

EDI ACTION PLAN | 2021



“

Our commitment to improving the representation of marginalized groups in neuroscience through equity and inclusion best practices means attracting and retaining a diverse representation of outstanding scientists.”

— **FAY HARRISON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR**

CONTENTS

1.0	MISSION STATEMENT	4
1.1	Core Principles	4
1.2	Strategic Objectives	5
2.0	ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK	6
2.1	Oversight	6
2.2	Pathway to Action	7
3.0	DIVERSITY STATUS & OBSERVATIONS	8
3.1	BrainsCAN participants EDI survey	8
3.2	Continuous program evaluation	16
3.3	Iterative optimization for data collection and expansion	18
4.0	ACTION PLAN INITIATIVES	19
4.1	Data-driven governance for the development and evaluation of EDI initiatives	20
4.2	Extend influence, leadership and support on EDI across the university and nationally	21
4.3	Embedding EDI considerations within all of our programs and the wider research community	22
4.4	Support and enhance positive work environment for all students, researchers and staff	24
4.5	Create, promote and support access to equity and diversity initiatives for all staff	25
4.6	Develop and implement equitable and diverse recruitment and retention initiatives	26
5.0	TARGET KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI)	28
5.1	Short Term (CFREF Term)	29
5.2	Long Term	29
6.0	PROSPECTIVE IMPACT AREAS	30
6.1	Influence hiring policies	30
6.2	Increasing visibility of research from underrepresented groups	30
6.3	Expanded EDI training and education opportunity	31
6.4	Additional programs and/or groups of interest	31
7.0	APPENDIX - ABBREVIATIONS	31

MISSION STATEMENT

Equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) best practices strengthen the validity and impact of scientific research and are integral to innovation and scientific excellence¹. Developing initiatives that directly create opportunities for historically marginalized groups is central to BrainsCAN's strategic plan.

We use a data-driven, adaptive and long-term approach to identify and implement best practices in EDI, at all levels of career progression, in research design and in the research environment.

^{1.1} CORE PRINCIPLES

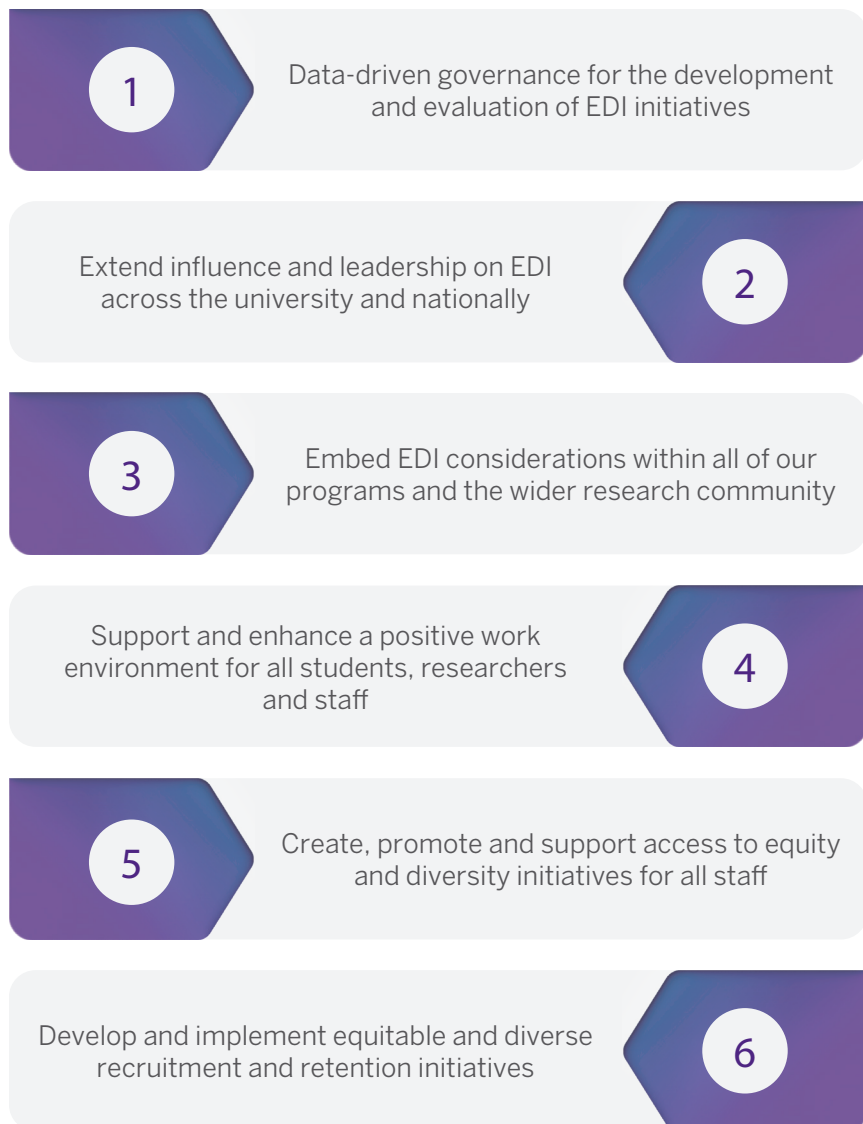
- We take ownership in addressing the challenges that remain in achieving full participation from members of underrepresented groups (including women, racialized groups, Indigenous peoples, LGBTQ2S+ people and people with disabilities) in our research communities.
- Comprehensive equity, diversity and inclusion practices increase access to a larger pool of qualified potential participants, strengthen research outputs, and increase overall research excellence.
- The creation of an equitable, diverse and inclusive research community is the responsibility of every member of the community, not just members of underrepresented groups.
- Diverse representation is absolutely necessary to reach our full potential as a research community and academic institution.

¹Science, Technology and Innovation Council (STIC), *State of the Nation 2014—Canada's Science, Technology and Innovation System: Canada's Innovation Challenges and Opportunities*, Ottawa (ON), 2015, p. 5.

1.2

STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Our data-driven EDI Action Plan outlines six strategic objectives that inform all EDI policies and practices (*Figure 1, page 7*):



**Western respects
everyone's right to
choose a washroom
appropriate for them.**

**Trust the person using
this space belongs here.**



**Western
BrainsCAN**
Transforming brain research.

This project is a partnership between Western University, Equity & Human Rights Services, the University Students' Council, the Society of Graduate Students, Pride Western and Queer Caucus. Special thanks to the President's Standing Committee on the Safety of Women on Campus and the USC for their funding support.

For more information, visit uwo.ca/equity

2.1 **OVERSIGHT**

The EDI Committee is a sub-committee of the BrainsCAN Executive Committee (EC).

The EDI Committee provides a forum for developing high level advice to the EC on all matters related to equity, diversity and inclusion, including issues that impact service provisions, outcomes and the reputation of BrainsCAN.

The Committee collects data to identify EDI matters related to our specific environment and then develops clear policies and action plans to address them. The action plans specify how objectives have been identified, how they will be addressed, how outcomes will be tracked, and how risks will be managed.

2.1.1 **EDI Committee Key Responsibilities**

Develop an EDI Strategic Plan, including an implementation and risk assessment plan.

