



Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Action Plan 2023–2027

June 2022



Niagara  Region

Acknowledgements

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Niagara Region is situated on treaty land. This land has a rich history of First Nations such as the Hatiwendaronk, the Haudenosaunee, and the Anishinaabe, including the Mississaugas of the Credit First Nation. There are many First Nations, Métis, and Inuit peoples from across Turtle Island that live and work in Niagara today.

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Parents and Child Enjoying Family Time



List of Definitions and Acronyms

Pride Crosswalk Outside
Niagara Region Headquarters



Bias	Disproportionate weight in favour of or against an idea, thing, or person
CIM	Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
Discrimination	Negative behaviours or actions towards members of a group based on stereotypes and prejudice
Diversity	The presence of differences in the lived experiences and perspectives of people
Equity	When everyone receives fair treatment, access, opportunity, and advancement in all areas of life
Inclusion	The creation of welcoming spaces and opportunities for everyone to participate and succeed
Intersectionality	Each person is unique and multi-layered; based on different aspects of a person's identity, individuals may experience different levels of power or discrimination in various situations
LAMs	Local area municipalities (Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, St. Catharines, Thorold, Wainfleet, Welland, and West Lincoln)
Marginalized	A group or individual that is treated as insignificant, put on the edges of society, made to feel powerless, or less important compared to the group in power
Niagara region	Refers to Niagara as a geographic entity or community
Niagara Region	Refers to Niagara Region as an organization
Prejudice	A judgement of opinion formed before all facts are known
Stereotype	An over-generalized belief about a group of people



Message from Regional Chair

One of the defining characteristics of this term of Regional Council is our commitment to building a Niagara that is as welcoming and inclusive as possible, while also responding to the ever-evolving world.

Since joining the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities in 2020, we have taken steps to demonstrate our commitment to change and growth. We established a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee, hired staff resources dedicated to this important work, and have done more engagement in the last four years than the previous decade.

For our part, we have engaged with subject matter experts with lived experience to provide practical education and training to Regional Councillors, helping us to better understand the world. I want to thank everyone who has taken time over the last few years to share their time and stories with members of Regional Council.

The events of the past two years have demonstrated that elected officials at every level cannot afford to ignore the growing need for change. While I know there is much work still left to be done, I believe that we have made some real progress that I am eager to capitalize on as we move forward together.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jim Bradley". The signature is stylized with a large, sweeping initial 'J'.

Jim Bradley, Chair
Niagara Region

Message from the Chief Administrative Officer

When I think of Niagara, I envision a place where everyone is welcome and included; a place that reflects a rich diversity of thought, background, and understanding. My desire is that staff at the Region feel accepted and valued at work, and provide services that are inclusive and meet the needs of the residents of Niagara.

The results of the thorough research conducted by the DEI Team supported by the DEI Advisory Committee, and many other staff and community members, reveal that we are doing well in some areas, but have far to go in other areas. The negative experiences of staff and community members reveal that discrimination and bias exists in Niagara, although it may be hidden in some communities.

I am confident that as we work together, we will be able to create an inclusive workplace culture; increase understanding and humility through learning; and, have a diverse workforce that is reflective of Niagara's community. We will be able to make progress in providing programs and services that meet the needs of everyone, address discrimination, and provide inclusive communication that reflects the people of Niagara in accessible ways.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'R. Tripp'.

Ron Tripp,
Chief Administrative Officer
Niagara Region

Message from the Chair of the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee

It was a historic first step when the Region created the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee. The goal of the Committee was to address biases and discrimination, mitigate negative impacts, and enhance the quality of life for diverse communities across Niagara.

The 12 individuals that served on the first DEI Advisory Committee came with unique backgrounds, experiences, and education. Their goal was to promote and foster better understanding and inclusion in Niagara. They brought forward issues facing multiple groups, including perspectives from Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC), 2SLGBTQQIA+ individuals, people from various religions, and people with visible and hidden disabilities. They provided examples of their experiences of discrimination and barriers to accessibility, in employment, healthcare, and housing. We worked collectively to support the development of the DEI Action Plan to ensure it reflects Niagara Region's commitment to fostering diversity and inclusion within the organization and the community.

The work of challenging racism and discrimination, and providing opportunities for community members from all backgrounds to have a voice is just beginning. I am confident that the Region's commitment to improving the experiences of diverse communities will result in healthier, more equitable policy solutions and service delivery in housing, health, transit, policing, education, employment, and the labour market for the greatest number of people across Niagara.



A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Sabrina Hill'.

Sabrina Hill, Chair
Niagara Region Diversity, Equity,
and Inclusion Advisory Committee

Living Document

Niagara Falls



The Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Action Plan is an aspirational living document.

It should be continually referred to, discussed, evaluated, and adapted to meet the current context and needs of diverse staff and community members. It reflects the experiences, insights, and recommendations of Niagara Region staff and community members who participated in consultation and feedback opportunities at a particular point in time (2020-2022). It does not include every voice in Niagara but instead, serves as a significant starting point for work and discussions long overdue in Niagara.

Those involved in the creation of the DEI Action Plan collaborated alongside individuals with diverse lived experiences in its development. The Region recognizes the complexities and challenges embedded in DEI work and is committed to continual learning while engaging in deliberate discussions with the community. The Region hopes, in the development and implementation of this plan, that it communicates a renewed commitment to reducing barriers for staff and community members, in order to make Niagara a more diverse, equitable, and inclusive community.

The Region recognizes the complexities and challenges embedded in DEI work and is committed to continual learning while engaging in deliberate discussions with the community.

Migrant Worker in Niagara



Executive Summary

Young Child in Front
of Niagara Falls



Many individuals in Niagara face barriers and exclusion due to their race, immigrant status, disability, religion, gender, sexuality, and age, among other factors. Individuals have unique and overlapping identities. These intersecting aspects of identity result in some people experiencing more discrimination than others in areas such as health care, employment, and housing.

Niagara Region recognizes its important role in addressing these barriers both as an employer and as a service provider. The Region is aware that reducing barriers for Regional employees involves ensuring that its workforce reflects the current diversity within Niagara. The aim is for employees to experience a work environment that is accepting, respectful, and inclusive, where they are able to perform their jobs safely and effectively.

