



Measuring an Organization's Progress Along the Diversity and Inclusion Continuum

The Regional Diversity Roundtable (RDR) developed an organizational assessment tool for non-profits to measure the status of their diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) practices. This white paper describes the objectives, process and summary findings from the research and tool development phase. Recommendations for next steps are also outlined.

This assessment tool aims to provide users with the following benefits:

- To identify gaps in the organization's diversity work, ensure the alignment of efforts in DEI work within the organization and review its implementation strategy;
- To provide an opportunity for conversation, increased understanding and education about DEI work within the organization;
- To enable a variety of voices within the organization to participate in assessing its progress and identify future directions of the work; and
- To help tell the story of diversity work in the organization and the community

Ultimately, the objective is to provide users with a roadmap to strengthen their DEI work as well as celebrate their successes.

TOOL FORMAT AND DOMAINS

The assessment tool that the RDR developed assesses practices along a continuum, representing the journey that organizations undertake in becoming equitable, diverse and inclusive. Progress is assessed through the key organizational areas, also known as the tool's domains. These domains were developed as a result of the research and

stakeholder engagement undertaken as well as the knowledge and experience of the working group.

The tool includes the definition of each domain as well as a list of indicators, which are grouped in sub-categories. By using a Likert scale, tool users are asked to provide both factual and perceived information. Under each domain, the users rate the status of current practices and initiatives within their organizations and also rate their agreement to a list of statements.

The assessment tool measures practices within the following ten areas:

- **CULTURE, VALUES AND ATTITUDES:** Formal and informal aspects of the organization that illustrate the orientation and climate of the organization. This includes such things as the mission and value statements as well as the employee's sense of fairness and belonging.
- **LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT:** Those executing the strategy of the organization at the senior level such as the CEO, ED and senior leadership team. This does not include the governance of the organization.
- **GOVERNANCE:** Mainly the functions of the board of a non-profit, responsible for a variety of issues, including determining the organization's mission and purpose, selecting, supporting and reviewing the performance of the ED and ensuring effective organizational planning.
- **HUMAN RESOURCES AND ADMINISTRATION:** HR professionals recruit, manage and provide direction for people who work in an organization to maximize profitability and employee satisfaction. They typically develop and administer policies related to hiring, performance

management, compensation, safety and wellness, employee benefits, communication and training.

- **POLICIES:** A policy is a principle or protocol to guide decisions and achieve rational outcomes. A policy is a statement of intent, and is implemented as a procedure or protocol.
- **INTERNAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES:** These are services and supports that are provided internally within an organization to meet the needs of their diverse staff.
- **EXTERNAL PROGRAMS AND SERVICES:** System of services, opportunities, or projects, usually designed to meet a social need of the community the organization serves.
- **COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT, COLLABORATIONS AND PARTNERSHIPS:** The processes by which the community and organizations build ongoing, permanent relationships for the purpose of applying a collective vision for the benefit of a community.
- **COMMUNICATIONS:** The active methods used to disseminate and share information (verbal and written) both externally and internally.
- **MONITORING, EVALUATION AND ACCOUNTABILITY:** The systematic and objective process of data collection of projects or programs. Evaluations appraise the data and information that informs strategic decisions. Evaluation is conducted to learn from experiences and improve practices and activities in the future; to have internal and external accountability of the resources used and the results obtained; and to take informed decisions on the future of the initiative.

It is expected that a variety of data sources will be required to complete the assessment tool. These include policy reviews, client satisfaction questionnaires and employee surveys.

FIGURE 1: Organizational DEI Assessment Tool

SOURCE: RDR

USERS AND BENEFICIARIES

The primary audiences for this assessment tool were identified at the beginning of the assessment tool development process. They include:

- RDR member agencies (staff, management and boards)
- Funders
- Neighbouring communities (York, Halton, Toronto)

The RDR Evaluation Tool Working Group hopes that the beneficiaries for this tool will be the assessment tool users, the staff, management and boards of the organizations, as well as the clients and the community being served by the organizations using the tool.

ENGAGEMENT OF STAKEHOLDERS AND RESEARCH PROCESS

The process that was used to develop the assessment tool consisted of a review of the literature and existing assessment tools as well as stakeholder consultation.

- **LITERATURE REVIEW :** A literature review was undertaken, examining peer reviewed and grey literature. Initially, the

focus of the literature review was broad, looking at both empirical and review articles from a wide range of sectors (mostly healthcare, business and education), published in or after 2008. A second brief review of the literature was undertaken including only review articles. The reviews also sought to identify assessment tools measuring organizational diversity, equity and inclusion practices, approximately 18 tools were reviewed. As the assessment tool development continued, other tools were reviewed as well.