Provide a forum for the identification and consideration of equity and inclusion issues, intended to enhance diversity.

Advise on equity aspects of BrainsCAN strategic, functional and operational plans and develop broad position statements.

Advise on the equity implications of BrainsCAN policies and practices and on responses to policy initiatives by the institution, government and other external agencies.

Provide an annual equity report to the EC, which includes agreed performance requirements.

Address other equity matters as directed by the EC.

2.0

ACTION PLAN FRAMEWORK



2.2 PATHWAY TO ACTION

The EDI Action Plan framework uses a data-driven approach to address challenges related to EDI within BrainsCAN, and within the overall academic community.

Central to our approach is accessing our community for input and guidance. Relying on data collected from BrainsCAN researchers enables us to target specific needs within our community, while also assessing the impact of initiatives to allow iterative improvement. This cycle is described in *Figure 1*. 📌

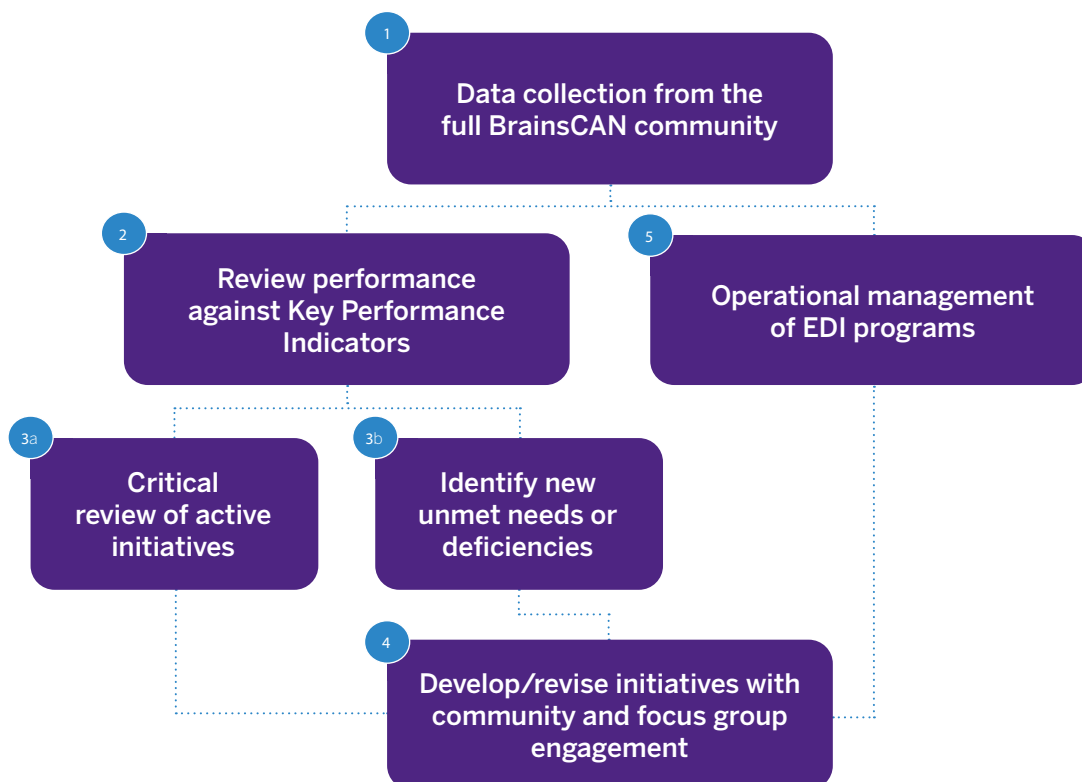


Figure 1. Agile EDI Action Plan Framework for Accountability and Optimization

DIVERSITY STATUS & OBSERVATIONS

A lack of specific data within the academy makes it difficult to unravel the barriers and inequities that exist. Leading academic equity programs such as Athena SWAN and Dimensions have demonstrated how effective data-driven action plans can be.

We therefore perform an annual environmental scan, to assess the culture and climate, to identify areas of progress and those that need improvement, and to inform our program design and delivery. In addition to this annual survey of the BrainsCAN community, we monitor EDI aspects of our programs including diversity in HQP recruitment, and gender balance among internally funded research teams and appointed panels.

3.1

BRAINSCAN PARTICIPANTS EDI SURVEY

In July of 2020, the BrainsCAN EDI survey was launched to assess the landscape within our community. This survey was designed using Qualtrics, and all responses were collected anonymously.

A draw for gift cards for the campus bookstore was offered to enhance the survey response rate, where personal details for the draw were kept separate from the individuals' survey responses. A summary report of the

environmental scan is being used to assess key impact areas such as safe working environment, representation, and equal opportunity.

A full report of annual survey findings is made publicly available for transparency within our broader community, and accountability towards effecting change. The following are selected results that were noted as key areas of interest for EDI strategic planning.

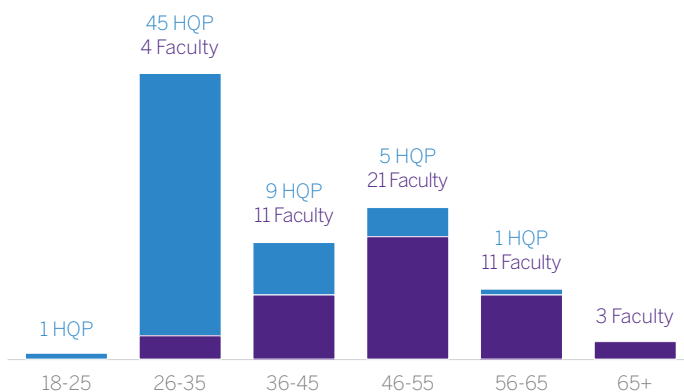
3.1.1

Community Diversity

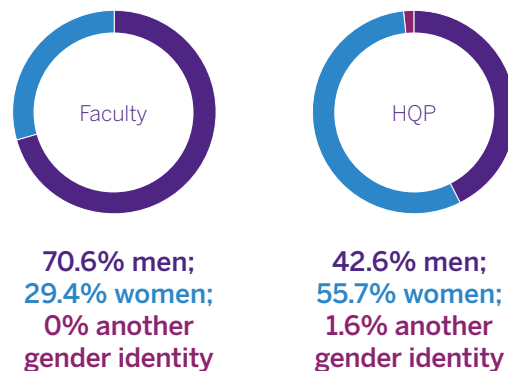
Response Rate

114 total respondents (**51 faculty**; **61 HQP**; **2 prefer not to answer**) from a BrainsCAN mailing list of approximately 450 (150 faculty; 300 HQP)

