are held to the same standards?
- If the answer is “yes”, are you participating in building that safe workplace?



Survey Says...

“My employer(s) consider and welcome diverse input on decision making and problem solving.”



On average, participants rated the above statement a 5.5 out of 10. Together we can work to move the needle forward!

Sample discussion questions:

1. What does **belonging** mean to you?
2. Where do you feel **included**? Excluded?
3. What does it feel like **not to belong**?
4. Who is being left out in company **policies/procedures**?

For example, imagine an insurance policy that does not recognize different partnerships, including same-sex marriages. Perhaps company ID badges have gender and date of birth. Might this be problematic for some groups of people?

Having these discussions will provide a safe space for diverse employees to share their experiences and be an eye opener for their colleagues.



IDENTIFY BIAS

Evaluate your Workplace

Focus Group Insight

"I am the 'token brown girl' and I work in a special needs school and if there are ever parents of colour, they are typically Caribbean and my boss will look at me and I already know.

She wants me to go and speak to them and make that connection because I'm a disabled minority. Yeah. And I'm able to do so because we do have something in common.

*But instead of sending me, why wouldn't you just learn about it to **make that connection as well?**"*

What is Implicit Bias?

Whereas explicit biases are those that people express openly (e.g., arguing that mothers of young children shouldn't hold management positions), implicit biases often lie outside of our **conscious awareness**.

For example, if a manager assigns a **tech-heavy task** to a **young employee** instead of an **older one** based on the unspoken assumption that younger staff members are better with technology, implicit bias is at play. Unconscious bias can also occur in the classroom; for example, students may marginalize non-native English speakers when choosing work groups, with the unconscious assumption that they may not perform as well as native English-speaking peers.

The insidious nature of bias lies in its unconscious nature, as our implicit biases often contradict the values that we aspire to. **And when people aren't even aware that they're doing something, it can be difficult to correct.**

TYPES OF IMPLICIT BIAS

The first step toward addressing implicit biases involves **learning to recognize them**. Among the various implicit biases prevalent throughout society are some such as race and ethnicity bias, age bias, gender bias, LGBTQIA+ community bias, and ability bias.

Race and Ethnicity Bias

Race and ethnicity bias occurs when people assume certain characteristics about someone based on their race or ethnicity, such as assuming that all Asian students are good at math or that all Hispanic individuals are English-language learners, and then take actions that reinforce those biases — unconsciously overlooking a Hispanic employee for a task that requires strong English communication skills, for example.

Age Bias

Age bias occurs when people make assumptions about others based on their age, such as when a hiring manager looking for a social media-savvy applicant rejects a resume because the graduation date tips off that the applicant is middle-aged, unconsciously assuming that the candidate wouldn't be adept at social media management.

LGBTQIA+ Community Bias

Ingrained social norms in which "cisgender, heteronormativity" is the **default** — the assumption is everyone's gender identity corresponds to their birth sex, and they are heterosexual — so the environment and culture conforms accordingly. This can be unwelcoming to those who identify as 2SLGBTQ+, and create stressful working environments. Data shows this culture is also driving many 2SLGBTQ+ employees to hide their authentic selves: 2SLGBTQ+ community bias is prevalent within daily interactions. When a female-presenting woman is asked if she has a boyfriend, implicit bias is at play. Ethnicity and gender identities may intersect into unique biases.

Ability Bias

Ability bias is prevalent throughout society. Examples include hiring managers who are less likely to select a candidate with a disability because they unconsciously assume they'll be more likely to take sick leave, and individuals who assume that all people who struggle with mental illness are prone to violent or dangerous behavior and so, without knowing they're doing so, restrict them from certain roles.

Other Types of Bias

Implicit bias can take many other forms, such as:

- **Affinity Bias:** The tendency for individuals to gravitate toward people similar to themselves.
- **Beauty Bias:** The tendency for individuals to treat attractive people more favorably.
- **Name Bias:** The tendency for individuals to judge someone based on their name — and thus perceived background — which can negatively impact a company's hiring processes.
- **Weight Bias:** The tendency for individuals to judge someone negatively, or assume negative things about them, if they're overweight or underweight.

OVERCOMING **IMPLICIT BIAS**

People can use several different strategies to overcome and address implicit biases, although this is an area that no one can ever fully master. Examples include striving to identify and understand your implicit biases, proactively becoming more inclusive, and spending time with people who are different from you.



Survey Says...

78%

of survey respondents felt **underestimated at work**

Identify and Evaluate Your Own Biases

The first step toward overcoming your implicit biases is to identify them. Use the following steps to reflect on your biases and be proactive in identifying the negative stereotypes you have about others.