- **STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT:** Two main consultation activities were implemented: (1) a group discussion at a monthly RDR member meeting; and (2) a survey of practitioners. A group discussion was held at the beginning of the tool development and at the end, where the tool was presented along with the overarching framework.
- **FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSIONS:** The discussion was facilitated by a member of the RDR Capacity Building Working Group. The group was divided into two: (1) RDR members at organizations that have a DEI assessment tool; and (2) those whose organizations do not have a tool. In total 18 organizations were represented; eight members from organizations using an assessment tool and ten whose organizations do not.
- **ONLINE SURVEY:** The survey was created in Survey Monkey, and the link was sent out via e-mail through the RDR distribution list and the Region of Peel local listserv. The target audience were individuals knowledgeable about both DEI work and the use of DEI assessment tools within their organization. The response to this survey exceeded the expectations of the working group members, indicating that there is great interest in this topic. Ninety-six respondents participated in

the survey. The majority of respondents were from Peel identifying as non-profit, public or social services.

KEY PLAYERS

The development of this assessment tool was supported by the Ontario Trillium Foundation, through their grant to the RDR. The RDR Capacity Building working group was tasked with this project. Outreach was conducted to the Board and RDR members. The newly formed group became the RDR Evaluation Tool Working Group.

The RDR members were informed about the development of this tool and were engaged in shaping the tool as well as reviewing the draft tool. Due to limited financial resources, the RDR had to reach out to pro-bono consulting programs. A pro-bono evaluation consultant was invited to lead the development of the assessment tool. The consultant received support from the Evaluation Tool Working Group as well as the RDR coordinator.

RESEARCH FINDINGS

Culture, Values and Attitudes

The literature and survey responses indicated that employees are more satisfied at organizations where there is a commitment to DEI work. A number of survey respondents discussed the varying definitions of diversity existing within different levels of the same organization and the tendency for diversity to be narrowly defined (e.g. as culture/race).

Leadership Commitment to DEI work

Both the survey responses and the literature indicated the value of leadership commitment to diversity, equity and inclusion work as demonstrated through attending trainings, publicly supporting diversity initiatives (O'Mara, 2011); supporting a culture of fairness and psychological safety in the organization (Kreiner & Ashforth, 2004) as well as supporting access to leadership positions

(Madera, 2013; Lucas, 2012). The lack of diversity amongst senior leadership within organizations was also noted in the survey responses as well as the lack of opportunities for advancement of diverse staff.

The Role of Management

The literature mentioned the importance of management supporting DEI work within a climate of psychological safety (Purnell et al., 2011; Liu et al., 2012).

The Role of Governance

The literature and survey respondents stated the importance of embedding diversity work into the organization, through the vision and mission statements (Purnell et al., 2011) and board composition (Purnell et al., 2011). Survey respondents highlighted the lack of capacity at the governance level, preventing effective engagement with DEI work.

The Role of Human Resources

This includes applying a diversity lens to recruitment, retention, advancement and accommodation. A number of survey respondents mentioned HR-related data collection to monitor an agency's progress towards DEI practices as well as the inconsistent application of HR policies in hiring for diversity. The literature often recommended tying performance appraisals to DEI practices (Avery, 2011).

Policies

Survey respondents noted the lack of formalized commitment in their organizations to DEI work in the form of policies or programs. In the literature it was noted that diversity should be embedded in organizational policies (particularly HR) and should be at minimum compliant with existing legislation.

Programs and Services - Internal

Programs and services that can serve to promote DEI include: diversity committees, mentoring opportunities, supplier diversity, support with communications and conflict resolution. There was a significant amount of literature on diversity training. In the survey,

the issues with training included: limited availability, lack of staff time, lack of resources to conduct training, inconsistency in training content and frequency across departments.

Survey respondents identified a number of topics that training should address, including developing skills for diversity and inclusion, going beyond the basics, training on incorporating practices into everyday work, (which is often overly academic for the grass-roots level), promoting self-awareness, and adopting reflective and change models. It was also noted that there was a lack of management attendance at training and that often training is planned in reaction to an incident.

FIGURE 2: Organizational DEI Assessment Tool

SOURCE: RDR

Programs and services - External

More than half (61%) of survey respondents noted the incorporation of DEI in their work as a challenge. The following challenges were mentioned by survey respondents: lack of responsiveness to the vast diversity in the community, diversity concerns are addressed on a volunteer basis, staff have limited knowledge about diversity and equity training, and assessment tools are scarce. Respondents observed that inclusiveness and diversity screening in the recruitment of volunteers was absent.

Few respondents noted the lack of equity in the access to services; some neighbourhoods and some populations are underserved,

sometimes due to funding restrictions. Other respondents noted the lack of equity in service delivery, including limited staff knowledge about equitable service provision. Although planning with an equity lens may occur, program implementation may fall short on this dimension. Equity in planning was reported as being an add-on or afterthought.

Community Engagement, Collaborations and Partnerships

The importance of engagement with clients and other stakeholders was mentioned in both the literature and the survey responses. Survey respondents noted challenges to community engagement, which include: paternalism, lack of staff knowledge and training on how to do community engagement, and resource constraints. Respondents mentioned the organization's lack of commitment to engaging marginalized communities.

Communications

In the literature, language was considered a major area to address. As an internal initiative, mechanisms to enable staff to access translation and other communication aids should be available. Diversity review of the communication material was a required activity in a variety of the tools reviewed. In the survey, respondents spoke to both internal communications and external communication.