The Region acknowledges its important role as a municipality in leading diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) work in Niagara, alongside the local area municipalities (LAMs). The Region is committed to co-ordinating with local community organizations to ensure that services offered in Niagara are inclusive, welcoming, and free from discrimination.

Niagara Region and the 12 LAMs joined the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities in 2020. The first Niagara Region Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan has been developed through research and collaboration with many staff and community members, including the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee.

This includes a vision, mission, scope, focus areas, goals, actions, key performance indicators, and timelines. Niagara Region staff conducted 28 focus groups with 110 staff members and 82 community members, a staff survey with 1,670 completed surveys, and a community survey with 1,599 surveys analyzed. This report details the finalized Action Plan items.

- **Vision:** Niagara region is welcoming and inclusive, where diversity and equity are reflected and valued
- **Mission:** The people of Niagara advance equity; build welcoming, inclusive communities and workplaces, while eliminating barriers and forms of discrimination
- **Scope:** This project includes Niagara Region as an organization, the LAMs, and the Niagara region as a geographic entity and community

Six focus areas have been identified to accomplish the mission of advancing equity, building welcoming, inclusive communities and workplaces, while eliminating barriers and forms of discrimination.

- A.** Inclusive workplace culture, leadership, and accountability
- B.** Increased understanding through education
- C.** Diverse workforce reflective of Niagara community
- D.** Programs and services meet the needs of everyone
- E.** Addressing discrimination
- F.** Inclusive communication

There are six internal goals, six external goals, 22 internal actions, 21 external actions, all corresponding with the six focus areas. Detailed frameworks that include key performance indicators, and timelines for each area of focus are provided within this report. The DEI Action Plan will be implemented with the support of staff, municipal councils, advisory committees, and community organizations. Reports will be provided annually, with a mid-term review in 2025.

The Business Case for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

Downtown St. Catharines



The business case for incorporating DEI continues to grow.

A diverse workforce with true equity and inclusion strengthens the reputation of the organization and the region, attracting talent and more diverse professionals. When a company has a positive culture of inclusion with a respectful workplace, people want to come to work and collaborate. They feel like they are part of a team, which increases employee engagement and improves retention rates.

McKinsey is an international organization that reviews the performance of companies across the world based on the diversity of their executive teams. Their 2019 analysis found that companies that have a balance of men and women on their executive teams were more profitable than companies that were dominated by one gender. Companies that were the most gender diverse were 48 per cent more profitable than the least gender diverse companies. They found that companies that were the most ethnically diverse were 36 per cent more profitable than the least ethnically diverse.¹

Research has found that diverse and inclusive workplaces are able to shift directions and come up with creative solutions, produce quality and effective products and services, and are more likely to meet or exceed financial targets.² Diverse teams have greater productivity and problem solving ability. Diverse people bring a variety of perspectives, experiences, ways of thinking and understanding of a situation. Employees that feel valued and included are more likely to have open conversations, share their ideas, and collaborate with one another which leads to increased effectiveness.³ In this way, reducing barriers for marginalized groups is not only beneficial for staff and community members but also results in organizations that are more profitable and effective.

Diversity and inclusion is important in communities.⁴ Welcoming communities that are free from discrimination lead to positive health and well-being for all residents and visitors. Discrimination, language or accessibility barriers, and micro-aggressions towards residents, newcomers, or visitors have negative impacts on their physical and mental well-being.⁵

- 1 Hunt, V., Prince, S., Dixon-Fyle, S., & Dolan, K. (2020). Diversity Wins: How Inclusion Matters. McKinsey & Company.
- 2 Bourke J. (2016). Which Two Heads are Better Than One? How Diverse Teams Create Breakthrough Ideas and Make Smarter Decisions. Australian Institute of Company Directors.
- 3 Bohnet, I. (2018). What Works: Gender Equality by Design. Boston, MA: Harvard University Press.
- 4 Guo-Brennan, M., & Guo-Brennan, L. (2019). Civic Capacity and Engagement in Building Welcoming and Inclusive Communities for Newcomers: Praxis, Recommendations, and Policy Implications, *Journal of Community Engagement and Scholarship*, 11(2), 31-42.
- 5 Vargas, S. M., Huey, S. J., Jr., & Miranda, J. (2020). A critical review of current evidence on multiple types of discrimination and mental health. *American Journal of Orthopsychiatry*, 90(3), 374–390.



There are direct impacts in terms of access to health care,⁶ housing,⁷ and employment,⁸ as well as indirect impacts on sense of belonging,⁹ and participation in civic activities. Overall, diversity, equity, and inclusion is important for individuals, groups, and organizations and is necessary in order to make Niagara more welcoming, where people want to live, learn, work, and play.

- 6 Varcoe, C., Browne, A.J., Bungay, V., et al. (2022). Through an equity lens: Illuminating the relationships among social inequities, stigma and discrimination, and patient experiences of emergency health care. *V. Health Inequities in U.S. Emergency Health Services*. 52(2), 246-260.
- 7 Auspurg, K., Schneck, A., & Hinz, T. (2019). Closed doors everywhere? A meta-analysis of field experiments on ethnic discrimination in rental housing markets, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 45(1), 95-114.
- 8 Waite, S. (2021). Should I Stay or Should I Go? Employment Discrimination and Workplace Harassment against Transgender and Other Minority Employees in Canada's Federal Public Service, *Journal of Homosexuality*, 68(11), 1833-1859.
- 9 Daley, A., Phipps, S. & Branscombe, N.R. (2018). The social complexities of disability: Discrimination, belonging and life satisfaction among Canadian youth, *SSM - Population Health*, 5, 55-63.

Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities

Niagara Region and the LAMs have a central role to play in building a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community. Their commitment to achieving change was signaled on September 18, 2020 when Niagara Region and Niagara's 12 LAMs (Fort Erie, Grimsby, Lincoln, Niagara Falls, Niagara-on-the-Lake, Pelham, Port Colborne, St. Catharines, Thorold, Wainfleet, Welland, and West Lincoln) joined the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities. The three objectives of the Coalition are to improve municipal practices to promote social inclusion, establish policies to eradicate racism and discrimination, and promote human rights and diversity. A major part of honouring these commitments requires critically reflecting upon the current practices of municipalities in Niagara and working towards making changes. Niagara Region's first Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan describes the actions that the Region intends to implement in the next five years.



