

Bridging Knowledge Mobilization and Inclusion by Developing a Community of Practice DEI Action Plan

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Abstract

Purpose: This Viewpoint article presents the intersection of knowledge mobilization and diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) from the perspective of knowledge mobilization practitioners. We represent the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University (Toronto, Canada) and [Research Impact Canada](#) (RIC), Canada's knowledge mobilization network. We reflect on building and animating a Community of Practice (CoP) with the [Future Skills Centre](#) (FSC) and outline the DEI Action Plan we developed for that knowledge mobilization mechanism. We provide recommendations for researchers and research organizations to strengthen the role of DEI in knowledge mobilization.

Design/Methodology/Approach: We provide critical inquiry into our knowledge mobilization practices through self-reflection, comparison to the literature, and testing against the lived and living experiences of knowledge mobilization and DEI practitioners.

Findings: We outline the steps taken to build the CoP and develop and implement the DEI Action Plan to support peer exchange and learning, collaboration, and capacity building. We also conclude that knowledge mobilization and DEI are mutually reinforcing. Both seek excellence in diverse forms. Both seek to maximize access to research programs, outputs, and evidence. Both are common features in the Canadian research landscape.

Originality: The intersections of knowledge mobilization and DEI are only starting to be explored. As a Viewpoint article, we have written from our perspective of knowledge mobilization practitioners who bring diverse personal and professional DEI perspectives to our work. This complements the literature review conducted by Cornelius-Hernandez and Clark (2024) with recommendations derived from our practice.

Purpose of the article

In today's rapidly evolving world of research and innovation, knowledge mobilization, resulting in societal impact, is essential for addressing complex societal challenges. Without the uptake of new research, we run the risk of missed opportunities for innovation, thereby limiting progress on social as well as economic goals. This is exemplified by Canada's science, technology, and innovation priorities. Canada's Excellence Research Chairs (CERC) program has five high-level societal challenges, which break down into 57 areas of focus. Only 30 of these 57 can be addressed by filing a patent or starting up a company. The remaining 27 require non-commercial pathways to impact, such as impacts on public policy, professional practice, or social services (Government of Canada, 2022). Canada needs

knowledge mobilization (Gobel, 2021), but it needs knowledge mobilization that is underpinned by a strong commitment to values and ethics.

Values ensure that knowledge mobilization engages community and other groups in an authentic fashion by avoiding extractive research practices (Igwe, Medici, and Rugara, 2023) and that the research questions are based on the needs of the community and provide benefits back to the community. Ethics is more than compliance with institutional ethics frameworks to safeguard research participants. Ethics includes principles that guide and decolonize research, and includes conscious approaches to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI), as well as accessibility (DEIA).

This Viewpoint article reflects on the intersection of knowledge mobilization and DEIA from the perspective of knowledge mobilization practitioners. It draws on recent work by Cornelius-Hernandez and Clark (2024). They undertook a systematic review of the literature that identified four barriers, including: inherent, unconscious, and implicit biases; a lack of evidence-based best practices; siloing of research and information; and a lack of institutional support and resources. Our practice-based article addresses the final barrier: a lack of institutional support and resources. We represent the Knowledge Mobilization Unit at York University and [Research Impact Canada](#) (RIC), Canada's knowledge mobilization network. We will present our work building and animating a Community of Practice (CoP) with the [Future Skills Centre](#) (FSC) and outline the [DEI Action Plan](#) we developed and implemented, providing reflections for DEI and knowledge mobilization practitioners and scholars and their institutions. This article begins to answer the call by Gagnon et al (2022) to address the gap between DEI research and DEI practice. We build on the DEI and knowledge mobilization literature to develop and implement a DEI action plan for a community of practice. We present recommendations for others seeking to embed DEI into knowledge mobilization practice.