- **Introspection:** Set aside time to understand your biases by taking a personal inventory of them. This can be done by taking tests to identify the biases you may have.
- **Mindfulness:** Once you understand the biases you hold, be mindful that you're more likely to give in to them when you're under pressure or need to make quick decisions. If you're feeling stressed, pause for a minute, collect yourself, and take a few deep breaths.
- **Perspective-Taking:** If you think you may be stereotyping people or groups, imagine what it would feel like for others to stereotype you.
- **Learn to Slow Down:** Before jumping to conclusions about others, remind yourself of positive examples of people from their age group, class, ethnicity, or sexual orientation. This can include friends; colleagues; or public figures, such as athletes, members of the clergy, or local leaders.
- **Individualization:** Remind yourself that all people have individual characteristics that are separate from others within their group. Focus on the things you have in common.
- **Check Your Messaging:** Instead of telling yourself that you don't see people based on their colour, class, or sexual orientation, learn to use statements that embrace inclusivity. For example, Apple Inc.'s inclusion statement circles around the topic of being different together: "At Apple, we're not all the same, and that's our greatest strength."
- **Institutionalize Fairness:** In the workplace, learn to embrace and support diversity.
- **Take Two:** Overcoming unconscious biases takes time. Understand that this is a lifelong process and that deprogramming your biases requires constant mindfulness and work.

BE AWARE AND PROACTIVE IN OVERCOMING BIAS

Once you've identified your personal biases, you can take proactive steps to be more inclusive. For one, check your media bias: Do you find that the blogs you follow, the shows you stream, or the social media accounts you "like" are all produced by people quite similar to you? That kind of affinity is natural, but it also reinforces unconscious biases. Seek out media sources aimed at different groups. You'll hear challenging opinions and learn how others experience the world.

SPEND TIME WITH PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT FROM YOU

Increasing your contact with different groups can help undermine your subconscious stereotypes.

Societal forces tend to keep us separate from people of different backgrounds and socioeconomic classes. Break out of your usual routine: Join a club sports team or library book group; volunteer for your child's school or local events.

This approach is backed by science: Psychological theory suggests that individuals can reduce their prejudices by interacting with people from other races, ethnicities, and backgrounds.



Focus Group Insight

"We just need to stop, and we just need to invite everyone to the table, and we need to make those tables for the moment."

BE PROACTIVE AND TAKE STEPS FORWARD

While implicit bias affects the workplace, you can work to avoid it through awareness and conscious decision-making. Taking inventory of the biases you have and laying out strategies to overcome them can help lead to a more equitable society for all.

ALLYSHIP BEYOND MENTORSHIP

Supporting your Workforce



Focus Group Insight

*“If there are people I work with - that I’ve even worked with and don’t work with anymore, I will advocate for them to succeed... And I feel like I lacked that. I think in the last couple of years, I’ve focused a bit more on **‘Who are my advocates?’***

Obviously I’m my own advocate, but in the corporate landscape you need advocates. ... It doesn’t need to be someone like myself. It needs to be someone with the same values as me.”

Being an ally goes beyond mentorship, and it's essential to understand the various ways you can support marginalized groups. Here are some ways to be an ally:

LISTEN AND LEARN

1. **Educate yourself:** Learn about the experiences and challenges faced by marginalized groups.
2. **Listen to their voices:** Amplify and listen to the voices of marginalized individuals, rather than speaking over them.

AMPLIFY AND ADVOCATE

1. **Use your privilege:** Use your privilege to amplify the voices and concerns of marginalized groups.
2. **Speak up:** Speak up when you witness microaggressions, bias, or discrimination.
3. **Advocate for policy changes:** Advocate for policy changes that promote equity and inclusion.

SUPPORT AND SOLIDARITY

1. **Show solidarity:** Show solidarity with marginalized groups by attending events, rallies, and protests.
2. **Offer resources:** Offer resources, such as time, money, or expertise, to support marginalized groups.
3. **Be an accountability partner:** Be an accountability partner for individuals and organizations, helping them to stay committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion.



Survey Says...

“I am afraid of retaliation if I were to report a concerning behaviour or event.”



On average, participants rated the above statement a 5.1 out of 10.
How confident are employees in **your** company that you will listen to their concerns?

CREATE INCLUSIVE SPACES

1. **Create safe spaces:** Create safe spaces for marginalized individuals to share their experiences and concerns.
2. **Inclusive language:** Use inclusive language and avoid language that may be hurtful or exclusionary.
3. **Physical accessibility:** Ensure physical accessibility and accommodations for individuals with disabilities.

ENGAGE IN SELF-REFLECTION

1. **Recognize your biases:** Recognize your biases and work to overcome them.
2. **Reflect on your privilege:** Reflect on your privilege and how it impacts your relationships with marginalized groups.
3. **Apologize and learn:** Apologize when you've caused harm and learn from your mistakes.

True demonstration of your commitment to allyship creates space for trust and connection in the workplace that can provide invaluable teamwork opportunities, leading to greater opportunities for collaboration and innovation down the road.

ADDRESSING MICROAGGRESSIONS

in Being More Inclusive



Focus Group Insight

“I would kind of just fit in, and then when I started wearing the hijab, it was, oh, do you speak English? What language do you speak? When did you come to Canada? So it’s a whole different experience that I never had before. And when I say I was born here, no one believes me.”