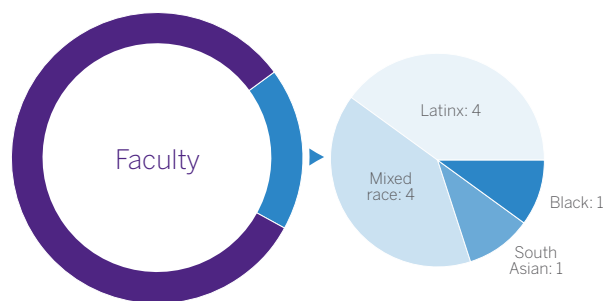
Age Breakdown



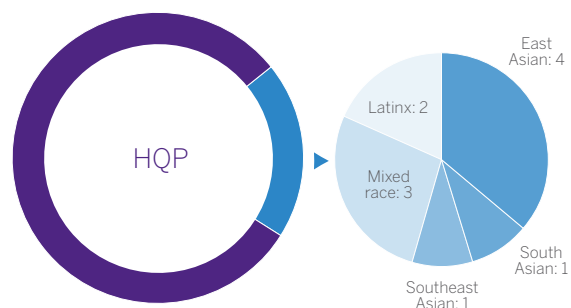
Gender



Racial Groups



80.4% White; 19.6% Racialized and Ethnic group members
(Black: 1; East Asian: 0; South Asian: 1; Southeast Asian: 0; West Asian: 0; Mixed race: 4; Latinx: 4)



82.0% White; 18.0% Racialized and Ethnic group members
(Black: 0, East Asian: 4, South Asian: 1; Southeast Asian: 1; West Asian: 0; Mixed race: 3; Latinx: 2)

Sexual Orientation



98.0% Non-LGBTQ2S+; 2.0% LGBTQ2S+

75.9% Non-LGBTQ2S+; 24.1% LGBTQ2S+

Indigenous Peoples

0 survey respondents indicated Indigenous persons status.

Persons with Disabilities

2 HQP respondents indicated a disability.

Impact Areas

The survey questions were divided into six impact areas. Each section contained questions including agreement level to statements, yes/no, open form, with responses stratified by demographic representation. The following are generalizations and trends within that data, which will inform the development of active programs, identify the need for new initiatives, and inform the EDI Committee on prospective programs requiring community support.

Perceived Representation

The area contained two statements:

I feel represented on promotional material related to my work environment (e.g. websites, brochures, posters, press releases, etc.).

In my work environment, diverse groups are visible role models (e.g. in staff inductions, as speakers at conferences, at recruitment events, etc.).

- In general, faculty members were less likely to agree to these statements.
- Among HQP; agreements increased from graduate students to postdoctoral fellows to staff.
- Women had lower agreement than men to the statement on having visible role models.
- Race has a major effect on perceived representation, with members of racialized groups showing much lower agreement to representational questions.
- Sexual orientation appears to have limited effects on perceived representation. Though LGBT2QS+ respondents were high in agreement on promotional material, and lower agreement on having visible role models.

Equal Opportunities

The area contained six statements:

In my experience, work is allocated on a clear and fair basis irrespective of gender, race, Indigenous identity, ability, sexual orientation, religion, etc.

Individuals I work with value the full range of skills and experience that I have.

I am actively encouraged to take up career development opportunities.

I am encouraged and given opportunities to represent my research environment externally and/or internally (e.g. on committees or boards, as chair or speaker at conferences, etc.).

I am provided with useful mentoring opportunities (as mentor or mentee).

I am provided with useful networking opportunities.

- Overall, faculty noted lower (compared to HQP) agreement on “fair allocation of work”, and “encouraged to take up career development”; while HQP noted lower agreement for “opportunities to represent research externally”, “mentorship opportunities”, and “networking opportunities”.
- Staff had particularly low agreement on “opportunities to represent research externally”, “mentorship opportunities”, and “networking opportunities”.
- Women (faculty and HQP) are less likely (compared counterpart men) to agree to all Equal Opportunity statements.
- Faculty from racialized groups have very low agreement in all Equal Opportunity statements, with disagreement to the “fair allocation of work” statement.
- LGBTQ2S+ HQP indicated lower agreement than Non-LGBTQ2S+ HQP on fair allocation, external representation, mentoring opportunities, and networking opportunities.

Safe & Inclusive Environment

The area contained five statements:

In my work environment, it has been made clear that unsupportive language and behaviour are not acceptable (e.g. condescending or intimidating language, ridicule, overly familiar behaviour, jokes/banter that stereotype people).

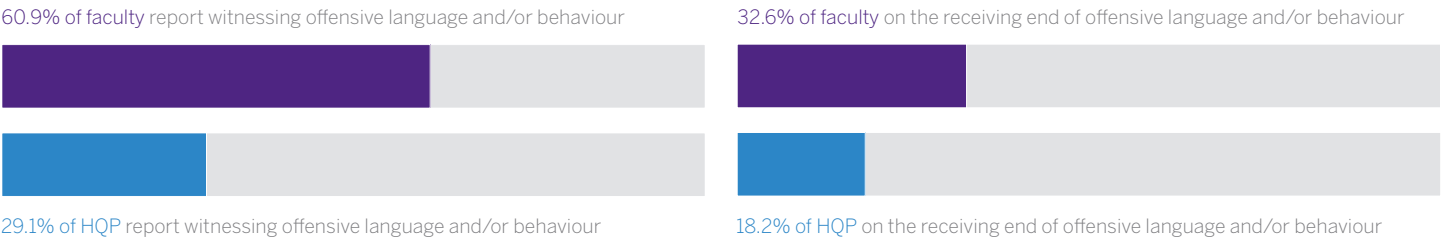
Inappropriate images that stereotype people are not acceptable in my work environment (e.g. in calendars, newspapers and magazines; on computers and mobiles).

I have been on the receiving end of offensive language and/or behaviour within my work environment.

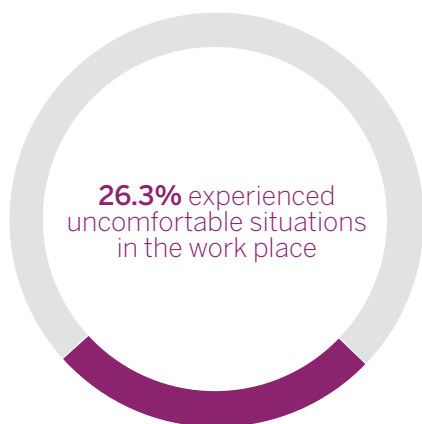
I have witnessed offensive language and/or behaviour within my work environment.

During my time in this workplace, I have experienced a situation(s) where I have felt uncomfortable because of my gender, race, Indigenous identity, disability, sexual orientation, religion, etc.

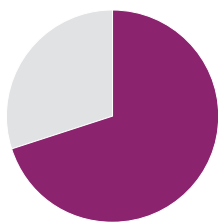
- Faculty are more likely to report incidences of witnessing offensive language and/or behaviour (faculty 60.9% vs HQP 29.1%), and being on the receiving end of offensive language and/or behaviour (faculty 32.6% vs HQP 18.2%).
- Graduate students witness more offensive language/behaviour than other HQP types.



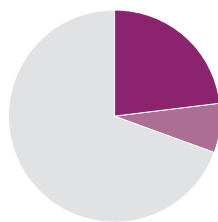
- 26.3% of all respondents experienced uncomfortable situations in the workplace.