Our Positionalities

Bissy is an Ethiopian-Canadian woman born and raised in Toronto, Canada. She is a career development practitioner, researcher, and community advocate. She has experience designing and delivering skills training programs for underserved youth to ensure they have the digital skills needed to navigate Canada's drastically changing workforce. She's worked for [Youth Employment Services](#) as a Career Counsellor on various government and corporate-sponsored programs, including the [HSBC Career Accelerator Program](#), [Youth Job Connection](#), and [This Way ONward](#). She worked at [Blueprint ADE](#) as a Research & Evaluation Associate on diverse projects for the [Future Skills Centre](#) and [City of Toronto](#), with a focus on providing technical assistance and coaching to build the evaluation capacity of grantees, practitioners, and community members. Most recently, she was the Manager, Evaluation and Continuous Improvement and later Acting Director of Operations at [Research Impact Canada](#) (RIC), based at [York University](#). She helped drive research, evaluation, knowledge mobilization, and strategic planning for two major portfolios: RIC's bilingual (French/English) Network of 30+ institutions across Canada, and the Future Skills Centre Community of Practice of 1,500+ members.

Connie is an empathetic and action-oriented leader dedicated to fostering shared spaces between researchers, academics, staff, and community partners to find community-driven

solutions. As the Director of Strategy and Business Development for Research Impact Canada, she implements pan-Canadian initiatives to grow Canada's capacity and investment in knowledge mobilization for over 37 universities, colleges, and research institutions across Canada. Having previously worked in the workforce development sector, science writing, and sustainability research, Connie knows that connection, mutuality, and exchange are at the core of working towards impact across every sector. A proud child of Chinese immigrants and a volunteer for newcomers and seniors, Connie is guided by the belief that meaningful change starts with evidence-based practices and is furthered by community collaborations.

David is a research administrator and has been working in research partnership and innovation since he left his postdoctoral immunology research in 1996. He joined York University in 2003 to lead research administration. In 2006, York and the University of Victoria launched Research Impact Canada, now 37 research organizations building institutional capacity for knowledge mobilization and the broader societal impacts of research. He is a gay, cis-gendered, white man who emigrated from England to Canada when he was two years old. He has extensive community experience in HIV/AIDS education and outreach. He sat on the Steering Committee for the York University President's Advisory Committee on DEI. He wrote the Decolonizing Research Administration Action Plan following a series of workshops on decolonizing for research administrators (Hillier, Phipps, and Haig-Brown, 2023). He implemented the action plan with the Associate VP Indigenous Initiatives between 2022-2024. He also launched and administers the internal university funding for Black Research Seed Grants and Indigenous Research Seed Grants.

These positionality statements are more than our bios. They illustrate the different roles and values we bring to the development of knowledge mobilization for DEIA. We acknowledge our privileges of being fully employed and living in an industrialized nation, and our lived experiences make us aware of the need to lower barriers to participation that we witness in our professional and personal lives. The FSC CoP and its accompanying DEI Action Plan are informed and shaped by these personal and professional journeys. By not relying on traditionally construed "experts" (see Hart et al, 2007, referenced below), the CoP recognizes the equivalence of the expertise of academics, professional practitioners, and the public. This lowers barriers to participation and enhances inclusion.

Context and Background

What is a Community of Practice?

A Community of Practice is made up of a group of people who share a common passion about a real-world challenge and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis (Wenger, McDermott, & Snyder, 2002; Nicolini et al, 2022).

Using community-university partnerships as an example, a CoP is described by Hart, Maddison, and Wolff (2007) as having the following characteristics that make it an ideal example of knowledge mobilization: 1) there is an emphasis on sharing; 2) there are no defined experts to enable sharing; 3) they have a sense of purpose; 4) focus on the

boundaries between participants and their organizations, with boundary spanners facilitating the sharing between individuals and their context.

Thus, CoPs are a knowledge mobilization mechanism. CoPs are designed to facilitate peer-to-peer knowledge exchange, foster collaborative problem solving, and support professional development. Knowledge mobilization is a mechanism to support impact, and impact equals change. Through knowledge mobilization, knowledge is shared, partnerships are developed, and change can occur through new and/or improved professional practices, social services, and public policies (Phipps et al, 2016). In the context of the FSC, the CoP was designed as a knowledge mobilization mechanism to connect actors across Canada's workforce development ecosystem, enabling members to collaboratively address challenges, build capacity, and implement promising Practices. The change we anticipated by implementing the FSC CoP was to get new knowledge into the hands of skills and labour market practitioners and policy makers so they could more effectively contribute to Canada's skilled workforce.