Identifying microaggressions can be challenging, as they are often subtle and unintentional. Here are some common examples and tips to help you recognize microaggressions:



Survey Says...

63%

of survey respondents were the target of offensive jokes or comments at least once in their workplace.

VERBAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

1. **Backhanded compliments:** Comments that seem complimentary but contain a hidden insult, such as "You're really smart for a woman."
2. **Stereotyping:** Making assumptions about someone based on their identity, such as "You're South Asian, so you must be good at math."
3. **Denying experiences:** Dismissing or minimizing someone's experiences, such as "That's not racist, you're being too sensitive."

NONVERBAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

1. **Avoiding eye contact:** Avoiding eye contact or not acknowledging someone's presence, often due to biases or stereotypes.
2. **Body language:** Displaying closed-off or defensive body language, such as crossing arms or legs, when interacting with someone from a different background.
3. **Proximity:** Standing farther away from someone or creating physical distance due to biases or discomfort.

ENVIRONMENTAL MICROAGGRESSIONS

1. **Lack of representation:** Not having diverse representation in images, media, or leadership positions at work
2. **Cultural appropriation:** Adopting cultural practices or symbols without proper understanding, permission, or credit.
3. **Inaccessible spaces:** Creating physical or social spaces that are inaccessible or unwelcoming to diverse individuals.

MICROAGGRESSIONS IN THE WORKPLACE

1. **Assuming identities:** Assuming someone's identity, such as their pronouns, without asking or confirming.
2. **Making assumptions about abilities:** Assuming someone's abilities or limitations based on their identity or appearance.
3. **Excluding diverse perspectives:** Not seeking or valuing diverse perspectives in decision-making processes.

By being aware of these examples and tips, you can better identify microaggressions and create a more inclusive and respectful environment.

MICROAGGRESSIONS AT WORK

Case Study 1

BACKGROUND

Aisha Khan is a 32-year-old project manager at a mid-sized consulting firm. Aisha, who wears a hijab, is a practicing Muslim. She has been with the company for over three years and has consistently received positive performance reviews. Despite her professional success, Aisha frequently encounters subtle forms of bias—known as microaggressions—that make her workplace experience difficult.



SITUATION

Over the past year, Aisha noticed a pattern of microaggressions from her colleagues and even some supervisors:

- **Assumptions about her ability to travel:** When projects involved travel, colleagues would often assume Aisha “wouldn’t be comfortable” traveling internationally because of her “religious restrictions,” without ever asking her preferences directly.
- **Questioning of her professionalism:** Some clients and coworkers made offhand comments like, “You speak English so well!” or asked, “Where are you really from?”—despite Aisha being born and raised in Canada.
- **Isolation from team events:** Social events were often centered around activities Aisha couldn’t fully participate in (e.g., alcohol-centered gatherings). She was rarely consulted when events were planned, reinforcing feelings of exclusion.
- **Stereotyping and tokenization:** In meetings about diversity initiatives, Aisha was often “voluntold” to speak for Muslim perspectives, even though that wasn’t her area of expertise and she hadn’t volunteered.

IMPACT

Although none of these incidents individually seemed severe enough to warrant a formal HR complaint, the cumulative effect began to wear Aisha down. She felt isolated, misunderstood, and undervalued despite her professional achievements. This led to increased stress, lower engagement at work, and eventually, she started exploring job opportunities elsewhere.

RESOLUTION EFFORTS

After months of internal struggle, Aisha decided to address the situation.

- **Private conversations:** She requested one-on-one meetings with her manager and HR representative, explaining how microaggressions were impacting her sense of belonging and professional growth.
- **Workplace training:** In response, the company initiated mandatory unconscious bias and cultural competency workshops. Aisha contributed ideas but clarified she did not want to be tokenized as the “face” of the initiative.
- **Policy updates:** The firm updated its inclusion policies to better reflect the needs of employees from different cultural and religious backgrounds, including considerations for event planning and project assignments.

REFLECTION

Aisha’s case highlights how microaggressions, though often subtle, can have significant cumulative effects on employees’ well-being and retention. It also shows the importance of organizations taking proactive, systemic approaches rather than placing the burden of change solely on the affected individuals.

Focus Group Insight

“I’ve seen when I’m wearing the hijab, I’m taken as a different person. And when I’m not wearing hijab, I’m taken as a different person.”

Reflection Questions

- How can managers **recognize** and **address** microaggressions before they accumulate?
- What **policies** could have prevented Aisha’s experience from escalating?
- How can companies make inclusion efforts more employee-led without **tokenizing** marginalized staff?

MICROAGGRESSIONS AT WORK

Case Study 2



BACKGROUND

Danielle James is a 29-year-old marketing specialist at a major tech firm. Danielle, who identifies as a Black woman, is known for her creativity, leadership skills, and strong work ethic. She graduated with honors and was hired through a competitive recruitment process. Although she quickly proved herself as a top performer, Danielle's daily experiences at work often included microaggressions that subtly undermined her.

