

Policy on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

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The Centre for Biodiversity Genomics (CBG) is committed to advancing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) in all elements of its operation. This commitment is motivated by the recognition that diversity in experience and perspective strengthens creativity and innovation while improving decision making. As a result, the CBG views EDI as a core value in all activities undertaken to advance its mission – research, governance, management, stakeholder engagement, and knowledge mobilization. This policy document outlines the CBG’s formal statement on EDI, its current goals, and planned actions. As a living document, it is reviewed and updated annually.

Statement on EDI

The CBG at the University of Guelph believes that equity, diversity, and inclusion require an organizational culture that embraces the uniqueness of individuals who are themselves representative of Canada’s population. The University of Guelph recognizes that an inclusive and equitable campus is an institutional and social imperative. Acknowledging the University’s diverse population and ensuring that every member of our community is a valued contributor is a foundational pillar of a successful post-secondary institution.

The CBG vigorously supports the principle that everyone deserves equitable treatment, and it further recognizes that its organizational capacity is strengthened by the diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and experiences of its staff.

The CBG is a diverse, inclusive organization that strives to maintain an environment free from discriminatory and intimidating behaviours, attitudes, policies, and processes. It continuously seeks to identify and address imbalances and barriers related to age, gender identity, disability, race, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status, as well as other Code-protected grounds. In the spirit of reconciliation, the Centre is also committed to respectful and reciprocal relationships with Indigenous Peoples.

The CBG acts by recognizing and developing initiatives towards EDI in hiring, promotion, stakeholder engagement, and knowledge mobilization. It provides support and mentorship to ensure all staff are treated fairly and ethically and enabled to realize their personal goals.

EDI Goals and Planned Actions

The CBG is advancing its EDI goals through actions in six areas.

1. Strengthen diversity in governance

The CBG has joined the **50-30 Challenge** coordinated by Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (<https://www.ic.gc.ca/eic/site/icgc.nsf/eng/07706.html>) which asks organizations to aspire to two EDI goals for their Boards and senior management:

1. **50%** of members are female or non-binary
2. **30%** of members belong to other equity-deserving groups

Among the 32 individuals currently serving on the CBG's five governance bodies (i.e., Board of Directors, Advisory Board, Executive Committee, Stakeholder Committee, Science Committee), 41% identify as female while 16% are members of equity-deserving groups. To ensure Board continuity while also creating the capacity to achieve the 50-30 Challenge by 2027, members of equity-deserving groups have been appointed for 4-year terms in contrast to 3-year terms for other members. As vacancies on these governance bodies become available, a strong effort will be made to recruit members who belong to equity-deserving groups.

2. Extend diversity in senior management

The Centre is striving to increase EDI in the senior ranks of its management team by employing best practices in recruitment (see next section), by supporting family-friendly work policies, and by providing leadership training opportunities to equity-deserving members of its staff so they can progress through the ranks.

Because these strategies have been long-standing, the CBG's management team is effectively compliant with the 50-30 Challenge as 53% identify as female while 27% belong to other equity-deserving groups. Moreover, these staff oversee four of its nine management units.

3. Establish EDI Committee

To advance its commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion and to increase accountability, the CBG recently established an EDI Committee chaired by its Chief Operating Officer and with members from staff and management. It monitors the Centre's progress towards its EDI goals, ensures all policies have been viewed through an EDI lens, identifies new opportunities for EDI training, ensures alignment with UofG EDI-related Policies and Statements, and leads new EDI initiatives. It will contribute to the CBG's next Strategic Plan which will be developed in 2024/25.

4. Maintain diversity in staff

The CBG has a long history of recruiting and welcoming a diverse workforce. Its staff currently includes individuals from 20 nations (Austria, Brazil, Bulgaria, Canada, China, Cuba, France, Finland, India, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Morocco, Pakistan, Romania, Russia, Taiwan, Turkey, UK, USA). Within this diverse community, 60% identify as female or non-binary (Table 1) while 30% belong to equity-deserving groups (Table 2).