To champion inclusive career development in Canada and support diverse stakeholders across the skills training and workforce development ecosystem, the Future Skills Centre (FSC) launched a CoP as a pan-Canadian network of diverse partners and community members across the skills training and workforce development ecosystem. With FSC's unique value proposition as an ecosystem connector in skills development, the CoP's main goal was to connect siloed service providers in a competitive funding landscape and address a lack of resources and training for those service providers. The FSC CoP was first launched in 2020 as a virtual space and encouraged account holders to connect in a self-directed way by providing a repository of contacts, event registration pages, and resources.

By including Research Impact Canada (RIC) as part of its FSC CoP Core Delivery Team in 2022, we learned that an effective CoP is only as strong as its **active facilitation**. Together, the Core Delivery Team refreshed the CoP to include new ways of mobilizing knowledge across the skills training and workforce development ecosystem, piloting new ways to animate the CoP. The CoP's activities, evaluation, and DEI Action Plan focused on network connections, peer learning and exchange, and access to experts and resources. With the spirit of testing and iteration, a key question guided this phase of experimentation of knowledge mobilization within the CoP: how can we foster meaningful engagement and connections to create value for the skills training and development ecosystem in Canada?

As a result, RIC piloted new ways to animate the CoP, focusing primarily on methods of peer-to-peer exchange, low-touch and high-touch ways to encourage collaborations, and workshops to facilitate uptake and use of tools in day-to-day work.

Who are the members of the CoP?

Members of the FSC CoP included a diverse mix of stakeholders: frontline employment and skills training providers, academic and non-profit researchers, government policymakers, and representatives from business and labour groups. These members joined the CoP with a shared interest in strengthening Canada's workforce development landscape through learning, collaboration, and systems-level thinking. Each group brought unique expertise, challenges, and expectations, creating an environment for mutual learning and practical

impact. A breakdown of each member's profile and interests for joining the CoP can be found in the following section.

Building the CoP

Some CoPs are built from the ground up, where individuals with shared interests and goals come together to learn and to collaborate to address challenges in their community. In some cases, organizations and institutions adopt a CoP model to connect like-minded individuals to come together to shape initiatives (Cambridge and Sutter, 2005). Some organizations design CoPs as an established feature of knowledge management and knowledge sharing across teams and departments (Henley Business School, 2015).

The FSC CoP was built as a top-down approach whereby FSC (the institution) set out to mobilize a community (the end-users). Given that the idea for the CoP was to reach a pan-Canadian audience across multiple sectors, the FSC CoP Core Delivery Team needed to better understand how to build a CoP that could provide value for FSC-funded projects as well as the greater skills training and workforce development ecosystem.

RIC started with a scan of the existing communities of practice in the skills training and workforce development sector in Canada to learn successes and challenges in building a community of practice, and to inform the CoP's value proposition and best practices in engaging diverse people in a pan-Canadian context.

RIC also conducted intensive bilingual stakeholder consultations, called Conversations to Connections (C2C), between Summer and Fall 2022. Its purpose was to connect with projects funded by the Future Skills Centre, as well as community members in the broader skills training and workforce development ecosystem, to understand common challenges and needs, and to learn how they hope to benefit from and contribute to the FSC Community of Practice. Across C2C, there were 147 survey respondents, 108 one-on-one interviews, and 21 semi-structured group interviews.

In response, we learned that CoP members would want to gain the following: 1) A "community manager" to facilitate connections between community members with similar areas of interest; 2) networking events to connect and collaborate, and share best practices; FSC projects shared interest in learning about wins and lessons learned from other funded initiatives. This includes curating smaller, thematic events for FSC projects to exchange learnings and best practices (e.g., connect stakeholders regionally); 3) mix of live events and self-paced learning opportunities (e.g., recorded webinars), so that offerings are flexible and accessible for those with time constraints; 4) A repository of free resources, including recorded events, actionable research, people, and tools; and, 5) meaningful engagement with experts in the field to provide targeted support for their work and skills-building among practitioners to better utilize tools and approaches needed for the future of work

C2C also confirmed the need to have diverse actors across the skills training and workforce development ecosystem as members to ensure an inclusive, bilingual, pan-Canadian CoP. Four (4) key member groups were determined to be engaged to participate in the CoP.

Employment and Skills Training Providers (e.g., career counsellors, job developers, case managers, program managers directly serving and equipping Canadians with the skills

needed to thrive in the labour market). Service providers' interest in a CoP is primarily in learning best practices for skills training to serve their clients and new funding opportunities.