SITUATION

Danielle faced several recurring forms of bias and exclusion:

- **Questioning of competence:** Despite her role, Danielle was often second-guessed in meetings. Colleagues frequently sought validation of her ideas from others, especially when she proposed innovative strategies.
- **Comments on appearance:** When Danielle changed her hairstyle (e.g., wearing her natural curls or braids), she would receive comments like, "Is that your real hair?" or "You look so different, I almost didn't recognize you," making her feel overly scrutinized.
- **Stereotyping:** Danielle noticed that she was often assigned to lead "diversity marketing" projects, even though she expressed interest in broader campaign work. She felt boxed into a narrow professional image based on her race.
- **Social exclusion:** Informal networking events often happened without her knowledge, contributing to missed opportunities for mentorship and leadership visibility.

IMPACT

These repeated microaggressions created a hostile undercurrent in Danielle's workplace experience. She began to feel isolated, frustrated, and undervalued. Although she loved her career, she started doubting whether she had a future at the company. Stress from navigating these situations affected her mental health and work satisfaction.

RESOLUTION EFFORTS

Danielle decided to act by:

- **Finding allies:** She built connections with other Black professionals at the company and participated in the firm's Employee Resource Group (ERG) for Black employees.
- **Speaking up:** Danielle had a candid conversation with her manager during a one-on-one meeting, sharing how microaggressions were impacting her professional growth and confidence.
- **Organizational change:** As a result, the company launched a mentorship program specifically to support underrepresented employees in accessing leadership opportunities. It also updated policies to improve inclusive practices around feedback, recognition, and professional development.

REFLECTION

Danielle's experience illustrates how daily microaggressions can derail even the most promising careers if left unaddressed. It also shows how employee-led advocacy, when supported by leadership, can drive meaningful structural changes toward equity.

Focus Group Insight

"You just show up as the 'exotic friend' or you show up now as your unique self. But that really does a number on people. I feel like, thank God for these workshops, these groups, individually speaking about embracing voices of Black women..."

Reflection Questions

- What could Danielle's manager have done **earlier** to support her more effectively?
- How can companies **create inclusive environments** without relying on marginalized employees to drive all the change?
- What systems should be in place to catch and address microaggressions **before** employees feel the need to leave?

INCLUSIVE EMPLOYMENT POLICIES

Creation and Evaluation

Focus Group Insight

“So we’re looking for wellness for our employees at work, and I get to do that. So I’m really grateful for that...”

We’re creating an environment. We’re creating safety. We’re creating, you know, that desired visual we kind of grew up with.”



Inclusive employment policies show your employees in tangible ways that you are listening to their voices and committed to an inclusive working environment. When creating or evaluating your policies, be sure to include:

STATEMENT OF COMMITMENT

This statement should encapsulate the company’s commitment to human rights, equity, and inclusion, as well as **why these are important**.

STATEMENT OF OBJECTIVES

This statement may include goals such as promoting human rights, preventing discrimination, or establishing workplace expectations. This provides the policy’s direction and can suggest metrics or benchmarks for later policy evaluation.

WHEN, WHERE, AND WHO

The policy should be clear on practical application circumstances. For example, in addition to offering protection from discrimination to regular workers, it should do so for temporary, casual and contract staff as well as volunteers. It should also apply to the actions of others who interact with workers in their jobs such as suppliers or customers. Finally, it should apply to all conduct in the course of employment, regardless of whether that occurs outside of the regular workplace or normal working hours.

DESCRIPTION OF BEHAVIOURS AND CONCEPTS

Definitions of key concepts and examples of workplace discrimination can give employees a greater understanding of expectations.

KEY ELEMENTS OF INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE POLICIES

Inclusive workplace policies should include items considering the experiences of Black, South Asian, Indo-Caribbean, low-income and LGBTQ+ workers to ensure that all employees, regardless of their sexual orientation, gender identity, ethnicity, feel safe, respected, and supported in the workplace. These policies should encompass non-discrimination, equal benefits, inclusive language, and support for employee resource groups. The examples below include different types of policies, examples, and practices.

Non-Discrimination Policies:

Explicitly prohibit discrimination based on ethnicity, sexual orientation, gender identity, and gender expression.

Equal Benefits:

Offer the same benefits to 2SLGBTQ+ employees and their partners, including health insurance, paid parental leave, and retirement plans.

Inclusive Language:

Use gender-neutral language in all communication and workplace interactions.

Gender-Neutral Restrooms:

Ensure the availability of gender-neutral restrooms.

Support for Transgender Employees:

Provide policies and procedures to support transgender employees during their transition.

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):

Encourage and support the formation of ERGs for diverse employees, providing a safe space for connection and support.

Training and Education:

Conduct regular training and education sessions, do not rely on the discriminated individual to lead diversity initiatives.

Feedback and Evaluation:

Regularly assess and adjust policies based on employee feedback and data.

Visible Leadership Support:

Ensure that leaders visibly champion inclusion and hold themselves and others accountable for creating an inclusive environment.