Table 1: Gender breakdown for staff at the CBG from 2019–2022. Counts derive from confidential data collected by the University’s Human Resources Department and provided to the CBG as aggregate data.

	2019	2020	2021	Total	%
Female	49	48	45	142	58
Male	35	29	33	97	40
Non-binary	1	1	2	4	2

Table 2: Number of CBG staff belonging to equity-deserving groups from 2019–2021.

	2019	2020	2021	Total	%
Caucasian	60	54	56	170	70
Visible Minority*	24	24	25	73	30
Other Groups	–	–	–	–	–

* Includes Racialized, Black, and People of colour

The CBG will continue to support diversity amongst its staff by employing best practices in recruitment, hiring, and retention with careful attention to recommendations outlined by the Canada Research Coordinating Committee (2022). In particular, the CBG is committed to:

- Advertising all positions as widely as possible through email listservs, social media, relevant scientific organizations, and associations (ECOLOG-L, EvolDir, iBOL, IUCN) and will increase its outreach to EDI fora (e.g., AboriginalJobBoard.ca, Abilities.ca, Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology, BlackScientists.ca)
- Ensuring that job postings include a statement specifically inviting applications from equity-deserving groups and a statement confirming the CBG’s commitment to an inclusive work environment.
- Requesting applicants complete a confidential self-ID form to ensure shortlisted candidates are diverse.
- Establishing hiring committees that include representatives from equity-deserving groups.
- Ensuring all members of hiring committees have recently taken the Principles of Equitable Recruitment module (available to employees via CourseLink), developed by the University’s Diversity and Human Rights Office.
- Ensuring that applicants requiring accommodations in the interview process are fully supported.
- Using a standardized rubric to assess candidates to ensure a fair, transparent selection process.

5. Enhance participation by groups under-represented in biodiversity science

The CBG is committed to fostering and supporting participation by under-represented groups (URGs) in biodiversity science. The historical lack of diversity in many STEM fields is well recognized, but some disciplines and URGs are particularly affected. For example, women have traditionally been represented in declining proportions as career levels progress. As well, participation in science has typically been lower for individuals from marginalised groups such as 2SLGBTQ+ and visible minorities, particularly in ecology and evolution (O'Brien *et al.* 2020). The CBG aims to reduce these barriers by increasing opportunities for URGs to participate in biodiversity science. Current efforts include the following:

- **First Nations and Inuit:** Two of the CBG's major research programs involve strong linkages with Indigenous Peoples. Work with Polar Knowledge Canada has led to close involvements with Inuit communities across the Kitikmeot region where the CBG has established a Science Ranger program to engage Inuit students in its work. As well, field courses are planned for both northern and southern students at the Canadian High Arctic Research Station in Cambridge Bay once the pandemic subsides. Aside from its northern involvements, the CBG's STREAM program, a water quality assessment project that spans our country, run in collaboration with Environment and Climate Change Canada, has strong participation by First Nations communities. These initiatives have already led several Indigenous students to register for graduate work in biodiversity science at Guelph.
- **Youth:** Increasing diversity in Canadian public schools means they are the harbinger of ethno-cultural diversity in our nation's future workforce. Thus, students are an ideal target for programs which seek to increase the participation of URGs in biodiversity science. For a decade, the CBG has run projects which allow students to explore biodiversity in their schoolyards (Steinke *et al.* 2017, Steinke 2022). These programs have been very well received and are helping to expose students to future careers in the life sciences.
- **International:** The CBG is advancing opportunities for researchers in low- and mid-income countries. With \$2.1M from IDRC, it supported researchers in six developing nations (Argentina, Costa Rica, Kenya, Pakistan, Peru, South Africa) from 2010–2015, allowing their participation in iBOL's first research program and stimulating long-term involvements. For example, MACN, Argentina's largest natural history museum, has now trained >500 South American researchers in DNA barcoding. Funding to Costa Rica catalyzed current efforts to develop a DNA barcode library for its entire biota. Work in South Africa saw it become a leader in applying DNA barcodes to curb trade in endangered species. Inspired by these outcomes, the Conference Board of Canada, the Secretariat for the Convention on Biological Diversity (SCBD), and the Japan Biodiversity Fund provided \$1M to allow the CBG to train 54 researchers from 34 developing nations in biodiversity genomics from 2016–2019 and to develop training materials (SCBD 2020a & 2020b). The CBG remains committed to this effort; it has so far secured \$10M to allow developing nations to participate in the \$180M BIOSCAN research program.

