
A Diversity and Inclusion Policy for Ontario EcoSchools

A Project for the AFP Fellowship in Inclusion and
Philanthropy

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1. INTRODUCTION

Ontario EcoSchools

Ontario EcoSchools' mission is to nurture environmental leaders, reduce the ecological footprint of schools, and build environmentally sustainable school communities. We administer an award-winning certification program and build capacity for environmental education through workshops, webinars, networking events, and educational resources. Our vision is "Every School an EcoSchool", where all students and staff in Ontario schools are engaged in environmental education and practices, developing the knowledge, skills, perspectives, and actions needed to be environmentally responsible citizens. Ontario EcoSchools is unincorporated and operates as a research project of York University.

Project Description

This project aimed to enhance diversity and inclusion (D&I) at Ontario EcoSchools through policy and practice. The project is divided into three parts:

- 1) An assessment of existing D&I policies and procedures at Ontario EcoSchools based on sector best practices.
- 2) The drafting of a new policy to outline Ontario EcoSchools' commitment to diversity and inclusion and the ways in which D&I would be supported internally through its culture and operations and externally through its programs and services.
- 3) The development of an implementation plan to ensure the new D&I policy is reflected in practice.

This project was completed in fulfillment of the requirements of the AFP Fellowship in Inclusion and Philanthropy program. This report is a summary of the full report submitted to AFP.

Project Rationale

Diversity refers to the variety of people and ideas within an organization. Diversity alone, however, is not enough. According to Myers (2012), diversity is "being invited to the party", and inclusion is "being asked to dance". In other words, inclusion is "creating an environment in which people feel involved, respected, valued, and connected" (Deloitte, 2014, p. 12).

In today's global economy, diversity and inclusion are increasingly recognized as integral to organizational success. Some have even predicted that D&I will become a top priority for businesses in 2016 (Bersin, 2015). Indeed, there is a significant body of research that demonstrates the positive relationship between D&I and a number of organizational performance measures, including financial returns (Hunt et al., 2015), employee engagement (Downey et al., 2015), talent recruitment and retention (Deloitte, 2014), and innovation (Forbes Insights, 2011).

Ontario EcoSchools employs 9 full-time staff, approximately 30 temporary staff, and works with over 1,700 schools across the province. Serving this diverse community in an effective manner requires the thoughtful and intentional integration of D&I principles into our culture and operations. By developing a D&I policy and implementation plan, this project aims to strengthen Ontario EcoSchools' role as a

provincial provider of environmental education and contribute to diversity and inclusion practice in the sector.

2. D&I ASSESSMENT

This project began with an assessment of Ontario EcoSchools' diversity and inclusion policy and practice using DiversiPro's Diversity and Inclusion Self Assessment Checklist. The checklist includes measures for six "cylinders", which represent key functions of an organization: leadership, products and services, human capital, workplace environment, stakeholder connections, and marketing. The detailed assessment was included in the full report and a summary is provided below.

Overall Assessment

Ontario EcoSchools is making great strides in its D&I policy and practice, excelling in the areas of products and services, marketing, and workplace environment. Existing procedures demonstrate a clear intention towards fairness, inclusivity, and accessibility, both internally through its culture and operations and externally through its programs and services. For instance, efforts are made to reduce barriers to accessing our services and there is a strong emphasis on including the Francophone community in all aspects of our work. Areas that require additional efforts include stakeholder connections, leadership, and human capital. Specifically, Ontario EcoSchools should consider communicating explicit commitments to D&I and ensure that its governing and advisory bodies are reflective of the community it serves. A deeper consideration of all forms of diversity – i.e. race, gender, sexual orientation, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, ability, religion, etc. – would enhance D&I practice at Ontario EcoSchools.

3. D&I POLICY

The first step to achieving diversity and inclusion in the workplace is to make a commitment to it (Third Sector New England, 2010). Good intentions without the backing of sound policies and procedures have limited long-term traction. Thus, a primary objective of this project was to implement a D&I policy for Ontario EcoSchools. To consolidate and enhance existing policies, a comprehensive diversity and inclusion policy was drafted for Ontario EcoSchools as part of the AFP fellow project. The draft policy includes a rationale for D&I, a statement of commitment, and an outline of responsibilities.

Diversity & Inclusion Policy for Ontario EcoSchools (draft)

Rationale

As an organization that strives to develop environmentally responsible citizens who treat all living things with respect, dignity, and fairness, we see diversity and inclusion as core values at Ontario EcoSchools. Diversity provides the unique mix of perspectives, experiences, and skills needed to generate innovative ideas and solutions, and an inclusive environment enables individuals to work together to address global environmental challenges. We believe that a commitment to diversity and inclusion is necessary to meet the needs of the increasingly diverse Ontario EcoSchools community, as

it reflects the growing and evolving population of Ontario. We also believe that fostering a working environment where everyone feels valued and respected is what makes Ontario EcoSchools a special place to work. This policy outlines our commitment to diversity and inclusion and provides a framework for integrating these core values into all aspects of our work.

Definitions

- **Diversity:** the presence of a variety of qualities and attributes within an individual, group or organization. Diversity includes such factors as age, sex, race, ethnicity, physical and intellectual ability, religion, sexual orientation, educational background, and expertise.
- **Inclusion:** appreciating and using our unique differences in a way that shows respect for the individual and enables them to achieve their full potential

Commitment to Diversity and Inclusion

Ontario EcoSchools recognizes that all of our stakeholders share unique characteristics, experiences, skills, and knowledge, and this diversity is to be valued and respected. Ontario EcoSchools is committed delivering programs and services in ways that are fair, inclusive, accessible, equitable, respectful, and culturally competent.

Ontario EcoSchools is committed to employment diversity. We are committed to ensuring that organization staff and representatives are reflective of and responsive to the diversity of Ontario and beyond. All decisions regarding recruitment, hiring, promotion, compensation, employee development decisions such as training, and all other terms and conditions of employment, will be made without regard to gender, race, ethnicity, religion, marital status, disability, age, ancestry, or sexual orientation.

Ontario EcoSchools is committed to promoting a workplace that respects and celebrates diversity and fosters a respectful, equitable, and collaborative environment that enables staff and volunteers to realize their potential through valued contributions. An inclusive approach will be integrated into the activities, operations, and relationships of the organization, and Ontario EcoSchools will make every effort to identify and remove barriers to inclusion. Ontario EcoSchools will take a zero tolerance approach to all forms of harassment, discrimination, and violence.

Responsibilities

Steering Committee

- Approve and review policy
- Evaluate progress in meeting diversity and inclusion objectives once a year

Senior Management

- Oversee day-to-day implementation of the policy
- Ensure appropriate allocation of resources for policy implementation
- Lead or coordinate training and education on diversity and inclusion

All Employees

- Uphold the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusiveness in all practices

- Treat all other employees, volunteers, and stakeholders with dignity and respect and in a fair and non-discriminatory manner
- Report immediately to their supervisor any violation of the policy

4. IMPLEMENTATION & NEXT STEPS

This project has created the space and motivation to evaluate and improve our work through a diversity and inclusion lens. Conducting the initial assessment, drafting a policy, and mapping out an implementation plan are key components of a comprehensive and long-term diversity and inclusion strategy. Implementing a D&I plan is a long-term process that requires participation and engagement from all corners. Included in the full report is a detailed implementation plan and timeline of actions. The next step will be to garner the support and engagement of all stakeholders through communication, collaboration, and training. These efforts will help Ontario EcoSchools become a leader in diversity and inclusion within the environment and nonprofit sector.

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