Ongoing Support:

Provide ongoing resources and support for diverse employees, to create fair opportunities.

REDEFINING “PROFESSIONAL”

Code-Switching vs Authenticity



Focus Group Insight

“You’re Black, but you’re not ‘that type of Black person’. ... Every day people try to make me question my Blackness. I’ve actually cut out the whole code-switching thing. I feel like it’s a way to kind of suppress Black people from being themselves.”

Code-switching is alteration of language and behaviour dependent on social circumstances. While everyone may adjust behaviour in minor ways to meet professional standards, BIPOC individuals in particular may feel pressured to code-switch their identity to meet standards of a narrow lens of professionalism. Code switching can be negative for employees in several ways.

EMOTIONAL LABOUR

- Authenticity:** Code switching can lead to feelings of inauthenticity, as employees may feel forced to suppress their natural communication style.
- Emotional Exhaustion:** Constantly adapting language and tone can be draining, leading to emotional exhaustion.

CAREER IMPACT

- Limited Advancement:** Code switching can create barriers to career advancement, particularly for employees from diverse backgrounds.
- Bias and Stereotyping:** Code switching can perpetuate biases and stereotypes, as employees may feel pressured to conform to dominant cultural norms.

WELL-BEING AND INCLUSION

- Stress and Anxiety:** Code switching can create stress and anxiety, particularly in high-stakes situations.
- Lack of Inclusion:** Code switching can reinforce feelings of not belonging, as employees may feel like they don't fit in with the dominant culture.

MITIGATING THE NEGATIVE EFFECTS

1. **Inclusive Work Environment:** Foster an inclusive work environment that values diversity and promotes authenticity.
2. **Training and Support:** Provide training and support to help employees navigate code switching and develop effective communication strategies.
3. **Leadership Buy-In:** Encourage leadership to model inclusive behavior and promote a culture of acceptance.

By acknowledging the potential negative effects of code switching, organizations can take steps to create a more inclusive and supportive work environment.

The concept of professionalism is often tied to cultural norms and expectations. Traditional notions of professionalism may reflect dominant cultural values, which can be rooted in white, Western culture. This can lead to:

IMPLICATIONS

1. **Cultural Bias:** Professionalism standards may prioritize certain cultural norms, such as direct communication or formal attire, over others.
2. **Exclusion:** Employees from diverse backgrounds may feel pressured to conform to these standards, potentially leading to feelings of exclusion or marginalization.
3. **Limited Representation:** Professionalism standards may not account for diverse cultural practices, styles, or communication methods.

RETHINKING PROFESSIONALISM

1. **Inclusive Definition:** Redefine professionalism to encompass diverse cultural norms and values.
2. **Cultural Sensitivity:** Recognize and respect different cultural practices and communication styles.
3. **Flexibility:** Allow for flexibility in professional settings to accommodate diverse needs and backgrounds.

By acknowledging the cultural context of professionalism, organizations can work towards creating a more inclusive and diverse work environment

Focus Group Insights

(On code-switching)
“... It’s picking away at who makes you unique.”

“I can’t be myself. Being professional means acting white.”



Survey Says...

“I must present an inauthentic self at work to be taken seriously.”



On average, participants rated the above statement a 5.35 out of 10.
Black respondents most frequently reported higher feelings of inauthenticity at work.

RESPONSIVE WORK SCHEDULES

Supporting Women with Caregiving Roles



Survey Says...

68%

of survey respondents had **at least** one dependent at home.

27%

of survey respondents were the **only working adult** in the household.

Focus Group Insight

“When my daughter was younger and she was sick, I was at home. Her dad wasn’t at home. And this indirectly and directly affects women’s economic independence. Because you’re taking a hit, and you’re not making the money. And then it’s like a whole domino effect; if you’re in a bad marriage or you’re in a bad hardship or a bad family, and then you don’t have the money to get out... We just need more support.”

In addition to workplace responsibilities, many women are expected to be primary caregivers for children or relatives at home. Providing accommodations for those juggling responsibilities, especially those trying to singularly provide for a household, can make all the difference in employee satisfaction, retention and quality of life.

STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYERS

1. **Flexible Work Arrangements:** Offer flexible schedules, remote work options, or compressed workweeks to accommodate caregiving responsibilities.
2. **Paid Family Leave:** Provide paid family leave policies that allow employees to care for newborns, adopted children, or family members with serious health conditions.
3. **Dependent Care Benefits:** Offer dependent care benefits, such as childcare assistance or eldercare resources, to support employees with caregiving responsibilities.
4. **Employee Resource Groups:** Create employee resource groups for caregivers to connect, share experiences, and access resources.
5. **Managerial Training:** Train managers to be supportive and understanding of caregiving responsibilities, and to accommodate employees' needs when possible.

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. **Increased Retention:** Supporting caregivers can lead to increased employee retention and reduced turnover.
2. **Improved Productivity:** Flexible work arrangements and supportive policies can improve employee productivity and job satisfaction.
3. **Enhanced Reputation:** Employers who support caregivers can enhance their reputation as family-friendly and supportive workplaces.

