

AVOIDING EDI POLICY MISTAKES IN SPORT

A TIP SHEET

Many existing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) policies reinforce and justify (often unintentionally) exclusion and inequity. In a sporting context, these policies tend to fall into two categories:

1

Policies that reinforce the status quo by continuing to privilege those positioned at the centre of settler colonial society.

Policies in this category tend to actively centre white, middle-to-upper class, non-disabled, cis-gendered Canadian citizens by **alleging inclusivity** and/or **refusing accountability**.

2

Policies that reproduce the 'excludable Other' by limiting opportunities for those positioned on the margins of settler colonial society.

Policies in this category tend to exclude racialized, trans, disabled and Indigenous peoples as well as those who experience barriers around poverty and citizenship by **erasing**, **problematizing**, or **hedging** around the inclusion of these groups.



Image of two masculine presenting soccer players running on the pitch. One player is black, the other is white.

Policies that Allege Inclusivity

What they do: Introduce sweeping EDI statements without making any changes to practices, procedures, decision-making, or resource allocation. They also tend to ignore the existence of historical and ongoing oppressions, harms, and exclusions.

What this looks like in practice: *"All persons associated with [sport] will be provided with equal opportunity to participate in [sport] at all levels including athlete, coach, official, volunteer, staff."*

Why this approach is problematic: These types of policy statements serve to declare the organization is inclusive rather than ensure any structural changes. There is no recognition that inequity exists and no commitment to any actions that might increase opportunities to participate.

Policies that Refuse Accountability

What they do: Off-load labour or responsibility to those with less institutional clout (e.g., programmer on the EDI committee) or those being harmed/excluded.

What this looks like in practice: *"Employees are invited to bring forward ideas or observations about practices or policies that may be creating systemic discrimination."*

"The concerned person (complainant) should make a complaint to the President (or designate) in writing within a reasonable period of time."

Why this approach is problematic: Despite off-loading responsibility, boards and management (who are rarely "diverse") still maintain full, control over any structural changes without any means of holding leadership levels accountable.

Policies that Erase, Ignore or Disregard

What they do: Identify specific practices and accountabilities for some groups and not others.

What this looks like in practice: In almost all of the policies published by National Sport Organizations, actionable policy statements focused on trans individuals, disabled individuals, Indigenous peoples, and/or women and girls. There were no actionable policy statements for Black or other racialized people, newcomers, those who experience poverty, or those who experience discrimination based on their culture or religion.

Why this approach is problematic: Creates an inclusion hierarchy, positioning some groups as less deserving of meaningful sport opportunities. Also, ignores the impacts of racism, Islamophobia, citizenship and poverty on accessing quality sport opportunities.

Policies that Problematize

What they do: Construct certain excluded 'populations' as inherently problematic groups that benevolent sport organizations can, and should, fix.

What this looks like in practice: *"Today's Aboriginal youth—one of the fastest growing segments of the Canadian population—are challenged by rising rates of illness, such as Type II diabetes, heart disease, and fetal alcohol syndrome, and suffer from higher rates of incarceration, substance abuse, suicide, racism, and a sedentary lifestyle."*

Why this approach is problematic: Ignores impacts of settler colonialism, capitalism, racism, and ableism on social and health inequalities and frames individuals as inherently deficient. Also, constructs sporting environments as places where individuals can be 'saved' or 'fixed', rather than recognizing that they are exclusionary systems that need to be reimagined.


Policies that Hedge

What they do: Have actionable statements that are qualified in ways that make certain forms of inclusion conditional or labour intensive for those excluded.

What this looks like in practice: *"[Organization A] will encourage and advocate for Aboriginal persons and persons with disability to participate as fully as possible as athletes, coaches and volunteers, with due consideration being given to meeting the criteria for qualification and safety at high performance competitions."*

"The athlete must demonstrate that her total testosterone level in serum has been below 10 nmol/L for at least 12 months prior to her first competition."

Why this approach is problematic: Language is non-committal (e.g., *encourage*) and offers easy justifications for ongoing exclusion (e.g., *to participate as fully as possible*). Often focuses on inclusion in one area of an organization but not others (e.g., disability accommodations as an employee, but not an athlete, coach or official). Often uses medical criteria that are invasive and can present financial and/or jurisdictional barriers that might take years to meet (e.g., a rural trans athlete might not have access to these required medical services).



The information presented in this document has been generated by **the ReCreation Collective**. A group of academics, practitioners, and policymakers, the ReCreation Collective work to collaboratively develop frameworks and learning tools intended to radically change the ways we think about and enact 'inclusion' in sport, recreation, and other movement cultures.

Members of the Re-Creation Collective that contributed to this project include: Dr. Danielle Peers, Dr. Lisa Tink, Dr. Janelle Joseph, Dr. Tricia McGuire-Adams, Dr. William Bridel, Dr. Lindsay Eales, Dr. Evelyn Hamdon, Dr. Bethan Kingsley, Dr. Chen Chen, Dr. Laura Hall, Andrea Carey, and Karen O'Neill.

DEVELOPING EQUITY, DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION POLICIES

Things to do:

- Explicitly acknowledge the existence of harms due to the historical, and ongoing, forms of settler colonialism, racism, (hetero)sexism, ableism, Islamophobia, and poverty in both sport and society more generally.
- Explicitly acknowledge the exclusionary structures that constitute current sporting system.
- Engage in critical self-reflection about settler colonialism, racisms, and marginalization as an act of settler allyship.
- State goals/aspirations to becoming more equitable and inclusive and make a commitment to action.
- Be explicit about goals, processes, timelines, resource allocations, and accountabilities.
- Focus on changing exclusionary structures and systems rather than just inviting/including those that have been, and continue to be, excluded.
- Engage with equity-denied groups when building the policies intended to impact them.
- Engage with all groups as intersectional and internally diverse.
- Represent equitable sport as a right and ends to itself, not simply a means to an end.
- Be clear that health and inclusion disparities are a product of social inequality not qualities of particular populations.
- Compare equity policies across groups and ensure you are equally committed to all forms of equity.
- Track and share progress.

Things to avoid:

- Minimizing the impact of settler colonialism, racism, Islamophobia, citizenship, and poverty on historically excluded groups.
- Constructing the people you have excluded as a problem to be solved instead of affirming them as individuals with dignity and a right to equal opportunities.
- Using terminology that defines a group by their exclusion (e.g., under-represented versus people we have underserved; marginalized versus people we have positioned on the margins).
- Including particular groups in your overarching EDI statements if you do not have explicit policy actions to support their inclusion.
- Positioning sport, and those who work in sport, as saviours. It's the sporting system that needs fixing not particular groups of people.



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