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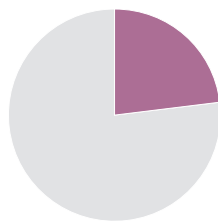
~70% due to gender
(both faculty and HQP)



23.1% of faculty noted age
(v. HQP 7.7%)



15.4% of faculty noted race
(v. HQP 0%)



15.4% of HQP noted sexual orientation
(v. faculty 0%)

Impact of Gender:

- Women (faculty & HQP) agree less than men that "it has been made clear that un-supportive language and behaviour are not acceptable".
- Faculty women have experienced more offensive language and/or behaviour and more uncomfortable situations than their male counterparts.
- Both faculty women and men have similar levels of witnessing offensive language and/or behaviour.
- HQP men report very low incidence of experiencing offensive language and/or behaviour, witnessing offensive language and/or behaviour, and feeling uncomfortable.

Impact of Race:

- Racialized group member respondents had much lower agreement on the statements related to the unacceptability of inappropriate language and imagery in the workplace.
- Racialized group member respondents had a higher rate of experiencing offensive language and/or behaviour, witnessing offensive language and/or behaviour, and feeling uncomfortable.

Impact of Sexual Orientation:

- LGBTQ2S+ HQP respondents had similar agreement on the statements related to the unacceptability of inappropriate language and imagery in the workplace compared to Non-LGBTQ2S+ HQP.
- LGBTQ2S+ HQP respondents had a higher rate of feeling uncomfortable, with gender and sexual orientation as main factors.

Social Events Inclusion

The area contained one statement:

Work related social activities such as parties, team building or networking events are likely to be welcoming to everyone (e.g. consider whether venues, activities and times are appropriate for people from different groups).

- There was less agreement to this statement among faculty compared to HQP, with disagreement among women faculty.

Work/Life Balance (Core Hours)

The area contained one statement:

Meetings/seminars held outside of core hours (for example 9:30am to 3:30pm) make it difficult for me to attend.

- There were various levels of agreement with this statement, with the most agreement among women faculty, and respondents aged 36-55. There was negative agreement among most HQP groups with graduate students showing the most disagreement.
- There may be a connection to family responsibility related to childcare associated with the demographics showing agreement.
- The disagreement among graduate students may present an opportunity to promote work/life balance early in their academic career.



Underrepresented groups often face challenges in accessing opportunities because of systemic biases, despite individual merit. We are taking steps toward building a more inclusive research environment.”

— FAY HARRISON, EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

EDI Policies and Practices Competency

The area contained two statements:

I am aware of the workplace policies in regard to equity. (e.g. on discrimination, parental leave, carer's leave, flexible working, etc.).

I am confident that my supervisor would deal effectively with any concerns about harassment, bullying or offensive behaviour.

- Overall, there was high agreement to both questions from faculty and HQP.
- Awareness of policies increases from graduate students to postdoctoral fellows to staff.
- HQP women are less confident in their supervisor's ability to handle EDI situations than their counterpart (HQP men).
- LGBTQ2S+ HQP are less confident in their supervisor's ability to handle EDI situations than their counterpart (non-LGBTQ2S+ HQP).

Community Support for Specific Initiatives

The area contained six specific initiatives:

EDI Multi-Use Room (use for e.g. multi-faith prayer, breastfeeding, smudging ceremonies, quiet space)

Core times for meetings, seminars, etc. between 9:30am and 3:30pm

Fund for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows with children under two years to provide short-term research support and childcare to attend conferences, academic meetings etc.

EDI training and education opportunities

Mentorship and support for marginalized groups

BrainsCAN EDI resource webpage

- There is strong support for all actions (~50% or higher).

3.2
CONTINUOUS PROGRAM EVALUATION

3.2.1
Gender balance appointed panel

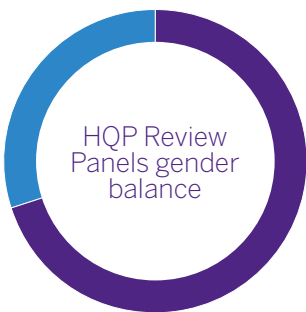
Given the small size of each panel (3-14 people), we focused on gender balance since other aspects of identity and intersectionality would have too much variance at low sample size to allow meaningful inference. The decision was further influenced by Western Equity Services policy not to release aggregate data on a self-identified category that would have less than five individuals in that group. As such, examining aspects of intersectionality at the panel level is not possible using current methods. The panelists were categorized as identifying as men or women based on interactions with the project manager and their public persona available online. We appreciate the inherent flaws of using this method and are looking to optimize the process moving forward to allow a more detailed evaluation.

Accelerator Review Panels:



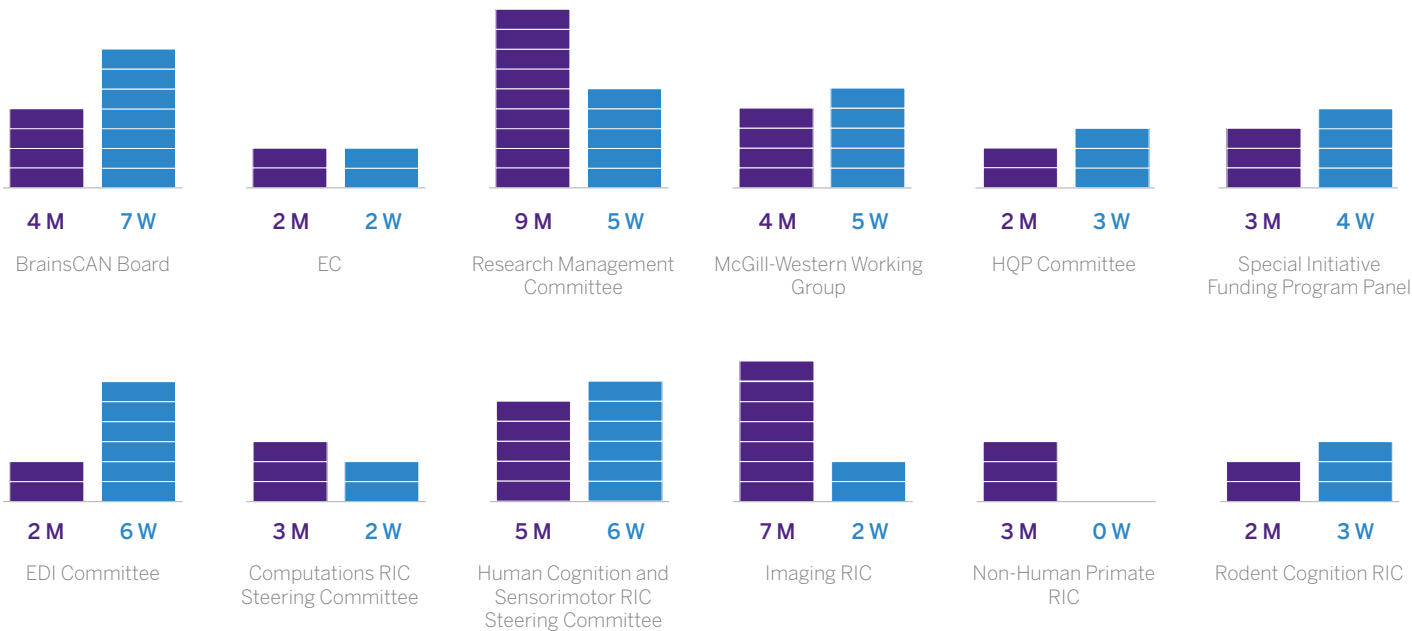
On average, the accelerator grant review panels are **69.7% men** and **30.3% women**. This is roughly aligned with the general faculty member gender ratios observed among BrainsCAN-engaged researchers.