Mayor Walter Sendzik signing the joint declaration to join the Coalition of Inclusive Municipalities

Dimensions of Diversity

Indigenous Drumming Circle



Diversity encompasses many differences and similarities between people. There are endless dimensions of diversity that can be used to categorize individuals and groups of people. For the purpose of the DEI Action Plan and research conducted in preparation of this work, 12 dimensions of diversity were utilized. These dimensions were identified as areas of particular interest based on local research and feedback from staff and community members.

It is important to understand that individuals are unique and within each dimension of diversity people have multiple identities. There are multiple ways that their identities overlap between dimensions, also referred to as intersectionality. These unique and intersecting identities lead individuals

and sub-groups of people to experience discrimination and bias differently depending on the situation.

The dimensions of diversity, in combination with representation from all municipalities in Niagara, were used to help identify community organizations and community members to include in focus groups and target for the community survey.

Actions specifically related to Indigenous communities and Indigenous community members are the focus of a separate Indigenous Action Plan, and will not be discussed within this DEI Action Plan. Niagara Region is working simultaneously with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit Peoples and groups in Niagara to create an Indigenous Action Plan.

12 DIMENSIONS OF DIVERSITY

Francophone

Indigenous

Ethnocultural

New Immigrants

2SLGBTQQA+

**People with
Disabilities**

Older Adults

**People with
Low Income**

**People Experiencing
Homelessness**

Youth

Gender

Faith



DEI Action Plan Process and Timeline

Niagara College Students



September 2020 – November 2020

Creation of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Team and Working Groups

A Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Program Manager and two Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Interns (one full-time and one part-time) were hired to lead this work. Various working groups were created to help support the work of DEI staff: the DEI Working Group, DEI Interest Group, and the LAM DEI Working Group.

The DEI Working Group is comprised of 15 staff members from across various departments within the Region. This group meets on a monthly basis and is closely involved in DEI initiatives and planning. These members have dedicated hours in their work schedule designated to support DEI work.

The DEI Interest Group is a 30-member group comprised of staff members across various departments in the Region that have a strong passion for DEI work. Due to the nature of their roles, they do not have designated hours to support DEI work but are committed to serving as champions for DEI initiatives within their departments and teams.

The LAM DEI Working Group features representatives from across the LAMs. This group was established to ensure effective co-ordination, planning, and rollout of DEI initiatives across the LAMs.

November 2020 – March 2021

Environmental Scan

An environmental scan was conducted to understand the current context in Niagara and in other municipalities relating to Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI), as well as researching current best practices through academic and non-academic literature. This scan identified existing gaps along seven themes related to DEI both internally at the Region, as a workplace and service provider, and externally, for diverse community members and the community as a whole. Based on these gaps, six quick start projects were selected from four of the theme areas. The scan also informed the content for the focus group and survey questions.

DEI Action Plan Process and Timeline

Woman Participating
in a Virtual Meeting



April 2021 – June 2021

DEI Advisory Committee

Regional Council appointed a Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Advisory Committee (DEIAC) to work with Regional and municipal staff and the Niagara community to provide Regional Council with recommendations to address bias, racism, and discrimination, and promote understanding and inclusion. Staff from the Region selected eight members from the 83 applications received from community members interested in participating in the Committee. Representatives from the Women's Advisory Committee and the Accessibility Advisory Committee also sit on the DEIAC, along with two members of Regional Council. The DEIAC held their first meeting in June 2021. The DEIAC has been instrumental in providing feedback, direction, and support in the development of the DEI Action Plan.

May 2021 – September 2021

Focus Group Sessions and Analysis

To get a thorough understanding of experiences and perspectives of diverse staff and community members, 17 focus groups were conducted with 110 Niagara Region staff members and 11 focus groups were conducted with 82 community members. The focus group sessions were transcribed and analyzed into key themes. These themes were combined with the analysis of the staff and community surveys.

September 2021 – January 2022

Staff and Community Survey Implementation and Analysis

Staff and community surveys were conducted online to get a broader understanding of the current demographics of Niagara Region staff, and receive input on experiences, and perspectives of diversity, discrimination, and potential actions from a larger number of staff and community members.

Niagara Region launched a voluntary staff survey on September 20, 2021 to a total of 3,884 active employees. The survey closed on October 8, 2021. The survey was administered by TalentMap, an external company. A total of 1,670 surveys were completed, representing a 43 per cent overall response rate.

Niagara Region's Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Community Survey was open for three weeks in December 2021 with a total of 2,304 responses. After removing response sets that answered fewer than six questions and response sets which were found to have unrelated responses to questions asked, a total of 1,599 surveys were included in analysis.



DEI Action Plan Process and Timeline

Colleagues Engaging
in Group Discussion



January 2022 – March 2022

Finalizing Reports

DEI staff used the analysis from the environmental scan, surveys, and focus groups to write multiple reports.

- Environmental Scan Report
- Staff DEI Experiences Report
- Community DEI Experiences Report
- Opportunities for Change Report
- Data Summary Report

The Data Summary Report is a summary of the other four reports, focusing on the best practices, successes, gaps, barriers, and opportunities for action in the seven theme areas identified in the opportunities for change report. All of the reports can be found on the Niagara Region website, DEI project page.¹

March 2022 – June 2022

DEI Strategy Development

Niagara Region, in collaboration with facilitator Sandra Summerhayes, hosted two Strategy Sessions designed to co-develop Niagara Region's draft DEI Action Plan. Using insights from the reports, a combination of Niagara Region staff, members of the DEIAC, representatives from other LAM DEI related advisory committees, and community members were involved in co-developing the vision, mission, goals, and actions.

The DEIAC advocated for both a corporate and community focus and helped develop the Action Plan framework. The information that emerged from the strategy sessions were summarized by DEI staff. DEI staff presented the proposed vision, mission, goals, and actions to over 180 staff and community members from across Niagara. This included a Niagara Region staff town hall, a public information session, and a feedback survey open for staff and community input. DEI staff incorporated the feedback received into the final version of the Action Plan.

¹ <https://niagararegion.ca/projects/diversity-equity-inclusion/default.aspx>



Who Was Involved

A total of 3,391 people participated in focus groups and online surveys to provide input for this DEI Action Plan.

Table one provides the diversity dimensions and total focus group participants per dimension. Each focus group was organized around a specific diversity category, however individuals participating in one focus group may also identify as members of other diversity categories, and were encouraged to bring those different perspectives to the discussion.