Focus Group Insight

"We're also gonna come to a time where our parents are gonna get older, and then we have to become caretakers or caregivers for them. And who's helping us then?... They just say 'You figure it out and make it to work'. And it's always the women who have to kind of take that."

BEST PRACTICES

1. **Conduct Regular Feedback Sessions:** Gather feedback from employees to understand their needs and concerns.
2. **Develop Inclusive Policies:** Develop policies that accommodate diverse caregiving needs, including parental leave, family leave, and bereavement leave.
3. **Provide Resources:** Provide resources and referrals for caregivers, such as childcare resources, eldercare support, and mental health services.

By implementing these strategies, employers can create a supportive and inclusive work environment that values and supports women with caregiving roles.



Survey Says...

"I am able to support my household with my current job."



On average, participants rated the above statement a 4.88 out of 10. That's a lot of women feeling the stress of supporting their families and balancing their work-life responsibilities. Are **your** employees able to support their families?

FOSTERING OPEN DIALOGUE

Keeping the Conversation Going



Focus Group Insight

“Celebrate, respect, and lift up your women, employees, and leaders, from different cultures, but also different ages, different family dynamics, just women...”

“I feel like, for me, based on my experience, I always say what makes work more pleasurable is when they have a work culture. I feel like that helps make things a lot better. When they do activities, or celebrate things. Some workplaces actually have - for example, for school, they have teacher appreciation week. And like, finally, someone cares about me.”

Once you’ve started fostering a workplace of inclusion and equity, it is important to make sure that conversations continue to flow. Workplaces are dynamic environments, and workplace inclusivity isn’t solved all at once - it is a journey between you and your employees. Ensure open lines of communication.

STRATEGIES FOR EMPLOYERS

1. **Create Safe Spaces:** Establish safe and confidential spaces for diverse women employees to share their experiences and concerns.
2. **Regular Feedback Sessions:** Conduct regular feedback sessions to understand their needs, challenges, and suggestions.
3. **Diverse Leadership:** Ensure diverse representation in leadership positions to provide role models and amplify diverse voices.
4. **Employee Resource Groups:** Support employee resource groups for diverse women to connect, share experiences, and advocate for change.
5. **Training and Education:** Provide training and education on diversity, equity, and inclusion to promote empathy and understanding.

Focus Group Insight

“We should be able to peacefully, safely speak about the things that matter most in our work spaces and not feel judged or criticized... We want to feel safe and heard and included.”

BENEFITS FOR EMPLOYERS

1. **Increased Trust:** Open dialogue builds trust between employees and employers, fostering a sense of belonging.
2. **Improved Inclusion:** Open dialogue helps identify and address barriers to inclusion, creating a more equitable work environment.
3. **Enhanced Innovation:** Diverse perspectives and experiences drive innovation and creativity.

BEST PRACTICES

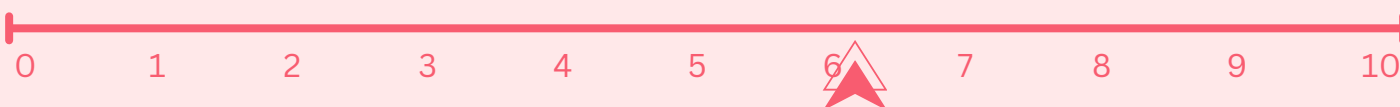
1. **Active Listening:** Practice active listening to understand and address concerns.
2. **Follow-up and Follow-through:** Follow up on feedback and concerns, and take action to address them.
3. **Anonymity Options:** Provide anonymity options for feedback and concerns to ensure employees feel comfortable sharing their thoughts.

By fostering open dialogue, employers can create a more inclusive and supportive work environment for diverse women employees.



Survey Says...

“If I reported a concerning behaviour or event, that concern would be taken seriously”



On average, participants rated the above statement a 6.32 out of 10.
Ensure your employees have a comfortable pathway to expressing their concerns!

EQUAL PAY AUDIT

Reviewing Pay Equity in your Workplace



Focus Group Insight

*“For me, it’s unbiased opportunities, equal mentorship across the board, and pay equity is a **big thing**.”*

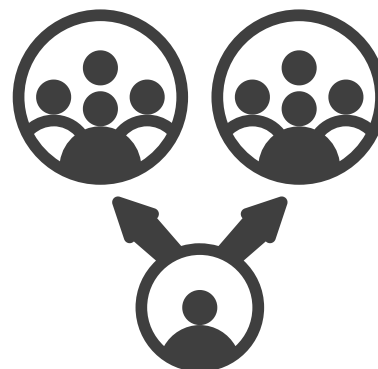
An equal pay audit can help you identify a gender and/or racial pay gap and uncover underlying causes that may be limiting your ability to achieve equal pay. Building a regular equal pay audit into your business as usual will provide achievable outcomes and evidence of your continued progress towards equality in the workplace

Equal pay for equal work means even when jobs or roles are not identical, workers should be paid the same for substantially similar work. This means the skills, effort, responsibilities and working conditions of the roles are comparable. For example, an organisation may have an account manager and office manager. While these roles have different contexts, they both require managing a significant budget, overseeing staff and managing complex issues and risks. They are comparable roles. A pay audit will help you identify roles with comparable work and, if there’s a pay gap, determine the areas of unequal pay. You can analyse the likely causes and determine where you can make changes to achieve equal pay.