HQP Review Panels:



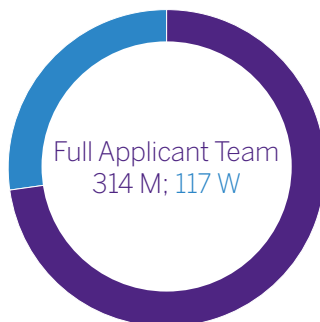
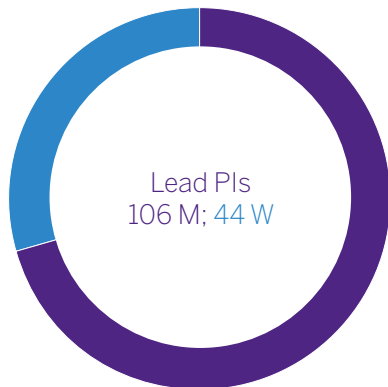
The mean gender breakdown of the BrainsCAN PDF review panel is **70% men** and **30% women**.

Other appointed committees for oversight, programs and Research Innovation Cores (RICs):

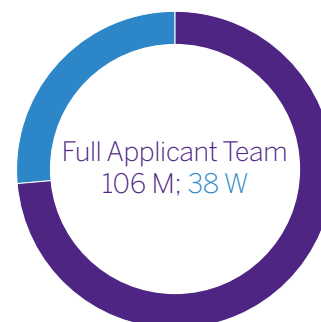
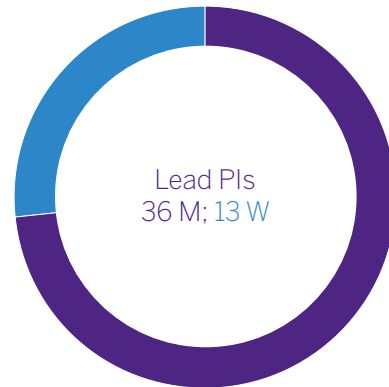


Accelerator Program

With similar rationale for assessing diversity in appointed panels, only gender balance is monitored for the lead applicants, as well as the full co-applicant team among submitted and awarded Accelerator grants. The gender balance has been assessed for each of the seven completed rounds. Note that these numbers include the same PIs listed on multiple teams, as well as reapplications.



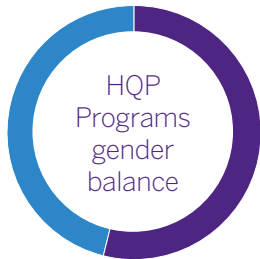
Of the 150 lead PIs that have **applied to the program**, **106 were men** and **44 were women** (70.7% men; 29.3% women). Similarly, when examining the full applicant team with 431 listed lead and co-applicants, we observed **314 men** and **117 women** (72.9% men; 27.1% women).



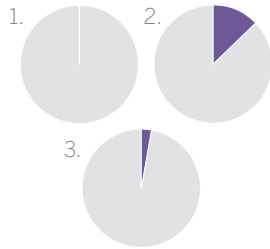
Of the 49 lead PIs that were **awarded grants**, **36 were men** and **13 were women** (73.5% men; 26.5% women). Similarly, when examining the full applicant team with 144 listed lead and co-applicants on successful grants, we observe **106 men** and **38 women** (73.6% men; 26.4% women).

HQP Programs

Applicants for all rounds are asked to complete an Equity Survey based on Western's Employment Equity Self-Identification Questionnaire, with additional equity areas and classifications included to meet the BrainsCAN mandate. The equity areas of gender, sexual orientation, Indigenous peoples of North America, members of a racialized group and persons with a disability examined in this program are reflected in the Ontario Human Rights Act. The survey was completely voluntary and had no bearing on the review process.

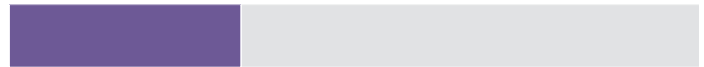


- Gender balance is present among applicants (**54% men; 46% women**).
- No applications from Indigenous peoples (*Fig. 1.*).
- **~13%** of applications indicated LGBTQ2S+ orientation (*Fig. 2.*).
- **~3%** of applications indicated a disability (*Fig. 3.*).



56% of applicants provided completed EDI surveys

- Response rate: **76** of a total 135 total applicants provided completed EDI surveys.
- Approximately a third of applicants identified as a member of a racialized group/visible minority, with half of these respondents noting East Asian. To date, there have been no Black or Southeast Asian applicants to a BrainsCAN HQP program.



~1/3 of applicants identified as a member of a racialized group

ITERATIVE OPTIMIZATION FOR DATA COLLECTION AND EXPANSION

Collection, interpretation and optimization of the data collection during the above processes are vital to ensure our data-driven model is successful and that resources are allotted effectively. This may require:

- Iterative optimization of community surveys to capture key information to assess progress on short- and long-term goals. Fundamental to this will be improvement to the response rate through more effective communication or incentives.
- Leveraging the resources of Western Equity Services to aggregate meta data and integrate it into the data strategy.
- Use target outreach on specific topics to develop steering programs or target support. These strategies have been implemented during the redesign process, to evaluate EDI within internal funding grants as well as community support during the COVID-19 pandemic.
- Focus groups will be run prospectively during program development, as well as retrospectively to evaluate the effectiveness of our programs. Focus groups provide a robust picture of how well received the programs are, and whether they address community members' needs and concerns.

ACTION PLAN INITIATIVES



Through transparent and consistent engagement within the BrainsCAN community, we are implementing EDI strategies in all aspects of our programs. We actively seek out participation from Black, Indigenous, and people of color (BIPOC); persons with disabilities; members of the LGBTQ2S+ community; and women, and strive to provide a supportive and inclusive research environment for all (www.brainscan.uwo.ca/about/equity_diversity_inclusion). Through the implementation of initiatives under the six following objectives, BrainsCAN aims to drive meaningful change within our program and beyond.

The following action plan items represent initiatives at various stages (from under development to fully implemented. Where possible, a link to the specific outcome or deliverable has been included. The main areas of impact (KPI Impact Areas; as outlined in the above data analysis) where the initiatives are meant to improve are listed as well.

4.1 DATA-DRIVEN GOVERNANCE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT AND EVALUATION OF EDI INITIATIVES

4.1.1 Formation of the EDI Committee

As described above in section 2.1, the EDI Committee was established to oversee BrainsCAN EDI initiatives. The EDI Committee consists of eight members which include representation from executive leadership, faculty, staff, postdoctoral fellows, and graduate students.

Status / Deliverables: Committee membership can be found at https://brainscan.uwo.ca/about/governance/edi_committee.html

KPI Impact Areas:
Fundamental to all areas

4.1.2 Annual EDI Survey

Our annual EDI survey is implemented to assess the landscape in our community. It provides us with invaluable information about safety in the workplace, areas for improvement and opportunities for program reform. The survey is an iterative process, one in which adjustments are made to best capture the unique needs of our research community. Highlights from the 2020 survey iteration are provide in the above section 3.1, with the full report available on the BrainsCAN EDI webpage.