Table 1: Focus Group Participants

Diversity Category	Number of Staff Participants	Number of Community Participants
Race/Ethnicity	7	6
Born Outside of Canada	5	5
Gender	6	9
2SLGBTQQIA+	5	7
People With Disabilities	3	20
Religious/Spiritual Affiliation	5	N/A
Francophone	4	5
People Experiencing Homelessness	N/A	5
People With Low Income	N/A	12
Older Adults	N/A	6
No defined category	75	7
Total	110	82

Parents and Children Enjoying Their Time Together

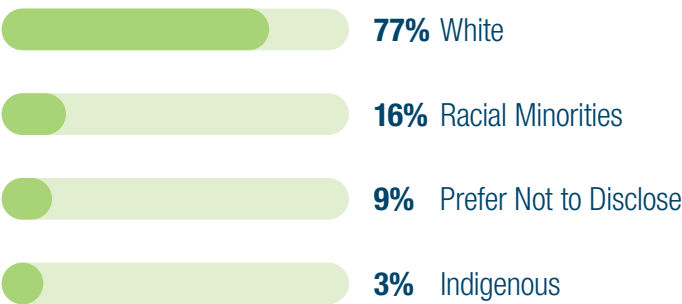
Table 2: Staff Survey Response Rates by Department

Internal Strategic Actions	Surveys Sent	Surveys Completed	Response Rate (RR)
Community Services	1,806	757	42%
Corporate Administration & Governance	104	82	79%
Corporate Services	257	182	71%
Planning and Development Services	46	38	83%
Public Health & Emergency Services	1,175	424	36%
Public Works	496	187	38%
Total	3,884	1,670	43%

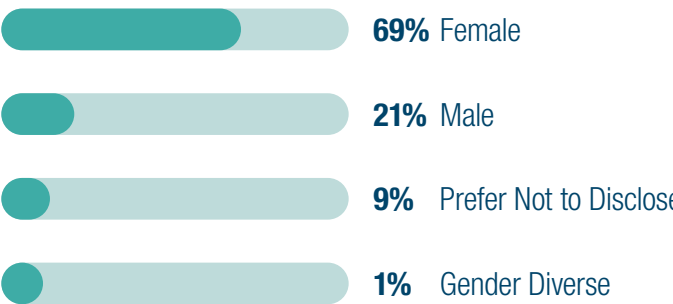
Who Was Involved

Niagara Region staff responded to six demographic questions at the end of the staff survey.

Race or Ethnicity¹



Gender²



Sexuality

7%
identified as
part of the
2SLGBTQIA+
community³



Physical or
Mental Health
Challenge⁴

39%
Identified that they
live with one or more
physical or mental
health challenge



Religion

6%
identified as
Religious
Minorities⁵



Immigration

14%
have lived
in Canada for
25 years or less

- 1 Participants could select more than one answer. Racial minorities includes Black, Latin American, south Asian, east Asian, south-east Asian, biracial or multiracial, Arab, west Asian, Pacific Islander, or prefer to self-describe. Indigenous includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.
- 2 Participants could select more than one answer. Gender diverse includes non-binary, questioning, transgender, transmasculine, transfeminine, and two-spirit.
- 3 The 2SLGBTQIA+ community includes aromantic, asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, questioning, and two-spirit.
- 4 Participants could select more than one answer. This includes mental health challenges, chronic conditions, hearing loss, learning challenges, vision loss, physical conditions, addictions, developmental conditions, and prefer to self describe.
- 5 Religious minorities includes Buddhism, Hinduism, Judaism, Islam, Sikhism, Wiccans, and those of Indigenous spirituality, as well as Pagan, Agnostic, Taoist, Orthodox, Jehovah’s Witness, and/or a mix of beliefs.



Who Was Involved

Demographic Profile of Community Survey Respondents

Thirteen demographic related questions were asked at the end of the DEI Community Survey.

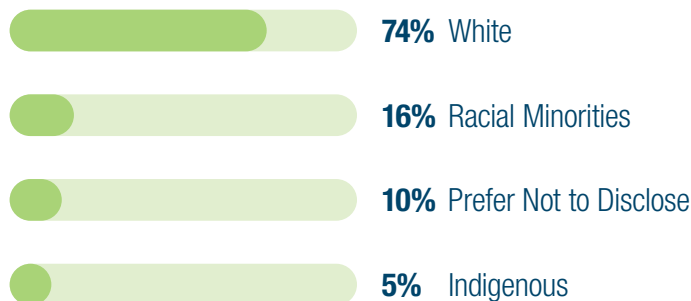
Table 4: Survey Responses by Municipality

Municipality	Survey Count	Survey Per cent	Region Per cent
Fort Erie	81	7%	7%
Grimsby	54	5%	6%
Lincoln	51	4%	5%
Niagara Falls	183	16%	20%
Niagara-on-the-Lake	53	5%	4%
Outside of Niagara	7	1%	N/A
Pelham	48	4%	4%
Port Colborne	52	5%	4%
St. Catharines	367	32%	30%
Thorold	62	5%	4%
Wainfleet	17	2%	1%
Welland	104	9%	12%
West Lincoln	41	4%	3%
Prefer not to answer	29	3%	N/A
Total	1,149	100%	100%

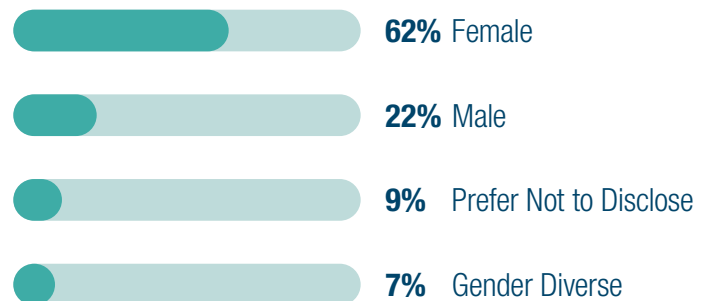
Who Was Involved

The participants responded to 13 demographic questions at the end of the community survey.