STEPS OF AN **EQUAL PAY AUDIT**

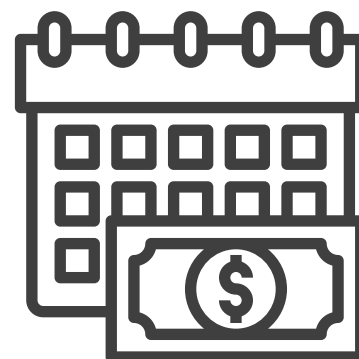
STEP 1. DETERMINE COMPARABLE WORK

To audit equal pay for equal work, you will need to group the roles in your business into levels of comparable work (pay levels) to compare remuneration and determine if there is pay inequality.



STEP 2. COLLECT DATA

Collecting pay data will help you gather the facts about payroll. Choose a pay period such as the last financial year and gather remuneration, demographic and role-specific data from your payroll and personnel records for each employee.



STEP 3. ANALYSE DATA

Analyse data within each pay level to determine what differences exist and any biases in your pay processes.



STEP 4. ASSESS AND ADDRESS

Assess the results of your data analysis and consider the reasons behind them. Consider whether changes in practice could address issues in the results. Make the changes of practice a target in your action plan.



DIVERSITY LEADERSHIP AUDIT

Reviewing Leadership in your Workplace



Focus Group Insight

“Do you feel your workplace leadership is diverse and representative of the employees?”

“Every C suite I’ve ever worked in in my whole career have been white men all around the same age. And in most of the time, VPs tend to be white women... And then the laborers are people of color.”

A diversity audit of leadership looks at who holds leadership roles and whether leadership opportunities are equitable across different identities (race, gender, disability, etc.).

STEP-BY-STEP LEADERSHIP AUDIT

1. SET CLEAR GOALS

- What are you trying to learn? (e.g., racial representation, gender gaps, career progression barriers)
- Focus on leadership roles: executives, directors, senior managers, board members, team leads.

2. COLLECT DEMOGRAPHIC DATA

- Ask leaders to (confidentially and voluntarily) share information such as:
 - Race/ethnicity
 - Gender identity
 - Disability status
 - Other relevant identities
- Tip: Use anonymous surveys or self-ID forms to ensure privacy and honesty.

3. ANALYZE REPRESENTATION

- Compare leadership demographics to:
 - The overall workforce.
 - The broader community (especially important if your organization serves a diverse public).
 - Industry averages (if data is available).
- Ask:
 - Are Black, South Asian, Indo-Caribbean, or other marginalized groups fairly represented in leadership?
 - Are women and nonbinary leaders represented at senior levels?

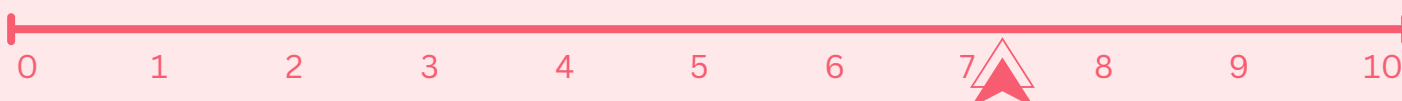
4. REVIEW PATHWAYS TO LEADERSHIP

- Look at:
 - Hiring: Who gets hired into leadership roles?
 - Promotions: Who gets promoted, and how often?
 - Professional Development: Who is offered leadership training, mentorship, or “stretch” opportunities?
- Ask:
 - Are advancement opportunities equitably distributed?
 - Are leadership pipelines diverse?



Survey Says...

“I want to be involved in leadership positions.”



On average, participants rated the above statement a 7.27 out of 10!

5. GATHER QUALITATIVE INSIGHTS

- Conduct confidential interviews, focus groups, or anonymous surveys with employees (especially marginalized staff) to ask:
 - Do they feel leadership is inclusive and representative?
 - Do they trust leadership to address equity issues?
 - What barriers exist to reaching leadership roles?

6. IDENTIFY GAPS AND PATTERNS

- Look for:
 - Underrepresentation of specific groups.
 - Bottlenecks (e.g., high diversity at entry-level, but little at the top).
 - Cultural issues (e.g., non-inclusive leadership behaviors).

7. REPORT FINDINGS TRANSPARENTLY

- Summarize both data (numbers) and themes (experiences).
- Protect confidentiality but be honest about where gaps exist.
- Share findings internally (and externally if possible).

8. DEVELOP AN ACTION PLAN

- Set specific goals (e.g., increase Black leadership representation by X% in 2 years).
- Introduce or strengthen:
 - Inclusive hiring practices
 - Equitable promotion processes
 - Leadership development programs for underrepresented employees
 - Mentorship and sponsorship initiatives
- Establish accountability measures (e.g., track progress annually, link leadership bonuses to equity goals).

