

Memorandum



DATE: February 4, 2025

TO: Members of the Combatting Racism, Discrimination and Hatred Advisory Committee

FROM: Rob Trewartha, MA, Director of Strategic Communications and Initiatives

SUBJECT Empowering Change: A Comprehensive EDI Strategy for the City of Mississauga (2025-2031)

1. BACKGROUND

The following memorandum is meant to provide an overview of the City's approach to equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI), as well as an update on the progress of City's new EDI strategy entitled, Empowering Change: A Comprehensive EDI Strategy (2025-2031)

2. EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION AT THE CITY OF MISSISSAUGA

The City has been committed to EDI since 2017, with the introduction of its first Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. In 2020, the City moved forward on an EDI agenda in earnest, following multiple Council resolutions, in particular Resolution 207, the Combatting Anti-Black and Indigenous Racism resolution. As an organization, the City has been working to foster a work environment where employees feel included and have an equal opportunity to succeed.

Since 2022, City staff have produced three annual reports about the organization's EDI efforts, cataloguing programs, policies, and activities in this area. The 2024 report will come to Council in spring 2025. These reports are available online.

The City's Strategic Plan has five pillars: Move, Belong, Green, Connect, and Prosper. The organization's EDI work relates to each of these pillars, but in particular the Connect and Prosper pillars. Mississauga's goal is to be a community where people choose to be because people choose to live in communities where they feel accepted and valued.

3. WHAT DOES EDI MEAN IN MISSISSAUGA?

There has been a lot of confusion around the terms equity, diversity, and inclusion in the media and on social media. There has also been some criticism and misrepresentation of the terms.

In Mississauga, EDI does not mean quotas or special privileges for some groups over others. It does not mean unqualified people are receiving positions because of their identity or that other people are losing jobs for the same reason.

In Mississauga, the City defines EDI as follows:

Equity, which is often confused with equality, is the act of implementing processes that are just and fair across various groups of people. To achieve equality, you need to account for equity first. For instance, the City's commitment to the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) is an example of equity. By making spaces accessible for those with disabilities, we are leveling the playing field and allowing for equality of opportunity.

This does not take away anything from others, but rather produces a better, more universally valid design framework that benefits all sorts of people (e.g. a ramp and automated doors benefits women with small children, older adults, people with temporary injury or disability, children and others).

The goal of the organization is to achieve equality of opportunity, or put in other words, a merit-based system. To achieve a merit-based system requires that peoples' lived experiences are accounted for and that everyone competes on the same footing.

Diversity is having a presence and representation of people who are different. This includes, but is not limited to, race, gender, disability religion, sexual orientation, political affiliation, age, language, and nationality. Mississauga is one of the most diverse cities in the world. Many studies show that inclusion of diverse voices and ideas has a positive impact on decision-making, organizational culture, and the bottom line.

When serving a population as diverse as Mississauga's, it is important to employ people with similar lived experiences to those they serve. Diversity is important not only to the bottom line, but also to maintaining the public's trust. As City leaders have said for years, our diversity is our strength, and Mississauga remains a place where people from around the world can live together in peace.

It is important that the City embraces the diversity of its employees and residents to unlock the potential that exists from a diversity of ideas, skill sets, lived experiences, work and personal experience, and innovation. Mississauga has benefited economically from our diversity as the City is able to welcome people and businesses from around the world to this community. Speaking more than 150 languages and representing almost every country in the world is a significant advantage economically and culturally for Mississauga. Over 60% of the City's population is born outside of Canada, making Mississauga one of the most diverse cities in the world. It's important then that diverse people are not just recognized, but respected, valued, and given the chance to thrive, bringing forward their experience, expertise, ideas, and innovation.

Inclusion is the state in which all groups feel recognized and receive access to programs, systems and power, and are not discouraged due to their personal characteristics.

The City's goal is for all employees and residents to feel included in their city.

Diversity is a given in Mississauga, but equity and inclusion are choices. To unlock the full power of the diversity in Mississauga, it is in the City's best interest to ensure everyone feels included.

When taken together, equity, diversity, and inclusion create a level playing field that allows people to feel a sense of belonging. It is about lifting communities out of poverty, marginality, exclusion by being 'deliberate' in our actions. Our goal through EDI is to have a system based on merit. This is not possible when some people start way ahead of other people through no fault of their own.

If we currently had a merit-based system, there would be no need for EDI policies. But since this is not yet the case, the City is working to create an environment where people's differences and lived experience are taken into account, and in some cases, accommodations made (AODA), to ensure we become a merit-based organization that serves its employees and the public as effectively as possible.

Examples of EDI in action, include:

- Ramps and sidewalk curb cuts
- Making all online documents accessible
- Family restrooms and change tables in both men's and women's washrooms
- Parental leave
- Conscious and unconscious bias training
- Wellness programs and incentives
- Employee recognition programs
- Communicating in multiple languages or having translation available
- Establishing committees like the CRDHAC to combat racism, discrimination and hatred in the community

There are many more examples, but these provide a good overview of what EDI looks like in practice.

4. **EMPOWERING CHANGE: A COMPREHENSIVE EDI STRATEGY (2025-2031)**

The City of Mississauga is updating our Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy to develop an EDI strategy for the corporation. This project builds on the EDI work to date with the following objectives:

- Fulfilling Council's commitment to Truth and Reconciliation
- Meeting our obligations under the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA)
- Implementing the recommendations of the approved 2017 Workforce Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
- Implementing the recommendations of the Council approved Black Caucus Report, "First Steps"
- Implementing the City's Workplace Psychological Health and Safety Strategy
- Implementing the Council approved Healthy City Strategy

The strategy covers the four key areas of work that defines any municipality:

- As an employer
- As a policy maker
- As a service provider
- As a purchaser of goods and services

The main deliverable of this project is a detailed 2025-2031 action plan that consolidates all the work City has been doing to make it a responsive and efficient organization that meets the growing needs of its diverse population and employees effectively. Additional deliverables that will be produced by the strategy include resources and tools for staff to deliver their services according to the needs of our population (e.g. relevant data/engagement tool, etc.).