The main challenges to external communication were limited in-house expertise or resources to communicate in a wide variety of languages and insufficient outreach to the larger community. In terms of internal communications, there was a lack of transparency in communication, confusing communication, communication on a "need to know" basis, and delayed communication.

Monitoring, Evaluation and Accountability

There was a significant amount of literature on the assessment of DEI practices with a wide range of focus areas, ranging from data collection methods to implementation guidelines. One of the common themes was that monitoring and evaluation

need to be transparent and equitable and linked to accountability. Survey respondents mentioned tools such as informal, one-off assessment, funder mandated evaluations and measurement frameworks tied to the organization's diversity and inclusion strategy. Various respondents mentioned integration of equity into program evaluations and needs assessments.

ISSUES REQUIRING SPECIAL ATTENTION

Assessment Tools and the Larger Context

It was clear from the survey responses and the RDR member discussions that assessment needs to be framed within a larger strategy. A number of assessment tools that were reviewed provided guidelines about how to develop, implement and assess a diversity and inclusion strategy, thus embedding assessment within a larger framework.

Implementation Issues

The survey responses highlighted the inadequate implementation of assessment tools, ranging from issues such as the ad hoc nature of the application of the assessment tool, to drawing on only selected perspectives from the organization (rather than trying to create a global organizational perspective). Also, the issue about who is administering the tool has a significant impact on the type of data collected. Addressing the administering issue is challenging because each organization has a different composition and the size of staff varies.

Subtler Mechanisms

The literature review and the survey surfaced a number of subtle dynamics within organizations. These included: incivility (as a form of discrimination), tokenism, and paternalism. Subtle mitigating factors also emerged, such as trust in the leadership, fairness and the tension between inclusion and belongingness of employees. These factors shape the organizational climate, but are challenging to measure and more challenging to address.

However, this should not result in a decreasing focus on these subtler mechanisms.

Organizational Climate and Psychological Safety

The importance of these factors were taken into consideration and included in the tool. The survey results and the discussion group reminded us of the need to address attitudes as well as behaviors and knowledge.

Mixed Methods

Although there was some debate about self-reported data as well as the challenge in analyzing qualitative data (for e.g. lack of time), space for qualitative data was included, enabling the tool to assess the attitudes of the users. A comments box was added to the end of each domain of the RDR tool.

Holistic and Inclusive Nature of the Tool

The RDR Evaluation Tool Working Group focused on organizations as a whole, looking at the different functions and levels that exist within an organization. The literature, survey and discussion group underscored the need for the tool to be inclusive of those with a stake in the organization.

Scarcity of Tools for Canadian Non-profits

Given that the group found many tools for business settings, there were a lot of specificities to the business context as well as omissions of areas pertinent to non-profits. Furthermore, there were many tools that were created in the U.S. context, many of which were focused on cultural competency. These were useful for the RDR assessment tool, but we did not find any that specifically mapped onto the concerns that the group was seeking to address.

NEXT STEPS

- **LINK BETWEEN THE DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION CHARTER OF PEEL AND THE ASSESSMENT TOOL:** The Evaluation Tool Working Group at the outset stated the goal of attempting to make explicit linkages with the Charter. There was insufficient
- time and resources to focus attention on the linkage between the tool and the Charter, but this should be considered.
- **PILOT TEST AND REVISE THE TOOL:** The RDR should pilot test the assessment tool and make modifications based on the results. The pilot testing could also provide some impetus for the group to develop a sample report generated from the tool, to support agencies with analysis and dissemination.
- **DEVELOP TRAINING AND GUIDELINES FOR IMPLEMENTATION:** The Evaluation Tool Working Group could organize training sessions around the launching of the assessment tool to illustrate processes to implement the assessment tool, addressing some of the issues around pitfalls in assessment. The creation of guidelines should support the proper implementation of the assessment tool. The guidelines could draw on information from the pilot testing of the assessment tool, as well as the literature review and research conducted to inform the tool. It will also be necessary to emphasize the importance of embedding inclusive principles in the process of assessment.
- **PRODUCE PRACTICE PAPERS:** As part of this process, the RDR reviewed a variety of assessment tools, which the RDR can discuss in the form of shorter papers that briefly summarize the review's findings. The RDR could also produce a report synthesizing the results of the survey conducted with diversity practitioners to provide relevant information for others in the GTA area who are doing DEI work.
- **CAPACITY BUILDING AND ASSISTANCE:** The RDR could provide technical assistance and training to organizations implementing this assessment tool. It could also support smaller agencies, for whom confidentiality and capacity are an issue, by acting as a neutral third party or by connecting these agencies

with others who may be able to conduct the assessment.

- **COMMON MEASUREMENT:** Eventually, the RDR could promote the use of this tool across Peel, encouraging a variety of agencies in the sector to collect this data, and provide an overall measurement for the progress of the community on DEI.

If you wish to be part of the pilot testing phase, please contact the RDR at rdr@regionaldiversityroundtable.org. The finalized tool is expected to be released in 2014.

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