Race or Ethnicity¹



Gender²



Sexuality

19%
identified as
part of the
2SLGBTQIA+
community³



Physical or Mental Health Challenge⁴

54%
Identified that they
live with one or more
physical or mental
health challenge



Housing

20%
were not living in
long-term, stable,
and safe housing



Languages

40
unique first
languages
spoken

- ¹ Participants could select more than one answer. Racial minorities includes Black, Latin American, south Asian, east Asian, south-east Asian, biracial or multiracial, Arab, west Asian, Pacific Islander, or prefer to self-describe. Indigenous includes First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.
- ² Participants could select more than one answer. Gender diverse includes non-binary, questioning, transgender, transmasculine, transfeminine, and two-spirit.
- ³ The 2SLGBTQIA+ community includes aromantic, asexual, bisexual, gay, lesbian, pansexual, queer, questioning, and two-spirit.
- ⁴ Participants could select more than one answer. This includes mental health challenges, chronic conditions, hearing loss, learning challenges, vision loss, physical conditions, addictions, developmental conditions, and prefer to self describe.



Key Findings

Discrimination in Niagara

Diversity in Niagara continues to increase – particularly regarding Indigenous communities, visible minorities, linguistic diversity, and individuals with disabilities.

However, there has not always been the same increase in inclusivity. Discrimination, barriers, and a lack of appropriate support in organizations remain for a variety of marginalized groups.

According to the Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Community Survey conducted throughout Niagara in December 2021, 66 per cent of participants indicated that they had experienced discrimination and 77 per cent indicated that they had witnessed discrimination.

The top five types of discrimination experienced by community survey participants as prohibited under the Ontario Human Rights Code were: gender (41 per cent); age (30 per cent); mental health (25 per cent); ethnicity (24 per cent); and ability/disability (23 per cent).

Twenty-four per cent of survey participants added that they experienced discrimination related to their “vaccination status”. However, according to the Ontario Human Rights Commission¹, vaccination status alone does not meet the definition of discrimination prohibited under the Ontario Human Rights Code and therefore it was not included in the final top five list. Under the Code, those who are unable to receive the COVID-19 vaccine for medical or disability-related reasons are to be reasonably accommodated unless it would significantly interfere with peoples’ health and safety.

¹ Ontario Human Rights Commission. (2021). OHRC Policy statement on COVID-19 vaccine mandates and proof of vaccine certificates. Found at https://www.ohrc.on.ca/en/news_centre/ohrc-policy-statement-covid-19-vaccine-mandates-and-proof-vaccine-certificates



Grandson and Grandmother
Looking at a Tablet

The top five types of discrimination experienced were:

1. Gender

“So many landlords will not rent to males and it makes it impossible to find an affordable place to live! Every time I find something in my budget the ad specifically states “females only” super discriminatory, especially when they would have rented to me prior to my transition but now won’t because I present as male? I’m the same person, gender doesn’t determine how good of a tenant you are.”

– Community member

2. Age

“The discrimination against seniors is incredible. I’ve been told ‘I am just an old person, go home’ ... told I am entitled, go to [the] back of line. I’ve been told to get off the road, I am going the speed limit.”

– Community member

3. Mental health

“For me, when I go in [to the hospital] and I have a physical ailment as opposed to a mental health [problem] then they treat me differently.”

– Community member

4. Ethnicity

“People from the BIPOC [Black, Indigenous, People of Colour] community in Niagara often face microaggressions in the community, education and workplace. A dichotomy of us versus them is still unfortunately prevalent.”

– Community member

5. Ability/disability

“The discrimination that I have experienced are related to access. I have had trouble getting into stores, older shops in the area because they are small and do not accommodate a person with physical disabilities or uses a wheelchair.”

– Community member

Key Findings

The top five types of discrimination witnessed by community survey participants as prohibited under the Ontario Human Rights Code were: ethnicity (60 per cent); mental health (48 per cent); race (47 per cent); ability/disability (47 per cent); and gender (42 per cent).

1. Ethnicity

“I feel like people who have lived here for a while are very intolerant and treat newcomers and especially [ethnically] diverse people badly.”

– Community member

2. Mental health

“When people have mental health problems which you can’t always see and employees or employers should be educated to not discriminate against them.”

– Community member

3. Race

“I live in Niagara-on-the-Lake – I have witnessed multiple incidents of harassment and abuse towards seasonal farm workers, actors from the Shaw (whom people in town have assumed do not “belong” there).”

– Community member

4. Ability/Disability

“Individuals supported sometimes have not been able to access services or resources because they have a developmental disability.”

– Community member

5. Gender

“You’re a man, you shouldn’t do that.”

– Staff member



DIVERSITY
MAKES US STRONGER,
SMARTER, GREATER THAN.

Only 19 per cent of the respondents who experienced discrimination and 18 per cent of respondents who witnessed discrimination reported the incident to their employer, the police, the media, or another place. The top three reasons people did not report incidents were that they felt their complaint would not be taken seriously, their report would not have a good outcome, or they feared problems for themselves.

Among Niagara Region staff, 79 per cent feel that their immediate manager creates an inclusive work environment, and 69 per cent of staff agree that diverse identities, ideas, and ways of thinking and working are valued at their organization. Less than a quarter (23 per cent) of staff responded that they do not know how to report an incident of discrimination at Niagara Region. The majority of staff (68 per cent) agreed that they would feel comfortable reporting an incident of discrimination that they experience or witness. The top reasons why staff would not feel comfortable reporting an incident of discrimination are the fear of problems for themselves, and the fear of being identified.

Key Findings

Current Successes

Research for the DEI Action plan identified multiple areas of success relating to DEI in Niagara, both in the Niagara Region as the organization, and in the community. Some of these items were identified during the environmental scan and focus groups, while others were quick start projects that were identified during the environmental scan that were implemented by the end of 2021. These selected items are linked to each of the six focus areas, however this list does not include everything that is happening in the region.