Researchers (e.g., researchers at post-secondary institutions, non-profit organizations, think tanks, government, evaluation organizations). Researchers were highly motivated by industry-academic collaborations, and hoped the CoP would facilitate those connections.

Policymakers (e.g., Members of municipal, regional, provincial, territorial, and federal governments) Beyond wanting to connect with key groups in business, training, and labour in their jurisdiction, policymakers were interested in the CoP to understand the latest insights to inform policies and advocacy work.

Business, Industry and Labour Groups (e.g., Members of literacy groups, workforce planning boards, industry councils, chambers of commerce, unions). Similar to service providers, there was immense interest in best practices and new funding opportunities.

Overall, members received open access to timely news, knowledge products, tools, resources, and research with actionable insights to inform best practices. The opportunity to connect and collaborate with other members to exchange knowledge and problem solve around common challenges, and to participate in professional development workshops and connect with experts who can provide targeted learning support.

DEI Action Plan

The vision for the FSC CoP was a thriving, pan-Canadian community that encompasses people of diverse experiences, knowledge, and expertise. Aligned with [FSC's DEI and Reconciliation \(DEI&R\) strategy](#), which requires all FSC activities to have a DEI&R lens, the goal of the [FSC CoP DEI Action Plan](#) was to ensure that the CoP facilitated a mutually beneficial exchange of knowledge and resources to achieve the common goal of building a thriving Canadian workforce.

For the pilot period, RIC developed an [evaluation framework](#) that would measure the impact of testing innovative ideas and activities for the CoP. One of the guiding approaches for the evaluation was a "Value Creation Framework" to prioritize collecting evidence on what CoP members found most valuable, their experiences participating in the CoP, and focusing on data indicators that could signal early signs of impact.

A Value Creation Framework is a helpful way to assess and link activities to desired outcomes (Mackness, 2012; Wenger et al., 2011). Indicators of value can be assessed over time, including the *immediate value* that members get from being part of the CoP, the *potential value* of the CoP, the *applied value* of practice change, and the *realized value*, i.e., return on investment of the CoP.

For the FSC CoP, a value creation approach guided the collection of evidence on what activities and offerings stakeholders deem most valuable, including:

Immediate value: What stakeholders experience as a result of CoP refresh activities.

Potential value: What stakeholders will receive (e.g., tools, training, resources) and the perceived usefulness and intent to use products.

Applied value: If stakeholders utilize products and offerings to enhance their practice and connect and collaborate with others in the CoP.

Realized value: Active network of pan-Canadian skills sector stakeholders who connect, collaborate, and implement innovative practices.

What was also needed was a way to track and measure how DEIA could be implemented, tracked, and measured. The team recognized that while the Value Creation Framework approach provided a starting point to evaluate the success of the CoP, a separate approach to DEIA with a different set of goals, actions, and processes was needed that would not be possible within the confines of a traditional evaluation framework and indicators.

Designing the DEI Action Plan

A co-design process was used to develop the DEI Action Plan. We relied on early learnings from C2C, available data and insights from FSC on the experiences and needs of FSC-funded projects, and internal sessions with the Core Delivery Team. The idea was to ensure coordination between each partner on the design and delivery of CoP activities to have a DEIA lens. We established clear expectations for each activity, including developing briefing notes and process planners for each activity with shared priorities, objectives, community engagement strategies, and timelines. The first draft of the pilot phase DEI Action Plan was completed in August 2022. While CoPs should include diversity, equity, and inclusion, the prioritization of a DEI Action Plan as an actionable document with its own set of targets and processes is unique amongst other CoPs.

Since the evaluation framework was guided by a developmental evaluation approach to identify early lessons and insights, including wins, obstacles to implementation, and opportunities for improving the model, the evaluation framework and DEI Action Plan was meant to be dynamic and flexible to allow for iterative testing and redesign of activities connecting members to people (peers and guest experts), learning (workshops and webinars), and knowledge (tools and resources). The key questions guiding the DEI Action Plan were: What is working and why? What can be improved? How can we continuously tailor CoP offerings to meet the diverse needs of stakeholders?