Status / Deliverables:
Full EDI Performance report will be made available on the BrainsCAN website annually

KPI Impact Areas:
Fundamental to all areas

4.1.3 Continuous program EDI monitoring and evaluation

In addition to ensuring EDI practices are embedded in the lab/work environments in our community, we continuously monitor the performance of our own program from an EDI perspective. This includes, but is not limited to, monitoring diversity in HQP applicants and awardees, gender balance for internal funding applicants and awardees, and gender balance among appointed committees. Should opportunities arise to improve our program performance, the design of program will be revisited. For instance, our recent call for applications to our postdoctoral fellowship program included a special call for underrepresented groups, which aims to address disparity within our application pool. See section 3.2.3 for additional details.

Status / Deliverables:
Full EDI Performance report will be made available on the BrainsCAN website annually

KPI Impact Areas:
Fundamental to all areas

EXTEND INFLUENCE, LEADERSHIP AND SUPPORT ON EDI ACROSS THE UNIVERSITY AND NATIONALLY

4.2.1

Engagement with “Dimensions: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Canada” Development

BrainsCAN leadership and representatives took an active role in several EDI outreach events during the development of the Federal government initiative “Dimensions: Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Canada”. BrainsCAN liaised with NSERC and TIPS “Made-in-Canada Athena Swan” (later renamed Dimensions) representatives at the 2019 University and Research Funding Agencies’ Equity Officers Roundtable hosted at Ryerson University on February 22, 2019. BrainsCAN representatives also attended multiple NSERC workshops on the Made-in-Canada Athena Swan Charter to assist in development. The Government of Canada held made-in-Canada Athena SWAN consultations with select groups from across Canada. BrainsCAN Co-Scientific Director, Dr. Lisa Saksida, and Executive Director, Fay Harrison, were involved in these consultations. The resulting national Dimensions EDI Plan launched May 9, 2019 by the Minister of Science and Sport, the Honourable Kirsty Duncan.

Status / Deliverables:

See BrainsCAN news article describing the involvement https://brainscan.uwo.ca/news/2019/brainscan_contributes_to_canada_ed.html

KPI Impact Areas: All Areas (incl. Research Quality, Safe & Inclusive Environment EDI Policies and Practices Competency, Equal Opportunities)

4.2.2

On-boarding of Physiology and Pharmacology into our agile EDI Initiatives

The EDI Committee has been working other departments at Western to align EDI initiatives to impact a wider population. The Department of Physiology and Pharmacology plans to adopt our process and work together to further their EDI agenda/initiatives. The broader mandate is anchored by core principles and a shared philosophy. Furthermore, the committee’s structure and workflows have been designed to enable EDI initiatives to be implemented in an efficient and agile manner.

Status / Deliverables:

In development

KPI Impact Areas: All Areas (incl. Research Quality, Safe & Inclusive Environment, EDI Policies and Practices Competency, Equal Opportunities)

4.2.3

Support of events/initiatives with EDI implications

We provide annual funding to a variety of programs which are linked to EDI, while advancing neuroscience research. Examples include: Inspiring Diversity in STEM (IDSTEM); a biennial conference aiming to promote diversity in STEM fields, Brain Bee; a competition for high school students which reaches youths in the London and surrounding areas, Neuroscience Research Day; an annual conference for neuroscience trainees which is committed to accessibility.

Status / Deliverables:

See examples <https://www.inspiringdiversityinstem.com/2020-conference>; <http://brainbee.ca/local-bees/london/>; <https://songsuwo.ca/nrd2021>

KPI Impact Areas: All Areas (incl. Research Quality, Safe & Inclusive Environment, EDI Policies and Practices Competency, Equal Opportunities)

EMBEDDING EDI CONSIDERATIONS WITHIN ALL OF OUR PROGRAMS AND THE WIDER RESEARCH COMMUNITY

Prioritizing EDI in Internal funding applications

Mandating effective EDI action plans for all BrainsCAN funded research grants provides a strong incentive for individual labs to develop and embed EDI strategies in their programs. We have therefore required an EDI action plan/statement for all internal grant applications and, more recently, have begun to increase the impact and weighting of this component during the evaluation process.

This is exemplified in our Accelerator grant program. We redeveloped this program for Fall 2020 to require an EDI action plan upon submission of an application, which was required to be evaluated as adequate before the application could proceed to scientific review of their application. This separation of the EDI component from the scientific proposal component is vital because: (1) it emphasizes the importance of the EDI action plan as a fundamental requirement for eligibility, rather than as a minor component of the application; (2) it reduces potential confounds created by the panel reviewers assessing both components of the application and, for example, overlooking a poor EDI action plan in the face of an outstanding scientific proposal; and (3) it provides an opportunity for educating PIs and working with them to develop adequate EDI action plans prior to the deadline for the scientific proposal.

The EDI action plans are assessed on a pass/fail basis, similar to external Tri-Agency Grants (NSERC). The plans consist of a one-page summary of the PI's EDI considerations,

followed by concrete practices they have or will be putting in place to mitigate systemic barriers. To encourage excellence in this area, we award a bonus to applications with EDI action plans deemed to be outstanding. Applications are anonymized during the grading process to ensure fair practice.

Training sessions for the writing of this EDI Action Plan are provided prior to the application deadline, where best practices and guidance of EDI implementation are presented, and application requirements are discussed. The EDI Action Plans are evaluated by the BrainsCAN EDI Committee and Accelerator Chairs.

Status / Deliverables: See Accelerator program website and guideline for detail on EDI requirement https://brainscan.uwo.ca/programs/accelerator_program/index.html

KPI Impact Areas: All Areas (incl. Research Quality, Safe & Inclusive Environment, EDI Policies and Practices Competency, Equal Opportunities)

4.3.2

OurBrainsCAN Participant Registry

Many basic research studies in cognitive neuroscience focus on local undergraduate students, due to ease of accessibility of this population. OurBrainsCAN is a tool that contributes to making this kind of research more inclusive for all people from the London community. With an engaged community outreach mandate that is centred around making participation in research studies more accessible, researchers using the registry are able to access participants for their studies and invite individuals from a variety of demographic and socio-economic backgrounds to participate. Our marketing and recruitment strategies have ensured that we have targeted all areas of the city, through intentional engagement with groups in London and surrounding areas. When the participants in research studies are more diverse, the results are more generalizable, which in turn contributes to the strength of research impact for principal investigators.



Status / Deliverable: See the OurBrainsCAN website for further EDI specific details
<https://ourbrainscan.uwo.ca/about/index.html>

KPI Impact Areas:
Research Quality

4.3.3

COVID Disproportional Effect Intervention

EDI practices need to be flexible, shifting to accommodate changes in the world. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a variety of shut-downs which affected all of our scholars. We delivered a COVID-19 survey to assess the climate for those we support in our programs. We found that there was an overall sense of fear with regard to the future and making up for lost time. The survey found that there is **increased stress, anxiety and depression** being experienced by respondents since the pandemic began.

