2025 CFREF Symposium – EDI Breakout Session

Tuesday May 27, 2025

11:15 AM – 12:30 PM

York University
4700 Keele Street
Room 006, Steacie Building
Toronto, ON M3J 1P3

Facilitator:

Andrew Castillo (drewcast@yorku.ca), EDI & Community Outreach Specialist (Connected Minds, York University)

- Presentation

Panel Session:

The EDI Breakout session began with a quick reminder to meaningfully reflect on the stories shared, the reasons why, and to try to understand the meaning and lessons from the discussions shared in the room.

The goal of the panel sessions was to hear about EDI success across CFREF funded-initiatives.

Caitlin Mullin (cmullin1@yorku.ca), Program Director (Connected Minds, York University)
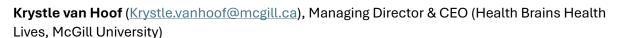
- Panel Presentation

Caitlin Mullin of Connected Minds shared her experience hosting an **EDI Leadership Summit** amidst a culture of EDI fatigue and resistance, and increasing anti-EDI sentiments in research and research funding cessations in America. Connected Minds Leadership and Directorate were taken to a venue located halfway between both institutions, and devices put away for the day (screen time breaks were built in). The day started off strong with a presentation by Dr. Denise O'Neil Green, inaugural Vice-President Equity, People and Community Inclusion at Toronto Metropolitan University to set the tone on responsibilities to lead impactful programming through CFREF's unprecedented funding. Groups discussions were had that shared EDI progress in the program, an opportunity to strategize EDI initiatives across various Operational Committees through breakout sessions, and discuss how CFREF funded programs can lead by standing by the integration of EDI across all aspects of the program's governance, research, and impacts.

Andrea Gill (amk.gill@utoronto.ca), Manager Inclusive Excellence & Research Development (Division of the Vice-President, Research & Innovation/ Acceleration Consortium, University of Toronto)

- Panel Presentation

Andrea Gill of the Acceleration Consortium shared highlights from two major initiatives at Acceleration Consortium. The **Student Undergraduate Research Program (AC-SURP)** provided

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underrepresented students from across Canada the opportunity to participate in funded research. The program included major program development including, mentorship opportunities, career development activities, present a poster presentation. By supporting underrepresented undergraduate students, a scaffold can be made to help inspire and support students to pursue graduate studies. The **Caregiver Research Support Funds** provide temporary research support funding for early/mid-career researchers on leave due to caregiving responsibilities. This initiative helps to encourage and normalize caregiving leave in research, and helps to address productivity gaps exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. By highlighting the importance of developing initiatives with a news grabbing communication strategy, each CFREF program has the potential to widely disseminate the positive impacts supporting EDI in research has on excellence and productivity.

Krystle van Hoof (Krystle.vanhoof@mcgill.ca), Managing Director & CEO (Health Brains Health Lives, McGill University)

- [Panel Presentation](#)

Krystle van Hoof of Health Brains, Healthy Lives shares from her experience leading a 2017 Competition CFREF that the biggest challenge to implementing EDI change is culture, and how logic models and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) can be the driving force behind changing behaviours, as culture progresses. By structuring multiple goals and focus areas, integrating EDI across the program seems more feasible and an inclusive data collection approach can ensure your CFREF shares its most impactful stories. The successes of the Indigenous **Mentorship and Paid Research Experience for Summer Students (IMPRESS)**, demonstrates that a structured program with clear requirements, milestones, and post-program support can help prepare the next generation of researchers to continue doing excellent work.

Question and Answer Period:

After each of the panelists delivered their 5-minute presentation, a Q&A session followed. Questions stemmed from:

- Wanting to know how to organize large-scale initiative – book early and try to minimize outside distractions for an impactful discussion.
- The importance of a strong communication led action plan – Work with communication specialists to ensure the importance of why initiatives are happening and how program changes will be implemented
- How to include folks outside of the underrepresented groups in EDI conversations – make space for them too in all your initiatives

Group Discussion:

Participants arranged themselves into three group and were instructed to respond to each of the questions below, which were also posted on an online Miro Board.

1. What are some of the greatest lessons learned in implementing EDI initiatives at your CFREF?
2. What are some challenges being faced in implementing EDI initiatives at your CFREF?
3. What are your suggestions/recommendations for solutions to the common challenges shared by other EDI Initiatives?

MiroBoard Responses (PDF/screenshot).

The MiroBoard was initially populated with answers from the Pre-Event Survey (1. Successes/2. Challenges/3. Additional Comments) shared with participants attending the session. It is important to note that the Challenges are a collation of challenges shared across multiple CFREF initiatives and may require further discussion at a future EDI Community of Practice Meeting to discuss shared solutions/strategies for tackling these barriers to implementation.

After the groups discussion major discussion points where shared from each of the tables.

Highlights included:

- Sharing Engagement strategies for distributing the EDI Action Plan – develop public facing versions of your action plan that can be easily distributed; host information sessions to discuss the EDI Action Plan
- The importance of making supporting and guiding applied EDI work to application processes – Not everyone is an EDI specialist, it is worthwhile creating opportunities to support researchers applying EDI to their work, for example through a check-in as part of a funding competition's application process
- Suggestions for creating governance models – Ensuring there is representation of EDI Champions/Leaders/Committee Members across the different governance pillars/domains/portfolios; the importance of a strong EDI lead who can drive impact across multiple levels of governance