Inclusive workplace culture, leadership, and accountability

- All Non-Union People Leaders at Niagara Region have a shared performance objective related to DEI in 2022
- Eighteen per cent of Niagara's 45 largest employers had clear DEI plans available, with clear DEI-related goals, while 38 per cent mentioned DEI on their external facing websites

Increased understanding and humility through learning

- A total of 4,549 Niagara Region staff have participated in DEI related trainings as of December 2021 (not all unique staff, some may participate in more than one training)
- Multiple community organizations provide DEI-related training to their employees or community members

Diverse workforce reflective of Niagara's community

- Completion of a Human Resources Best Practices Guidebook: How to Increase Diversity and Inclusion in Recruitment, Hiring, and Promotion
- Niagara Region conducted two staff surveys that collected demographic information (2020 and 2021)

Programs and services meet the needs of everyone

- Community consultation is a standard part of most planning processes at Niagara Region
- There are 10 DEI-related advisory committees to Council that include people with lived experience who are consulted for input on some programs and services at Niagara Region and four of the 12 LAMs

Addressing discrimination

- Niagara Region has a formal complaints process for staff experiences of discrimination or harassment
- Sixty-four per cent of staff that responded to the survey agreed that they knew how to report an incident of discrimination or harassment that they may experience at Niagara Region
- Niagara Region Police Service established an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Unit, that investigates all police reports involving discrimination

Inclusive communication

- Niagara Local Immigration Partnership Anti-Racism campaigns are positive examples of inclusive communication
- Over 20 internal and external DEI-related communications from Niagara Region related to a calendar of significant dates in 2021 and 2022
- Niagara Region updated the land acknowledgement in 2021

DEI Action Plan

The DEI Action Plan is comprised of a vision, mission, scope, guiding principles, and six areas of focus.

For each area of focus there is an internal goal with associated internal actions and an external goal with associated external facing actions. The internal goals and actions focus on work for Niagara Region to implement as an organization. These actions may require input from community members, and can be mirrored and advanced in other organizations. The external goals and actions are focused on the community, and require collaboration and coordination with community organizations, advisory committees, and community members to ensure their success.



Parents and Child Playing
on a Walk in the Park

Vision, Mission, and Scope

Vision:

Niagara region is welcoming and inclusive, where diversity and equity are reflected and valued.

Mission:

The people of Niagara advance equity; build welcoming, inclusive communities and workplaces, while eliminating barriers and forms of discrimination.

Scope:

This project includes Niagara Region as an organization, the local area municipalities, and Niagara region as a geographic entity and community.

Guiding Principles

There are six guiding principles that are the foundation of this work.

All Hands In,
Symbolizing Teamwork



Accountability	Niagara Region is committed to achieving the goals set out in this Action Plan and holding staff at all levels accountable for the multiple initiatives.
Collaboration	Niagara Region is committed to working in collaboration with the local area municipalities, community organizations, and community members to achieve the desired outcomes of this Plan. The collaboration of all diverse groups is essential for the success of this work.
Community Expertise	Niagara Region recognizes that people with different lived experiences are the experts in understanding the barriers they experience, have creative solutions, and are essential partners for achieving the desired outcomes of this Action Plan.
Evidence Informed	Niagara Region is committed to using evidence from other municipalities, academic sources, best practice guides, and community expertise to inform all work associated with the DEI Action Plan.
Humility	Cultural humility is the cornerstone of this work, to achieve true equity and inclusion. We must all be willing to humbly accept that we do not have all the answers. Niagara Region commits to life-long learning, critical self-reflection, challenging power imbalances, developing mutually beneficial partnerships, and maintaining institutional consistency and accountability.
Transparency	Niagara Region commits to providing transparent, clear, and accurate reports on the progress of this Action Plan on a regular basis.



Focus Areas

Father and Daughter Playing
Together on their Driveway

Through consultations and discussions,
six priority areas were identified.



Focus Area A

Inclusive workplace culture, leadership, and accountability

Enabling an organization where leaders are accountable and provide an environment where staff and community members feel heard and respected



Focus Area D

Programs and services meet the needs of everyone

Providing evidence-informed best practices and resources to incorporate DEI principles into Niagara Region programs and services



Focus Area B

Increased understanding and humility through learning

Providing knowledge, skills, and learning opportunities for staff, Councillors, volunteers, and community members to increase their ability to understand and use DEI principles and demonstrate cultural humility



Focus Area E

Addressing discrimination

Reviewing and revising policies and processes, in partnership with diverse communities, to address and reduce discrimination experienced in Niagara



Focus Area C

Diverse workforce reflective of Niagara's community

Using evidence-informed best practices to recruit, hire, retain, and promote a more diverse workforce



Focus Area F

Inclusive communication

Providing clear, inclusive, representative communication for staff and community members to showcase significant dates, provide key information, and recognize leaders that advance DEI

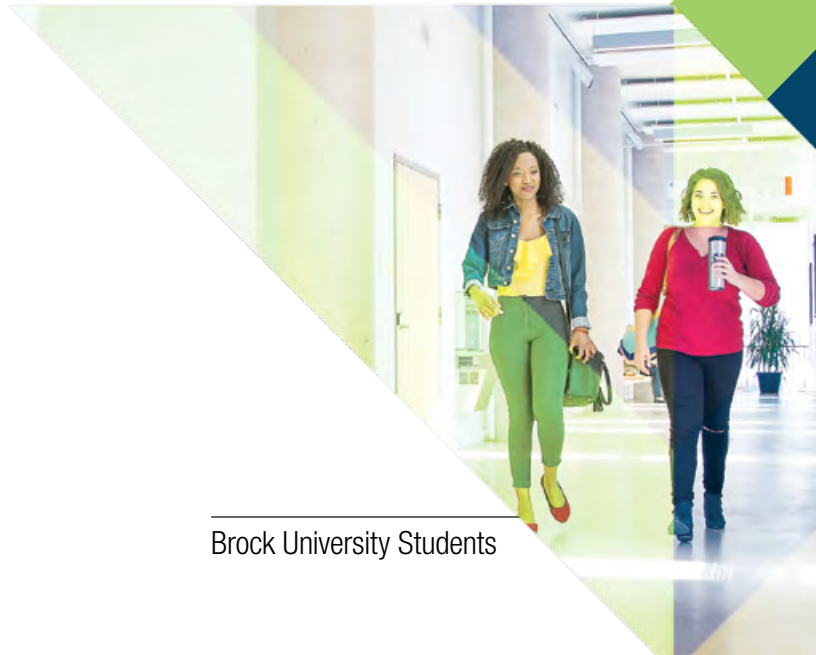


DEI Action Plan Framework

This section outlines the DEI Action Plan framework, including the goals, actions, and how each focus area will be measured.

It includes the internal and external goals, their sources, and if possible the baseline measurement. At the time of publication, some proposed sources are new or yet to be developed and therefore no baseline measurements currently exist.