Through this survey, necessary programmatic changes were made including funding extensions for both internal grant holders and our postdoctoral fellows. Importantly, the survey enabled us to address the increased mental health strains on our community by expanding our EDI Resources page to include more mental health resources.

Status / Deliverables:

See COVID Resource page at
https://brainscan.uwo.ca/about/equity_diversity_inclusion/edi_support.html

KPI Impact Areas:

Equal Opportunity, EDI Policies and Practices

4.4

SUPPORT AND ENHANCE POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT FOR ALL STUDENTS, RESEARCHERS AND STAFF

4.4.1

EDI Resource Page

The BrainsCAN EDI Resource Page provides our community a repository of links to education, training and support. Resources ranging from EDI education in allyship, Indigenous considerations and anti-racism are featured on this webpage. In addition, sources for support are offered on our webpage to enhance access for individuals seeking assistance. This page continues to grow to reflect the needs of our diverse research community.

Status / Deliverables: See BrainsCAN EDI Webpage https://brainscan.uwo.ca/about/equity_diversity_inclusion/index.html

KPI Impact Areas: Safe & Inclusive Environment, Work/life Balance, EDI Policies and Practices Competency

4.4.2

Core Hours Policy

We recognize that the work-life balance for our community is of vital importance. Core hours (9:30am to 3:30pm) are to be utilized for all meetings, seminars and events scheduled for BrainsCAN. These core hours are highly supported by members of our community, as found in the 2020 BrainsCAN EDI Survey (Over 50% of respondents are supportive of the policy).

Status / Deliverables:

BrainsCAN EDI policies and best practices available on the BrainsCAN website.

KPI Impact Areas: Work/life Balance

4.4.3

EDI Multi-Use Room

In the 2020 BrainsCAN EDI Survey, 48.7% of our community members (on average) supported the idea of having a multi-use room to support well-being during work hours. The EDI Multi-Use Room was formed in Summer 2019, and can be used, for example, for multi-faith prayer, breastfeeding, smudging ceremonies, or as a quiet space to enhance mental health.

Status / Deliverables:

BrainsCAN EDI policies and best practices available on the BrainsCAN website

KPI Impact Areas: Safe & Inclusive Environment

CREATE, PROMOTE AND SUPPORT ACCESS TO EQUITY AND DIVERSITY INITIATIVES FOR ALL STAFF

4.5.1

EDI in Research Seminars/ Webinars

The 2020 Western University Anti-Racism Working Group Report determined that our institution “needs to create an educational approach to teaching about EDI on campus, as a shared practice, and not simply as a concept”². We understand the importance of education as a driver of change and set out to create an informative and practical webinar for our research faculty and staff. The webinars cater to the unique environments within laboratories, with real-life examples of how EDI can be implemented by our researchers. With 188 registrants for the first set of webinars, it is clear that this type of training is valued by our community. We plan to run EDI in Research Webinars each semester until 2023, with plans to develop more generalizable sessions for the broader Western Research community.

Status / Deliverables:

Available webinar and educational resources can be found at https://brainscan.uwo.ca/about/equity_diversity_inclusion/edi_in_research.html & https://brainscan.uwo.ca/about/equity_diversity_inclusion/edi_education.html

KPI Impact Areas: Perceived Representation (Visible Role models); Equal Opportunity (Mentorship and networking) Safe Work Environment; Competency; EDI Policies and Practices Competency

4.5.2

Laboratory Manual

In a research-based environment, laboratory culture is central to the experience of all trainees. While each laboratory can represent a unique environment, the overall culture within BrainsCAN aims to unite personnel and create inclusive spaces. We have developed a laboratory manual template which includes suggestions and recommendations for ways in which researchers can include EDI considerations. This has provided an opportunity for transparent and intentional implementation of EDI best practices, to develop more equitable and inclusive research environments within BrainsCAN. Currently, the laboratory manual is being piloted in 9 research laboratories. Ultimately, we aim to make this resource available to our researchers on the EDI Resource webpage once initial pilot feedback is obtained.

Status / Deliverables:

Pilot Phase. The lab manual will be made available on the BrainsCAN website

KPI Impact Areas: Safe Work Environment; EDI Policies and Practices Competency; Equal Opportunity; Work/life balance

4.5.3

Accessibility at BrainsCAN

We are committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for persons with disabilities studying, visiting and working within BrainsCAN's physical spaces, as well as when accessing digital resources and content. BrainsCAN representatives were involved during the planning and layout of the 6th floor of WIRB with accessibility at the forefront. Furthermore, our website has been Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) 2.0 AA compliant since 2017, four years earlier than the deadline legislated by the Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA). Moving forward, we seek out and encourage the use of any resource that increases accessibility to its spaces, facilities and content, such as using closed captions for virtual meeting, “text-to-speech” capability within documents, or including sign language translation at major events.

Status / Deliverables:

BrainsCAN EDI policies and best practices available on the BrainsCAN website

KPI Impact Areas: Safe Work Environment; Equal Opportunity

²President's Anti-Racism Working Group: Final Report May 2020—Available from: <https://president.uwo.ca/anti-racism/>

4.6

DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT EQUITABLE AND DIVERSE RECRUITMENT AND RETENTION INITIATIVES

4.6.1

BrainsCAN Mentorship Network

We are committed to creating an inclusive research environment where our trainees are encouraged and supported in reaching their highest potential. Mentorship is an incredibly valuable experience for postdoctoral researchers and graduate students, which facilitates career development and advancement. The BrainsCAN Mentorship Network aims to connect BrainsCAN-associated principal investigators with researchers at all career stages to foster meaningful guidance leading to opportunities for development. The BrainsCAN Mentorship Network is intended to provide invaluable support which will help mentees develop the skills needed to succeed in their future careers. The BrainsCAN research community is vast, spanning eight faculties and 35 departments. This network aims to magnify the connections between researchers committed to personal growth and professional development.

Status / Deliverables:
In development

KPI Impact Areas: Perceived Representation (Visible Role models); Equal Opportunity (Mentorship and networking)

4.6.2

Postdoctoral Fellowship: Special Call

We are committed to improving the representation of marginalized groups in neuroscience through equity and inclusion best practices. This means attracting and retaining outstanding scientists from historically underrepresented groups who contribute toward research excellence in neuroscience. We acknowledge the barriers to access these groups face in research spaces because of systemic biases, despite their meritorious qualifications. The development of the **BrainsCAN Postdoctoral Fellowship Program: Special Call** aims to attract a diverse cohort of the world's most promising early-career neuroscientists who self-identify as Black, Indigenous, LGBTQ2S+, people with a disability, and women. Up to 10 BrainsCAN postdoctoral fellowships from this call will be awarded in the Winter 2021 semester. Depending on prior experience, awards will be offered for two years (Tier II) or three years (Tier I), with annual salary ranging from \$55,000-\$75,000 CAD (plus benefits) depending on Tier and on other funding, as well as an independent research/travel allowance of \$3000-\$5000 per year (depending on Tier). Tier I recipients will also have access to apply for internal BrainsCAN operating funds of over \$12M for innovative research. Benefits include Employment Insurance, Canada Pension Plan, health insurance, parental leave, and the BrainsCAN Mentorship Network.

