

AFP Diversity and Inclusion Fellowship Project Report

Ending Stigma around Invisible Diversities: Implementing the Invisible Diversity Subcommittee at Tides Canada

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Background

The Fellowship in Inclusion and Philanthropy Program is a program of The AFP Foundation for Philanthropy – Canada. The Fellowship provides dedicated education, professional development and mentorship to 20 mid-level and emerging non-profit professionals from across Canada, representing a wide range of cultural backgrounds and interests. The goal of the program is to build the capacity of emerging fundraising leaders that reflect the diversity of our communities.

About the Author

Trevor Loke is an entrepreneur and philanthropy professional currently working with Tides Canada Foundation as Development Manager. A trusted campaign, partnerships, and fundraising advisor, Trevor has over a decade of experience working with civil society, businesses, philanthropists, and elected officials to deliver effective campaigns, solve complex problems, and achieve meaningful impact.

Trevor was elected to the Vancouver Park Board in 2011, serving as commissioner until 2014, and was co-founder of the crowdfunding platform, Weeve, where he worked as Chief Operating Officer (the company was acquired by LX Ventures in 2014). He was named to BC Business Magazine's inaugural Top 30 under 30 and as a Maclean's Magazine "future leader" of Canada. When not working, he spends his time playing ice hockey, hiking, cycling, camping, skiing, reading, volunteering, travelling, and enjoying life in beautiful Vancouver, British Columbia.

About Tides Canada

Tides Canada is a national charitable foundation working toward progress on environmental sustainability, social equity, and economic prosperity for all Canadians. Established in 1999, Tides Canada has facilitated more than \$200M in grants to the Canadian charitable sector through its philanthropy. As Canada's largest intermediary organization, Tides Canada is uniquely positioned to bring diverse sectors together to create uncommon solutions for the common good.

Ending Stigma around Invisible Diversities

Introduction and Context

My personal interest in this topic results from both personal experience and community experience. In my personal instance as a gay man (an invisible diversity), and through direct work with trans communities and people with autism spectrum disorder, I've seen the need to consider approaches which allow all of us to better succeed and have opportunity.

The most notable experience that I have had prior to this project was through my work at the Vancouver Park Board, where I served as commissioner from 2011 until 2014. During that time, the board unanimously voted to approve a series of recommendations that had been sourced directly by community to improve public facilities and spaces across the city, specifically for trans and gender-variant people. Inspired by that work, I've shared the successful approach of the city with elected officials and civil servants across North America, including during a keynote speech during the 2015 Pan Am Games' Sport Inclusion Summit in Toronto.

Going into the fellowship, I wanted to explore a project that met my personal interests, experience, and which built upon the work Tides Canada was already doing as a leading organization in this space.

Building Upon Success: Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

Tides Canada established its first Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion ("REDI") committee in 2018. As an inaugural member of the committee, I participated in active discussions to further the ways that the organization considered its approach and worked together better outcomes. Over the past year, the committee has led work on a number of fronts to bring all staff into the conversation. Work began with an all staff survey, asking a series of questions designed by the evaluation specialist within the organization who offered their services to the committee. These carefully designed questions allowed the committee to decipher through the high-participation, anonymous survey, the real and perceived strengths and gaps that existed.

Among these areas were a number of so-called "invisible" diversities, literally those things which set us apart that we cannot see. It was noted by the REDI committee that these issues (most notably: class, sexuality, and mental health) included some which were not actively being considered by the committee, offering an opportunity to engage in this area of work. Following the results, I decided to begin researching how this was being approached by other organizations.

Challenges and Approach

Among the many considerations discussed was how we could actively pursue greater inclusion and diversity, without sidelining initiatives and progress made for communities facing oppression. We found consensus among the committee members that the priority should continue to be focused on marginalized communities with the aim of furthering diversity

amongst staff by broadening our means of inclusion. In other words, by furthering our work around racial justice, we can also take the opportunity to ensure that impoverished and working-class racialized communities are specifically considered, as one example.