The plan was developed to ensure that the space embodied the following principles: 1) a **diverse** CoP ensures that differences amongst community members are recognized, valued, and celebrated. It encourages diverse perspectives and experiences. It also ensures there is a diversity of content that is shared within the CoP. 2) an **equitable** CoP recognizes that barriers to participation, engagement, and opportunities in the skills development and workforce training ecosystem exist. It is the action of creating an environment that discusses and addresses these barriers and provides support so that all community members receive equitable opportunities to succeed. 3) An **inclusive** community is built with a sense of belonging from its members. It is the action of co-creating a supportive space that ensures all community members are heard, respected, and understood.

A set of goals was co-designed with the FSC CoP Core Delivery Team to ensure that all members of the Core Delivery Team and Executive Steering Committee were on board to ensure the sustainability of the plan.

GOAL 1: Equitable opportunities

Foster equitable access to the CoP through an inclusive outreach strategy and implement practices that address knowledge, financial, geographical, and language barriers faced by CoP community members.

GOAL 2: Accessible CoP activities

Implement DEI practices to accommodate a full range of community member accessibility needs across all refresh activities and the CoP platform.

GOAL 3: Inclusive content and programming design

Design resources, tools, and refresh activities inclusive of all community member groups working with or serving diverse client demographics

GOAL 4: DEI capacity and commitment of the Core Delivery Team and the Executive Steering Committee

Enable the Core Delivery Team (CDT) members to improve their awareness, knowledge, and skills of DEI principles as well as ensure they are committed to implementing the actions set forth in this DEI action plan.

Measuring the Impact of the DEI Action Plan

While implementing the DEI Action Plan to guide the design and development of various activities for the pilot phase, the Core Delivery Team was able to reach 1,396 individuals across diverse offerings and events. There were a total of 254 repeat attendees who joined at least 2 events, which shows the value that the pilot period provided to those members.

During the piloting and testing phase of the FSC CoP, RIC led the design and delivery of experiments with different approaches to peer-to-peer exchange, collaboration, and knowledge sharing. As the implementation lead, RIC designed and tested offerings with a “minimum viable functionality” approach to allow for iterative redesign and continuous improvement.

The elements focused on during the pilot and testing phase to design CoP activities included:

Peer Exchange and Learning: Space to exchange knowledge, effective practices, ideas, tools, and resources; Provide an expertly facilitated space for members to exchange ideas and discuss common challenges and possible solutions; Connect career development practitioners with experts meaningfully

Collaboration: CoP members connect for potential future collaborations; CoP members leverage connections to relevant experts, subject matter specialists, or advisors who could

provide targeted support for their work; Regional and sector-specific events allowed for diverse perspectives and stakeholders with similar passions and experiences to connect and discuss ongoing trends and challenges cohesively and engagingly.

Capacity Building: CoP members learn about leading practices and gain the capacity to address challenges in the ecosystem; CoP members increase professional capacity because of offerings and initiatives; CoP members gain access and the ability to use tools in their day-to-day work that are useful and enhance their practice.

To understand the experiences of attendees, a mixed data collection approach was used, including surveys, social media analytics, interactive polling, semi-structured group and one-on-one conversations with FSC project stakeholders and stakeholders across the skills training and workforce development ecosystem, and observations conducted by the Core Delivery Team. Based on learnings and feedback from the piloting and testing phase of the FSC CoP refresh, we learned that the following components are crucial to a high-quality knowledge mobilization offering:

Connecting People to People: Creating an inclusive, accessible, and bilingual environment for open discussions and sharing and exchange of ideas and resources. In the context of the FSC CoP, this looks like connecting people across Canada who are preparing Canadians for the future of work to help foster connections for possible future collaborations.

Connecting People to Knowledge: Delivering accessible, user-friendly, curated products, research, and tools with actionable insights and innovative practices that provide high-level synthesis of complex research with findings relevant for target audiences. This looked like actionable infographics that highlight learnings from CoP events and FSC research.

Connecting People to Learning: Facilitate learning and professional development by connecting members to experts who can provide targeted support for their area of work. This looked like partnering with FSC to identify workforce development experts' opportunities to host events on relevant topics, and leveraging RIC's resources and knowledge by providing the sector with tangible tools and resources that address gaps and barriers in their work.

The pilot period showed that two of the most successful activities that provided the most value for CoP members were the Peer Learning Groups (PLGs) focused on peer-to-peer learning and exchange, and Professional Toolkit Webinars, focused on providing learning support and capacity building. For PLGs, 89% (353) of attendees found the topics explored valuable to their work. Many shared that they appreciated the space to discuss challenges, share resources, and the number of attendees has continued to grow steadily over time. For Professional Toolkit Webinars, 95% (843) of attendees found webinars to be valuable. They appreciated the practical strategies presented in the webinars, which they could directly apply to their work.