Status / Deliverables: Specific on the PDF Special call can be found at https://brainscan.uwo.ca/programs/pdf_special_call/index.html

KPI Impact Areas: Community Demographics, Perceived Representation (Visible Role models); Equal Opportunity

4.6.3

Open and Transparent Hiring Practices

We acknowledge the barriers to highly qualified personnel from underrepresented groups in the hiring process. We believe having an intentional process for hiring results in high quality candidate pools and is a critical step toward removing barriers. Our hiring strategy includes intentional advertising that is inclusive and far reaching through multiple networks, especially targeted toward underrepresented groups. We also ensure the presence and support of our EDI Committee Co-Chairs during review panel discussions, fair adjudication and consideration for leaves of absences indicated on applications as part of the review process. We also implement a 30-day posting requirement for all of our job postings; while not required by the Ontario Human Rights Commission, we identified this as an area we could expand to better support hiring equity (<http://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/iv-human-rights-issues-all-stages-employment/3-advertising>). Importantly, we set our intention to regularly review our hiring practices to ensure fairness for all.

Status / Deliverables:

BrainsCAN EDI policies and best practices available on the BrainsCAN website

KPI Impact Areas:

Community Demographics; Equal Opportunity

4.6.4

Diversity in Neuroscience Summer Studentship Program

This undergraduate summer program for students from underrepresented groups provides an opportunity to participate in a 10-week paid internship in the lab of a BrainsCAN research supervisor. We will recruit three to five students through a competitive application process from those entering their 3rd or 4th year of studies, and currently completing a degree in a STEM field that may lead to a career in neuroscience. The program will include participation in research projects assigned by the supervising faculty member, with support from a graduate student or postdoctoral mentor. Additionally, participants will receive training in professional development through bi-weekly workshops.

Status / Deliverables:

In development. Estimated launch for Summer 2021

KPI Impact Areas:

Community Demographics, Perceived Representation (Visible Role models); Equal Opportunity

TARGET KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS (KPI)



5.1 SHORT TERM (CFREF TERM)

Community demographics

Increase BrainsCAN engagement with **underrepresented groups** noting the limitation on demographic change within relatively static population of Western researchers (NB: HQP are less static than faculty).

EDI Policies and Practises Competency

Full agreement on awareness of policies and confidence in supervisors to properly address situations.

Perceived Representation

Increase agreement to “**visible role model**” among underrepresented groups.

Equal Opportunities

Increased agreement across all Equal Opportunities statement, with particular interest addressing “**fair allocation of work**” among **faculty respondents**, and **opportunities for external representation, networking and mentorship for HQP**.

Work/life Balance

Subsequent surveys will ask respondents questions on the expectation to work outside of core hours, in addition to ability to attend meetings and events outside of core hours. We strive to **minimize expectation to be available for work outside of core hours** for all.



BrainsCAN's research excellence combined with our role as leaders of equity, diversity and inclusion initiatives puts us in a position to motivate systemic change."

— LISA SAKSIDA, CO-SCIENTIFIC DIRECTOR

5.2

LONG TERM

Safe & Inclusive Environment

Full agreement that it has been made clear that unsupportive language and behaviour as well as inappropriate imagery are not acceptable in the workplace.

Subsequent surveys will ask respondents if there were recent (last 12 months) incidences of experiencing, or witnessing offensive language and/or behaviour within their work environment, as well as if they felt uncomfortable because of gender, race, Indigenous identity, disability, sexual orientation, religion, etc. We strive for year over year reduction to **zero incidences**.

The long-term goals of the BrainsCAN data-driven EDI Action Plan are to educate individuals at all career levels about the importance of EDI policies, as well as embed these practices in all facets of research at Western to effect change beyond the CFREF term.

The ultimate goal will be a research community where all experiences and identities are adequately represented and equally valued. Progress toward the long-term goals will require regular evaluation of representation among faculty and HQP, as well as tracking career progression within the university (i.e. promotions) and for those leaving Western.

PROSPECTIVE IMPACT AREAS

The following are areas for intervention as identified by the environmental scan in this report as well as researching best practises at other institutions. These areas will be reviewed by the EDI Committee for policy and procedure development and/or reform. This process may involve consultation with focus groups. Proposals for interventions will be ratified by the EC.

6.1

INFLUENCE HIRING POLICIES

- A prospective initiative that could influence hiring policies could be an in-depth analysis of BrainsCAN-engaged PIs on career progression (start date, length of time to tenure, length of time to associate professor/full professor, salary by career stage etc.) with career metrics (h-index, publications, citations, current grant value, cumulative grant value, service contributions). Any discrepancies could influence how traditional bibliometric are used in the hiring process.
- Engaging with other departments (see section 4.2.2) to further EDI initiatives will be paramount in achieving a sustained culture shift within our institution, where hiring and promotion takes place. The BrainsCAN team is actively engaged with the newly formed Western EDI Network, where our best practices can be shared, and our influence may reach the larger Western community.

6.2

INCREASING VISIBILITY OF RESEARCH FROM UNDERREPRESENTED GROUPS

- Develop case studies to enhance BrainsCAN program reform and subsequent action plans, with a focus on inclusivity in order to prevent tokenism.
- Leverage our communications team in order to highlight our researchers through avenues such as social media, resulting in better community outreach and increased visible representation.
- Wikipedia pages to boost the visibility of our researchers, starting with members of underrepresented groups.
- Encourage the use of repositories such as “Women in Neuroscience” (<https://www.winrepo.org/>)

6.3

EXPANDED EDI TRAINING AND EDUCATION OPPORTUNITY

- Increasing collaboration and integration with the newly formed office of the AVP EDI, Research Ethics, Indigenous Services, and Accessibility at Western to develop training opportunities.
- In addition to current educational resources and training that are provided on an ongoing basis, and updated frequently to reflect EDI best practices, future training opportunities could also promote active engagement rather than passive receipt of information.

6.4

ADDITIONAL PROGRAMS AND/OR GROUPS OF INTEREST

- Fund for graduate students and postdoctoral fellows with children under two years old, to provide short-term research support and childcare to attend conferences, academic meetings, etc.
- Special targeted granting programs to address needs identified through our agile data-driven framework.
- Development assistance with grant and award (i.e. CRCs) applications, specifically for members of under-represented groups.
- Investigate if provisions for menopausal individuals could represent area of need within our community. Currently, several initiatives at UK universities are targeting this as an area to effect positive change.

7.0

APPENDIX - ABBREVIATIONS

AVP EDI	Associate Vice President, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
CFREF	Canada First Research Excellence Fund
EC	Executive Committee
EDI	Equity, Diversity and Inclusion
HQP	Highly Qualified Personnel
KPI	Key Performance Indicators
PDF	Postdoctoral Fellow
PI	Principal Investigator
RIC	Research and Innovation Core
STEM	Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics
WIRB	Western Interdisciplinary Research Building



BrainsCAN
Western University
Western Interdisciplinary Research Building
London, Ontario, Canada, N6A 3K7

brainscan.uwo.ca