Engaging Staff in Identifying Scope

Working with the REDI committee, I was tasked with reaching out to staff across Tides Canada to source ways of identifying various invisible aspects of our work. After two weeks of consultation with staff, we sourced the following list of ways to identify ways of considering inclusivity in the workplace for invisible diversities (see appendix “A”)

Following the creation of this list, I compiled a brief presentation for the REDI committee to begin exploring this work. The brief presentation encouraged members of the committee to explore their own unique diversities that people cannot see and assess how Tides Canada could benefit from a deeper approach to intersectionality by considering the invisible factors that influence how people engage and work together. The presentation was well received and led to the next step, engaging staff as a follow up from the all-staff survey by asking staff to list different identifiers of diversity that could not be seen.

More than a dozen staff engaged in detailed and thoughtful responses, building a crowdsourced list (and de facto scope for the committee’s focus) by those directly impacted by the work.

Engaging the Team and Building a Subcommittee

At the February 2019 meeting of the REDI committee, I presented the list of staff-sourced invisible diversities (see appendix “A”) and proposed that based upon the responses of the all-staff survey and the engagement of staff during the creation of the list, that we seek interest from committee members to take this work further.

Four members of the committee volunteered and met to discuss next steps. The result of the initial meeting was the agreement to develop a terms of reference and propose that the group become a permanent subcommittee of REDI. The subcommittee terms of references were created by the working group of volunteer committee members and brought back to the REDI committee for adoption (see appendix “B”). The REDI committee approved the recommended terms of reference, officially creating the subcommittee.

Members of the working group were invited to continue to serve as subcommittee members, of which all agreed, and an additional two non-committee member staff joined the subcommittee, for a total of seven subcommittee members. As the group gets going, it has set a 2-year vision for its work to report back to the REDI committee and evaluate its work at the end of the period.

Assessment and Next Steps

The subcommittee has set in motion a vision for its work over the next two years with the intention of reporting back to REDI at the end of the period to assess how the subcommittee can best meet the needs of the organization as it changes.

Starting with an assessment of priorities based upon staff engagement and further analysis of the all-staff survey with a special consideration to the invisible diversity needs mentioned through written and multiple-choice responses, the group will ultimately develop a workplan to focus on areas where Tides Canada can focus to become a leader in diversity and inclusion for all, by adding an invisible diversity approach to its existing approach in targeted priority areas of inclusion.

At its initial meeting the subcommittee agreed to the following phased approach to its work:

Phase 1: Set priorities for the committee's work - January 2019 to May 2019

Phase 2: Share priorities with REDI committee - May 2019

Phase 3: Finalize committee two-year work plan - September 2019

Phase 4: Implement work plan - September 2019 to August 2021

Phase 5: Evaluate progress and report back to REDI committee - September 2021

Conclusion and Reflection

The initial work has encouraged an enthusiastic group of volunteer members ready to dig into the first phases of the work. We believe that through our work we will help people see not only what is shown on the outside, but to consider the unique experiences that people live in their daily lives which are not considered because of our inability to see them. A more equitable society is one which will not only correct the injustices toward racialized communities, but which includes an approach to ensure economic, social, and environmental justice and an approach to inclusion that considers every aspect of who we are as people, visible and non-visible alike.

The work of this project is inspired by the AFP Fellowship in Inclusion and Philanthropy. In 2018, Melissa Leite of Tides Canada, graduated from the fellowship and implemented the REDI committee at Tides Canada, from which this project owes deep thanks. As a 2019 fellow, this work compliments the foundation laid by previous fellows and deepens the approach through a wider diversity lens with the goal of improving inclusion outcomes.

My hope, through this work, is that experiences of having to “come out” and face the stigma of workplaces that are resistant or hesitant to change will end. This model of inclusion can inspire organizations to see a boost in staff morale, higher-quality candidates, and a more dynamic workplace that reflects our society. As a queer person, I am lucky to work for an organization that wants to lean into understanding how people with diverse sexualities – my personal connection to invisible diversity – can better be situated in the workplace (for instance: being engaged in reviewing HR policies, inclusion on the REDI committee, etc...), but I recognize this as a privilege and one that I can use to help develop a model for others to spread throughout the sector and beyond.