PLGs are a series of 90-minute sessions that include expert-led presentations and facilitated breakout room sessions to promote connections amongst attendees and provide opportunities for peer learning and exchange. After each event, we curated post-event knowledge products with insights and learnings shared, and relevant tools and resources.

One of the most successful PLG delivered was *AI and the Future of Workforce Development*, with 159 attendees.

Professional Toolkit Webinars were designed specifically for career development practitioners to receive information from key experts application uses of relevant tools and strategies. Webinars were co-led by subject matter experts and tool creators. Participants had the opportunity to connect with experts through an interactive “help me solve” session, where attendees received support on how to apply tools in their own organizations. Similar to PLGs, after each event, we curated post-event knowledge products with relevant insights, tools, and resources. One of the most successful webinars was *ChatGPT for Skills and Workforce Development Professionals*, with over **300** attendees. Many of the participants are community-based and non-profit skills organizations. Raising awareness of AI opportunities and issues and providing access to further tools helps build capacity among more precarious organizations who might otherwise be excluded from the opportunities afforded by AI. While not related to individuals, this does speak to the need to consider the inclusion of diverse organizations in knowledge mobilization activities.

What’s Next?

While the long-term impacts of the CoP are still too early to tell, it was clear that participants perceived immediate and potential value. The ultimate goal or realized value is that, over time the efforts of CoP members will contribute to system-level changes that include policy and practice changes for skills delivery. Through the piloting and testing period, we were able to capture early insights on the *immediate* and *potential* value of the FSC CoP for its members. The immediate value was shown with the 89% and 95% satisfaction rate of participants who attended the PLGs and Professional Toolkit Webinars. The potential value of the CoP was identified through feedback that members shared throughout the pilot and testing phase:

“Recognition [that] there is a Peer Learning Group that can continue the conversation on definitions, processes, best practices, common, and different experiences.” - PLG participant

“I managed to identify some new people and their work that I would like to connect with around certain evaluation issues or approaches.” - PLG participant

“I think you had an excellent idea to invite influential members involved in the regional socio-economic development, such as representatives of the City of Thunder Bay and representatives of the business and cultural communities. I think it’s a great idea to invite people beyond conference attendees. This was most definitely knowledge mobilization in action.” - Speed Networking Event participant

When the pilot phase ended, the team turned its attention to scaling, a diverse suite of offerings has been tested that can be scaled to a pan-Canadian community of practice that provides value for the skills training and development ecosystem. Given the success of the Peer Learning Groups and Webinars, these initiatives were advanced to serve a wider and diverse audience across geographic locations, target populations, and various industries.

The pilot period proved that the CoP filled a gap in the skills training and workforce development ecosystem by bringing together people across Canada who share a common goal of preparing Canadians for the future of work. Knowledge mobilisation efforts fostered an environment where members came together, shared information, and brainstormed solutions to common challenges.

Reflections on KMb/DEI

RIC has a DEIA thinking group formed of DEIA specialists and knowledge mobilization specialists from RIC member institutions who come together in an ad hoc fashion when we need to consider knowledge mobilization through a DEIA lens. Cornelius-Hernandez and Clark (2024) provided early reflections on the intersections of knowledge mobilization and DEI. Both functions can be mutually reinforcing.

Both seek excellence in diverse forms

- There is no single best practice for either knowledge mobilization or DEI. Both seek to support success and excellence in many diverse forms. For knowledge mobilization, research on the UK Research Excellence Framework has shown that among the 6,361 impact case studies, there were 5,397 unique pathways to impact (Cagla et al, 2023). Many types of impact, many ways to make that impact. Similarly, there is no single way to lower barriers to participation for everyone who has lived and is living experiences of diverse forms of marginalization.

Both seek to maximize access to research programs, outputs, and evidence

- York University has a Community Engagement Community of Practice whose members share practices to increase access to York facilities and resources by local community members. This sometimes involves the campus built environment that benefits everyone, not just community members. It also includes access to physical buildings and intellectual resources. York developed the first Indigenous Research Ethics Board in Canada (York, 2023) to recognize the unique nature of Indigenous scholarship and provide authentic ethics review that not only adheres to the Tri-Council Policy Statement on Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans but does so in a culturally centred fashion. York's Libraries and Knowledge Mobilization Unit collaborated with a local community to establish a repository of community-based research and resources that was in the community and not on York servers. This enhances access by community-to-community resources.