IMPORTANT PRINCIPLES

COMMITMENT TO ACTION

An audit without follow-up action undermines trust.

TRANSPARENCY

Share what you learn, including areas that need improvement.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Protect individuals' privacy at every step.



Survey Says...

37%

of survey respondents felt a lack of promotion opportunities was their biggest barrier toward leadership.

EMPLOYMENT EQUITY ACTION PLAN

Creating a plan, creating commitment



Focus Group Insight

“Now when I go into roles and I pick specific companies I work at, I use [my identity] to my benefit... in an advertising space, in a culture like Canada or the US, there’s so many different people there. So if everybody’s white, then your advertisements and actual work we do is not representative to the culture because you can’t pick things out the way someone like I can.”

Supporting the advancement of diverse women is critical to fostering organizational productivity and promoting workplace equity. In order to address systemic barriers, the information provided herein serves to guide the creation of a fair and inclusive professional environment. Below, you will find a sample Equity Action Plan designed to assist in the strategic application of the resources contained within this toolkit. You are encouraged to apply all or selected resources according to the specific needs of your organization.



EMPLOYMENT EQUITY ACTION PLAN

Organization Name:	
Plan Duration:	
Lead Department:	

1. SET CLEAR GOALS

2. KEY OBJECTIVES

Goal	Description	Target Date

3. ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

This image shows a blank sheet of white paper with horizontal ruling lines. The lines are evenly spaced and extend across the width of the page. There are no margins, text, or other markings on the paper.

4. MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Metric	Baseline	Target	Frequency

5. ACCOUNTABILITY

Executive Sponsor:	
Lead:	
Progress Review	
Employee Feedback Loop:	



EXAMPLE EQUITY ACTION PLAN

Organization Name:	York Region Water Fountains
Plan Duration:	2 Years
Lead Department:	Human Resources

1. SET CLEAR GOALS

build a diverse, inclusive, and equitable workplace where every employee—regardless of race, gender, disability, or background—has access to opportunities, respect, and support to thrive

2. KEY OBJECTIVES

Goal	Description	Target Date
Increase Representation	Improve representation of Black, South Asian, and Indo-Caribbean women in leadership roles by 15%.	April 1 st , 2026
Improve Accessibility	Conduct a workplace accessibility audit and implement 5 key changes.	April 1 st , 2027
Enhance Equity in Recruitment	Launch blind recruitment process and targeted outreach strategy.	September 30 th , 2026
Foster Inclusive Culture	Deliver anti-racism and unconscious bias training to all staff.	June 1 st , 2025 Annual workshop

3. ACTIONS AND ACTIVITIES

A. Recruitment and Hiring

- Implement blind resume screening for all new hires.
- Partner with community organizations (e.g., ACCES Employment, Urban Alliance on Race Relations).
- Develop inclusive job postings using equity-informed language.
- Require diverse interview panels for mid- and senior-level roles.

B. Retention and Advancement

- Launch mentorship program for racialized and disabled employees.
- Develop internal leadership pathways with training and sponsorship for women of color.
- Conduct quarterly pulse surveys to assess equity in workplace experience.

C. Policy and Practice Review

- Review HR policies using a DEI lens (e.g., parental leave, dress code, performance reviews).
- Update anti-discrimination and harassment policies with input from diverse ERGs.

D. Training and Education

- Provide mandatory equity training for all staff.
- Offer specialized training for managers on bias-free performance management and inclusive leadership.
- Host monthly “Equity in Action” discussions or guest speakers.

4. MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION

Metric	Baseline	Target	Frequency
% of Black/South Asian/Indo-Caribbean women in leadership	12%	30%	Bi-annual review
# of employees completing training	0	200	Bi-annually
Accessibility improvements completed	0	5	Annual review
Employee perception of inclusion (survey rating)	3.4/5	4.5/5	Quarterly review

5. ACCOUNTABILITY

Executive Sponsor:	Camille Mohamed
Lead:	Brianna Murphy
Progress Review	Bi-annual report to leadership and staff
Employee Feedback Loop:	Anonymous suggestion forms, open forums, ERG Consultations

There is no “one size fits all” solution to creating an inclusive workplace—each organization must find its own way. But whether you have been working on diversity and inclusiveness for some time, or are just starting the journey, we hope this toolkit will inspire you to do more to ensure a great place to work “for all” in your organization.

Diversity and inclusion is a holistic endeavour that requires us to recognize people as whole and complicated beings and recognize the systems that impact people’s ability to thrive and live authentically in this world. Continuing this work—through connection with others—helps ensure that this work is meaningful, impactful, and creates a sense of belonging for all employees. Not only is this good for business, it’s good for people.



“To me employment equity means being treated equally in all aspects of the job, from hiring to compensation, benefits, work environment, professional growth opportunities, recognition and appraisal and job security.”