6. Foster a culture of inclusion

The CBG believes that an inclusive work environment is essential to support a diverse workforce and to reap the benefits from this diversity in the realization of its mission. As such, the CBG is committed to fostering a culture of inclusion through strategies aimed at building EDI competencies and embedding inclusive practices across its operations. These strategies include:

- **Promoting EDI training opportunities to new and current staff.** Areas of relevant training include reducing implicit bias, understanding and combatting microaggression, improving cross-cultural communication, developing effective mentorship skills, combatting racism, and facilitating inclusive meetings. While key modules and courses are available through the Tri-Agencies and the University's Diversity and Human Rights Office, the CBG will increase opportunities for its staff by supporting access to other training (e.g., Canada Centre for Diversity and Inclusion).
- **Ensuring that all CBG-organized events have publicly posted policies** which support diversity in speakers/attendees, and which promote an environment that is respectful and free from harassment/barriers for all participants. The CBG first adopted this practice in 2015 when it hosted the 6th International Barcode of Life Conference, a meeting which attracted 600 delegates from 65 nations to the University of Guelph. Similar best practices will be used for all future events and meetings organized by the Centre.
- **Incorporating inclusion into strategic planning.** The CBG's last Strategic Plan (2020) made clear its commitment to EDI (see page 2) but did not detail specific actions. Despite this gap, the CBG has taken action to establish an EDI Committee and its operation will ensure that all future Strategic Plans include an EDI assessment and action items.

Conclusion

While the CBG has made much progress in understanding the barriers which often restrict participation in STEM by equity-deserving groups, and in developing/ implementing strategies to reduce them, there is room for improvement. Because "diversity without inclusion is exclusion", the CBG places equal emphasis on supporting diversity and inclusion in its EDI strategy. As noted earlier, its EDI policy is regularly updated to reflect the evolution in understanding of EDI and to ensure the CBG's scientific mandate is achieved by supporting diversity in its workforce.

References

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Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Definitions

Diversity is the collection of peoples with different identity characteristics, ways of knowing, and ways of being. The University recognizes that the diversity of identities on our campus is intrinsically connected to the protected grounds articulated in the Ontario Human Rights Code, including age, colour, ancestry, disability, ethnic origin, family status, gender identity or expression, marital status, race, sex, and sexual orientation. Diversity is not limited to these characteristics and may include others like ways of thinking or learning, legal status, education, or work backgrounds. Diversity is essentially about recognizing the many perspectives and lived experiences that contribute to an institution and a functioning research enterprise.

Equity is recognizing that there are individuals and groups who encounter individual, interpersonal, institutional, and systemic barriers to full participation. Equity involves identifying and removing systemic barriers and biases that impede the full participation of equity-seeking groups. The University recognizes four designated groups as a matter of law: women-identified individuals, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, and racialized persons. While the University is particularly focused on identifying and eliminating barriers for these four designated groups, the institutional understanding of equity is broader, including a recognition of the unique barriers that manifest in an intersectional form and for other marginalized groups, like the LGBTQ2IA+ community. Systemic barriers may manifest in multiple forms within an institution, but are particularly noticeable in systems, policies, practices, and procedures that impede the full participation of equity-seeking groups in the full range of institutional activities. These barriers may result from an EDI lens missing from processes like recruitment, selection, and retention. They may also manifest from unconscious biases, assumptions, perceptions, or stereotypes. Institutional reviews are essential to identifying the specific barriers and contributing factors.

Inclusion is ensuring that all campus community members are respected, valued, and empowered to fully participate in all functions of the institution. Each member's contributions must be supported, encouraged, and incorporated into the functioning framework of the institution.