Both are common features in the Canadian research landscape

- The Canadian Institutes of Health Research recently released its updated research excellence, including a definition for research excellence. This definition includes both knowledge mobilization as well as DEI. Other features that reduce barriers to participation include open science, Indigenous knowledge, and patient-oriented research (CIHR, 2024).

Knowledge mobilization lowers barriers to participation and supports inclusion

- Making the Shift is a knowledge mobilization network focused on preventing youth homelessness. Network participants include academic researchers, policy makers, social service providers and the LiveEx network of people with lived experiences of youth homelessness. Their primary knowledge mobilization mechanism is the Homeless Hub (<https://homelesshub.ca/>). Their annual reports demonstrate how many thousands of youth have stabilized their education, employment, and relationships with families (Making the Shift, 2023).
- Through the FSC CoP, we supported knowledge mobilization activities that framed skills training not just as a pathway to employment, but as a mechanism for advancing decent work, work/life balance, and well-being. For example, the webinar [“Creating a Culture of Care: Addressing Mental Health in the Skills and Workforce Development Sector”](#) and the subsequent Mental Health Toolkit supported a shift in discourse toward the social and emotional dimensions of work. By mobilizing practitioner knowledge and lived experiences, this webinar helped career practitioners challenge extractive models of labour that prioritize productivity and market-focused results, and instead ask: how can we create ecosystems that value care, inclusion, and psychological safety? This illustrates how the CoP can foster systemic change by embedding equity-informed insights into everyday practice.

Knowledge mobilization to enhance the societal impact of research is not unique to Canada. In their book *Cornerstones of Impact Management* Dowd, Keenan, and Graham (2025), edit contributions from authors in Australia, Catalonia, UK, Denmark, Canada, and USA. DEI is also not unique to Canada. For example, every institution applying to Horizon Europe must have a Gender Equity Plan, and UK institutions can sign on to the Athena Swan Charter, recognizing a commitment to gender equity in research. To internationalize this work, Research Impact Canada hosts a quarterly call with five international impact networks where topics such as DEI can be discussed (Phipps, 2023).

Recommendations

Gagnon et al (2022) identify that there is a gap between DEI scholarship and practice. They call for action knowledge to be applied in practice. This paper is one example of DEI practice informed by the literature and by the authors’ lived experiences through personal and professional engagements. Some of the key learnings for how to successfully execute knowledge mobilization activities for a community of practice include how to implement DEI principles into processes and procedures. We recommend:

1. Work directly with DEI experts to inform the design and delivery of offerings and outreach strategies to engage diverse audiences. In addition, consider more holistically defining “expert” to value the experiences and knowledge that stakeholders and partners can contribute. An expert is someone who can provide targeted insights, solutions, and support.
2. Emphasize accessibility as part of any DEI action plan or strategy implemented. Accessible programming design may include using closed captions, creating pre- and post-event packages, providing recordings or transcripts, and accommodations for visual impairments. Consider incorporating presentation templates that meet

accessibility guidelines, and curating bilingual resources shared. Actively build DEIA action plans.

3. Ensure the staff have the capacity, resources, tools, and support needed to sustainably execute activities. Regular touchpoints throughout the lifecycle of the activity to ensure that all staff members (delivery team, leaders) are clear on if the goals are being met
4. Create a working group of relevant partners to gather experiences and knowledge on best practices to engage underrepresented groups to ensure that offerings remain diverse and inclusive. As mentioned above, the RIC DEIA Thinking Group supports RIC with feedback and expertise on how to deliver accessible and inclusive events.
5. Use a co-design process to design thematic events and topics that leverage the expertise, knowledge, and experiences of key audiences. Consider engaging key stakeholder groups as well as diverse actors in the broader sector to address unique considerations and experiences of target audiences.

Figure 1: The process, activities, and recommendations for developing an accessible, equitable, and inclusive community of practice.

INSERT FIGURE 1 HERE

Acknowledgement: The authors gratefully acknowledge Sandy Chan, Research Impact Canada, for creating Figure 1.

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