The strategic actions within each focus area are provided, along with one key performance indicator (KPI), and the target timeline for engaging with each action. As the project progresses and measuring structures are put in place, some of these KPIs or timelines may be modified, and additional KPIs may be added.



Brock University Students



Focus Area A: Inclusive Workplace Culture, Leadership, and Accountability

Internal Goal: Increase per cent of Niagara Region staff who report that they feel heard, respected, and valued by their managers by five per cent

Source: Staff survey, currently 79 per cent of staff agree that their immediate manager creates an inclusive work environment where they feel heard, respected, and valued

Internal Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
AI1. Measure and report baseline results of workplace culture	Per cent of staff who complete the survey	2022
AI2. Create program that recognizes staff who advance DEI	Number of staff recognized	2023
AI3. Develop and promote a DEI handbook	Number of downloads of the DEI Handbook from the website	2024
AI4. Develop a diversity mentoring program	Number of mentors and mentees active in the program	2025

External Goal: Increase per cent of community members that feel they are reflected and heard by locally elected officials by 20 per cent

Source: Community survey, currently 35 per cent of respondents agreed that elected officials reflect the communities they identify with; 36 per cent of respondents agreed that elected officials listen to the communities they identify with

External Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
AE1. Create and promote a DEI Charter	Number of organizations that sign on to the DEI Charter	2023
AE2. Establish and lead DEI Community of Practice	Number of members in the DEI community of practice	2023
AE3. Increase engagement opportunities between Councillors and diverse community groups	Number of opportunities provided for diverse people to engage with Councillors	2024
AE4. Increase opportunities for diverse people to participate and be included in Council meetings	Per cent of community members that feel they are heard by locally elected officials	2025
AE5. Create program that recognizes community members who advance DEI	Number of community leaders recognized	2025





Focus Area B: Increased Understanding and Humility Through Learning

Internal Goal: Increase the knowledge, skills, and competencies of staff, Councillors, and volunteers to be equipped to support the diverse population of Niagara by 10 per cent

Source: Pre-post training session's surveys

Internal Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
BI1. Develop DEI learning curriculum with learning paths for staff, Councillors, and volunteers	Number of trainings available	2022
BI2. Deliver DEI learning for all staff, Councillors, and volunteers	Per cent of Regional Councillors, staff, and volunteers who have successfully completed DEI training	2023
BI3. Implement inclusive leadership development	Increase in percentage of Niagara Region staff who agree that senior leaders lead by example to promote a respectful and inclusive workplace	2024

External Goal: Increase the knowledge, skills, and competencies of training participants in the community regarding DEI and cultural humility by 10 per cent

Source: Pre-post training session's surveys

External Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
BE1. Develop a resource about human rights, addressing hate crimes, and interacting with police	Number of downloads of the resource from the website	2024
BE2. Partner with community organizations to develop and deliver DEI learning curriculum for community members	Number of community organizations involved in developing one or more aspects of learning curriculum	2025
BE3. Support community events with advisory committees on DEI topics	Number of community events supported	2025



Focus Area C: Diverse Workforce Reflective of Niagara's Community

Internal Goal: Use a variety of inclusive strategies to hire, retain, and promote the workforce of Niagara Region to reflect the region's diverse population based on the Canadian Census

Source: Staff survey demographic questions, compared to 2020 Census data

Internal Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
CI1. Increase capacity and resources committed to DEI related staff at the Region	Number of DEI focused staff	2022
CI2. Implement best practices to eliminate barriers in recruitment, hiring, and promotion processes	Per cent of new staff who recognize their interview panel had diverse representation	2023
CI3. Create outreach strategy to expand diverse candidate pool	Number of applicants from minority groups	2024
CI4. Monitor, report, and celebrate the diversity of workplace composition	Per cent of minority groups employed in leadership positions	2024

External Goal: Increase percentage of people that believe employers in Niagara do a good job of attracting, retaining, and promoting people of diverse backgrounds to leadership positions by 20 per cent

Source: Community survey, currently 47 per cent of respondents believe employers in Niagara do a good job of attracting people of diverse backgrounds, 42 per cent of respondents believe employers in Niagara do a good job promoting people of diverse backgrounds

External Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
CE1. Promote the HR Guidebook: How to Increase Diversity and Inclusion in Recruitment, Hiring, and Promotion	Number of downloads of the HR Guidebook from the website	2024
CE2. Promote the business case for DEI	Number of locations where the business case is promoted	2024
CE3. Provide learning opportunities for community organizations regarding DEI recruitment, hiring, and promotion best practices	Number of community partners that attend learning opportunities	2025
CE4. Partner with community organizations to expand intern and co-op opportunities	Number of new intern and co-op opportunities created annually in collaboration with the Region	2025





Focus Area D: Programs and Services Meet the Needs of Everyone

Internal Goal: One hundred per cent of Niagara Region Divisions have incorporated diversity, equity, and inclusion principles into their work

Source: Survey on Niagara Region programs and services

Internal Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
DI1. Improve the process for complaints within Niagara Region programs and services relating to bias or discrimination	Number of complaints received by people identifying in each diversity dimension	2023
DI2. Review and revise Niagara Region programs using the DEI handbook	Number of programs and services that have incorporated DEI handbook principles	2025
DI3. Improve procedure for providing accommodations (accessible, religious, gender) for programs and services	Number of community members included in review of procedure for providing accommodations	2026

External Goal: At least 70 per cent of program participants believe that the Niagara Region programs and services are meeting their needs

Source: Survey on Niagara Region programs and services

External Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
DE1. Report on periodic community DEI surveys that include evaluating the impact of Niagara Region programs and services	Number of participants who completed the survey	2024
DE2. Expand opportunities to work with communities on program and service planning and evaluation, incorporating people with lived experience	Number of programs and services that are engaging people with lived experience for program and service planning and evaluation	2025





Focus Area E: Addressing Discrimination

Internal Goal: Increase the DEI score for Niagara Region employees by five per cent

Source: Staff survey, composite score of six DEI-related questions, current score is 75 per cent

Internal Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
EI1. Publish a formal anti-discrimination acknowledgement statement	Number of communication platforms where statement is communicated	2023
EI2. Review staff complaint process for incidents of bias, discrimination, or harassment	Per cent of staff that agree that they would feel comfortable reporting an incident of discrimination they experienced or witnessed	2024
EI3. Incorporate DEI impacts as part of reports to Council and Corporate Leadership Team	Per cent of Council reports that incorporate DEI impacts	2024
EI4. Review Niagara Region policies and procedures using the DEI handbook	Number of policies reviewed	2025