References

- Trans* and Gender Variant Inclusion Working Group of the Vancouver Board of Parks and Recreation *Building a Path to Parks & Recreation for All: Reducing Barriers for Trans* & Gender Variant Community Members* (2014): <https://vancouver.ca/files/cov/REPORT-TGVIWorkingGroupReport-2014-04-28.pdf>
- Julie O'Mara and Alan Richter, *Global Diversity and Inclusion Benchmarks* (2017): <http://centreforglobalinclusion.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/GDIB-V.090517.pdf>
- Amy Soden, AFP Fellowship in Diversity and Inclusion Blog (July, 2016) *When Diversity in Invisible*: <http://www.afpinclusivegiving.ca/story/when-diversity-is-invisible/>
- Mary Francis Winters, *The Inclusion Solution* (October, 2013) *What is Diversity Part 3: The Visibly Invisible*: <http://www.theinclusionsolution.me/what-is-diversity-part-3-the-visibly-invisible/>

Appendix A: Staff-sourced List of Invisible Diversities

- **Class / Economic Status**
 - Wealth
 - Salary / Income
 - Inherited vs. earned capital
 - Economic / job opportunity
- **Mental Health**
 - Depression
 - Anxiety
 - Isolation / Loneliness
 - Eating-related illness (bulimia / anorexia)
 - PTSD / schizophrenia / cognitive-related issues
 - Suicidal thoughts
 - Autism
 - ADHD
 - Memory loss
- **Sexuality and Gender Identity**
 - Heterosexuality / Homosexuality / Bisexuality / Pansexuality / etc...
 - Non-binary gender / male / female / intersex / 2-spirit / hijra / butch / femme / trans man/woman
 - Gender reassignment surgery / hormones
- **Physiological Health**
 - Ability to live independently vs. dependency for tasks/activities
 - Wheelchairs / walkers / physical access restrictions
 - Disease / infection / chronic illness
 - Organ-related conditions (heart, liver, kidney disease, etc...)
 - Blindness
 - Deafness
 - Muteness
- **Personality Type**
 - Introversion vs. Extroversion
 - Innovation vs. traditional approaches
 - Conflict / disagreement style
- **Cultural Norms**
 - Language / dialect / vocabulary / communication style
 - Music / food / cultural traditions
 - Routine / daily practices
 - Family structure
 - Holidays / celebrations
- **Religion / Spirituality**
 - Monotheism / Polytheism / Nontheistic religion / Spiritual practice / Agnosticism / Atheism

- Philosophy / ethics
- **Political Beliefs / Affiliations**
 - Left-wing / right-wing / centrism
 - Political affiliation vs. no affiliation
 - Voting rights / privileges
 - Stances/beliefs about individual issues
- **Age**
 - Silent Generation / Baby Boomer / Gen X / Gen Y / Millennials / iGen
 - Life experiences
- **Marital/Family Status**
 - Children vs. no children
 - Married/partnered vs. not
- **Nationality**
 - Citizenship
- **Education**
 - Access to education (affordability, geography, privilege)
 - Level of education
- **Experiences of Trauma**
 - Individual vs. intergenerational

Appendix B: Subcommittee Terms of Reference

Mandate

1. The Invisible Diversity subcommittee, in collaboration with the Reconciliation, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (“REDI”) committee, to which it shall report, will lead the focus of the committee as they relate to invisible diversity in the workplace.

Purpose

1. The primary function of the Invisible Diversity subcommittee (the “subcommittee”) is to serve as a support of REDI with a specific focus on invisible diversity.

Governance

1. The subcommittee has the authority to make recommendations to REDI on subjects related to its mandate of invisible diversity; and,
2. The subcommittee shall review its terms of reference on an annual basis and present any requested amendments or revisions to the committee.

Membership, Appointments and Vacancies

1. The subcommittee shall be made up of volunteers made up of Tides Canada staff, including members of the REDI committee; and,
2. The subcommittee shall be open to participation on a volunteer basis with supervisor approval; and,
3. The subcommittee shall select a chair at its discretion that will be responsible for setting and organizing meetings.

Meetings and Quorum

1. The subcommittee shall meet at least six times per year (in person or by teleconference), and may meet more frequently if the subcommittee determines that such meetings are necessary; and,
2. Quorum for scheduled meetings shall be a minimum three members, including the chair.