City staff have been working with the Diversity Institute at the Ted Rogers School of Management and Toronto Metropolitan University to craft this strategy.

5. WHY AND EDI STRATEGY AND WHY NOW?

The City of Mississauga has consistently been named as one of the top employers in Canada. In 2025, the City was ranked as the top Canadian municipality and 38th on the Forbes list of the top 300 employers in Canada by a survey of 40,000 employees across Canada. The survey asked former employees if they would recommend the company, and ranked companies on criteria including salary, work flexibility, training programs and opportunities to advance. It is on the last criteria that the City's EDI strategy will focus, ensuring that diverse people have an equal opportunity to grow and advance and that we achieve equality of opportunity.

As the City of Mississauga continues to evolve into one of the world's most diverse cities, it is imperative that we adapt our services, policies, practices and procedures to align with this demographic reality. The Empowering Change: A Comprehensive EDI Strategy is an essential mechanism for a government to foster a thriving society that benefits everyone inside and outside the organization.

By actively considering the lived realities of our diverse communities, we can create sustainable initiatives, practices, policies, and processes that meet the needs of all employees and residents. This approach ensures that the City provides the right services at the right time, ultimately cultivating an inclusive environment where all individuals can flourish.

Desired Outcomes

Implementing the new EDI strategy will yield numerous benefits for all employees of the corporation and members of the community. A few of these benefits include:

- When residents feel seen and heard, they are more likely to engage in community activities, fostering a sense of belonging that strengthens the city and communal ties.
- EDI-focused strategy empowers residents by providing equitable access to resources and opportunities which makes the government more democratic and accountable.

- Industries that embrace diversity in the workplace often see enhanced performance and engagement, as varied perspectives lead to more dynamic problem solving and decision-making and drive productivity, innovation and creativity.
- When programs and initiatives are tailored to meet the specific needs of all our diverse communities, it enhances the quality of City service delivery by making it more responsive and cost efficient.
- This approach not only improves individual outcomes but also contributes to the overall health of the community.
- The City of Mississauga remaining a top employer in Canada, a leader in the municipal space, and an example for other businesses in the community.

The Strategy is a commitment to build a more equitable Mississauga – where all employees and residents (new and established, young and old, resourced and under-resourced, etc.) regardless of their lived experience, have the opportunity to thrive. Ultimately, this approach positions the City of Mississauga as a leader in progressive governance, creating a benchmark for others.

The Strategy will ensure the City to comply with provincial legislation, including AODA as mentioned, and the Ontario Human Rights Code. More than that, a revised strategy that demonstrates the City's commitment to EDI will help us attract top talent, ensure all residents have a voice, and that we are operating in an equitable and inclusive fashion.

Current Status of the Strategy

Initial public consultations were held through October to December 2024. Another round of public consultations began in January and culminated in a public forum on February 5, 2025. All engagements have been advertised and promoted through the City's communications channels.

Following the public engagements, staff will work with the Diversity Institute to compile a final report, with recommendations, for Council's consideration. This is scheduled for September 2025. The strategy will be in effect from the date of Council approval until 2031.

6. WHAT EDI IS NOT

There has been a lot of talk about EDI recently, and along with it, misinformation and misconceptions about what EDI is and what its objectives are.

To be clear: at the City of Mississauga, EDI is not a handout. It is not based on quotas or goals. Nobody wins at the expense of others, and nobody is being hand-picked to be moved to the front of the line.

At the City, EDI does not mean we take away jobs from one group and give them to another to rectify historical grievances. It is about eliminating bias and discrimination from our policies and practices to ensure a level playing field for all. It's about achieving a truly merit-based system and equality of opportunity.

The City's EDI strategy and daily work does not assume that every person, policy or process is racist or discriminatory, but seeks to work across the organization to identify where bias, racism and discrimination may exist and address them appropriately.

The City's EDI work is not **Critical Race Theory (CRT)**. Critical Race Theory is an academic theory that looks at the relationships between social conceptions of race and ethnicity, social and political laws, and mass media. It considers racism to be systemic as laws for instance that were created by people of a certain gender and race and infused with certain biases, and in some cases, racism. "Critical" refers to Critical Theory, an academic term, not criticizing or blaming individuals. CRT examines how race intersects with our society, our laws, our institutions. To deny that race is a factor in all these places is impossible.

Finally, the City's EDI strategy does not use the term "woke," a slang term that has been used with negative connotations as of late. Woke simply means to be aware of and actively attentive to important facts and issues (especially issues of racial and social justice). While the City's EDI work is aware of racial issues and systemic discrimination, it does not use the term "woke" in its work.

7. CONCLUSION

The City of Mississauga will continue to advance EDI through a revised strategy and will put in place a framework to follow and measure against for the next five years. The public are welcome to provide feedback throughout the process, as are the members of the CRDHAC, Members of Council, and City staff at edi@mississauga.ca. Questions about the project can also be directed to this email address.

Through the City's revised EDI Strategy, we are striving to ensure that in all aspects of our business we are fair, unbiased, and as equitable as possible, and most importantly, creating an organization and a community where everyone feels like they belong and can succeed, no matter their lived experience.

Prepared by:



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