

Understanding EDI in Research Practice vs. Research Design

A Resource for New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF) Applicants

For the **New Frontiers in Research Fund (NFRF) Exploration** competition, **Equity, Diversity and Inclusion** is evaluated as a **pass/fail**. The EDI criterion acts as a screening threshold: The application must receive an overall "meets expectations" (or a majority of reviewers rating it as meets expectations) to remain fundable. If the application receives an overall "does not meet expectations" for EDI in research practice, it is not considered fundable, regardless of how highly it scores on high risk, high reward, or feasibility.

NFRF emphasizes the integration of **EDI** as a core component of both research practice and feasibility or research design.

EDI in Research Practice

Focus: *Who is doing the research and how the research environment is structured.*

EDI in research practice refers to the **composition, culture, and functioning of the research team**. It includes:

- **Team Composition and recruitment:** Proactively recruiting and retaining individuals from underrepresented groups (e.g., women, Indigenous Peoples, racialized individuals, persons with disabilities, 2SLGBTQIA+ communities).
- **Inclusive Environment:** Creating a respectful, accessible, and supportive workplace that values diverse perspectives.
- **Mentorship, Training, and Development Opportunities:** Ensuring equitable access to professional development, leadership roles, and mentorship opportunities.
- **Barrier Reduction:** Identifying and addressing systemic barriers to participation and advancement within the research team.

Goal: To foster a research environment where all members can contribute fully and equitably.

Feasibility/EDI in Research Design

Focus: *What is being researched and how the research is conducted.*

Feasibility considers the research plan and involves embedding inclusive principles into the **research project, content and methodology**. This includes:

- **Research Questions:** Framing questions that consider the experiences and needs of diverse populations.
- **Design and Methodology:** Using inclusive and culturally sensitive methods that account for intersectionality and lived experiences.
- **Data Collection & Analysis:** Ensuring data is disaggregated and analyzed in ways that reveal disparities and promote equity.

- **Knowledge Mobilization:** Sharing findings in accessible formats and with communities that are impacted by the research.

Goal: To produce research that is relevant, ethical, and impactful across diverse communities.

Top tips:

- The biggest mistake applicants make is treating the EDI section as a statement of values. NFRF Exploration reviewers are not looking for your commitment to EDI in the abstract - they are checking whether you satisfy every required element of the pass/fail matrix.
- **1. Write directly to the four review headings.** Organize your response exactly as reviewers assess it:
 - Analysis of context
 - Concrete practices
 - Implementation
 - Impact and monitoring
- **Make the "context" specific, not philosophical or aspirational**
 - Avoid: "Our team values diversity and inclusion."
 - Instead discuss your actual context: your discipline(s), your institution, your career stage, your project structure, the types of trainees you'll recruit
 - Identify **one or more specific systemic barriers**, such as: underrepresentation in the field, barriers for interdisciplinary researchers, inaccessible recruitment practices, networking advantages that favour existing insiders, challenges faced by trainees with caregiving responsibilities, geographic or institutional inequities
 - Support the discussion with evidence where possible (published statistics, institutional data, disciplinary reports). Reviewers explicitly expect concrete examples and supporting data or references.
- Don't promise diversity, instead describe practices. Reviewers want practices that reduce barriers.
- Cover all three required practice areas. Applicants sometimes write only about hiring. Cover team composition and recruitment, T&D, environment, and design.
- **Include accountability.** Reviewers now specifically look for accountability.
 - Examples include: annual review of recruitment practices, confidential feedback mechanisms, regular team discussions on inclusion, designated responsibility for monitoring implementation, documented onboarding procedures etc.
 - The application should make it clear that these practices will actually occur rather than simply being aspirations.