External Goal: Decrease the per cent of people that experience discrimination in Niagara by 20 per cent

Source: Community survey, currently 66 per cent of survey respondents have experienced one or more types of discrimination

External Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
EE1. Facilitate Town Hall dialogues with diverse communities on discrimination issues	Number of Town Hall dialogues	2024
EE2. Partner with community organizations to host anti-discrimination community engagement sessions and provide anti-discrimination public education	Number of community engagement sessions	2025
EE3. Ensure Niagara Region programs and facilities are safe spaces for all people regardless of identity/diversity	Per cent of program participants who believe Niagara Region facilities and spaces are safe spaces	2027



Focus Area F: Inclusive Communication

Internal Goal: Ninety per cent of Niagara Region staff feel represented and included in DEI-related communications and initiatives

Source: Staff survey

Internal Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
FI1. Review and update internal DEI website (VINE) to provide relevant information and resources for staff	Number of visits to the Vine site	2023
FI2. Publish a community calendar of significant dates	Number of dates in calendar	2023
FI3. Work with diverse staff to recognize and showcase significant dates	Number of significant dates chosen to showcase	2024
FI4. Ensure diverse staff are recognized	Number of stories published	2024

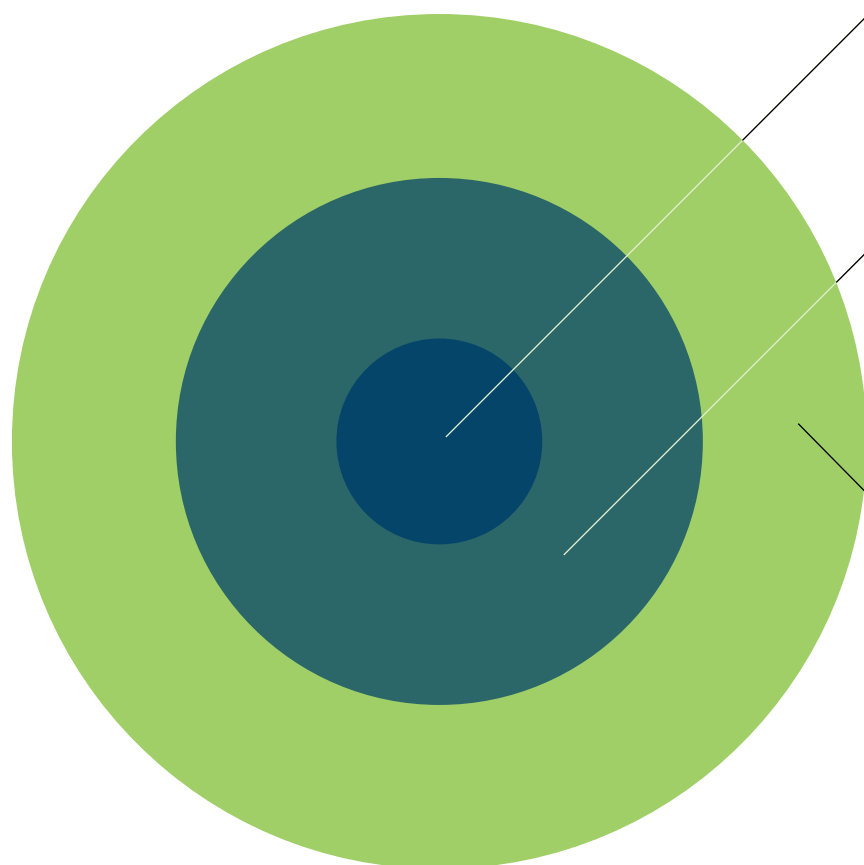
Internal Goal: Eighty per cent of Niagara Region's communication platforms are inclusive and accessible for all community members

Source: Community survey

External Strategic Actions	Key Performance Indicators	Target Timeline
FE1. Support events with community partners to recognize special days and events showcasing diversity	Number of collaborative events held	2024
FE2. Ensure all Niagara Region communication platforms are inclusive and accessible	Per cent of communication platforms that are inclusive and accessible	2025
FE3. Ensure all materials are presented in plain language, are culturally appropriate, and depict the diversity of Niagara	Per cent of materials that depict the diversity of Niagara	2026
FE4. Ensure signage in Niagara Region facilities is accessible	Per cent of signs in Niagara Region facilities that are accessible	2026

Strategy Governance and Implementation Mechanism

To ensure the action items are implemented, supported, and that there is accountability at multiple levels of Niagara Region, the following groups will be involved at three levels. Reporting on the DEI Action Plan will occur on an annual basis, with a mid-term review taking place in 2025.



Support and Accountability:

- Corporate Leadership Team
- Regional Council

Implementation:

- DEI Staff Team
- DEI Staff Working Groups
- Niagara Region
- People Leaders
- Niagara Region Staff
- LAM DEI Working Group
- Community Organizations

Input, Advice, Support Implementation:

- DEI Advisory Committee
- Women's Advisory Committee
- Accessibility Advisory Committee
- LAM Advisory Committees
- Community Members

Risks and Risk Mitigation

As with any large scale strategy or plan, there are multiple risks that may affect the successful implementation of the actions.

Potential risks associated with the DEI Action Plan include:

1. Insufficient resources or budget allocation
2. Lack of staff and community buy-in and support
3. Change in Council or leadership priorities with municipal elections and staff turnover
4. Loss of credibility with public if action items are not delivered as planned
5. Resistance and opposition from internal staff, community organizations, or community members

To mitigate these potential risks, the following steps will be implemented. They do not necessarily align with the corresponding number related to the risks.

1. Extensive communications describing the plan, its outcomes and the important role of staff and community for the success of the plan
2. Develop and promote the business case for DEI with staff and Council to raise awareness of the significance of this work and the importance of supporting the work with allocated budget and staff time
3. Multiple opportunities for staff and community member input throughout the implementation of the plan
4. Report regularly on progress of the plan and showcase accomplishments
5. Establish broad community and political consensus based on a long-term vision for the DEI Action Plan
6. Create supportive structures and policies to ensure sustainability for DEI work regardless of political changes or opposition



Family at Home Eating
Outdoor Meal Together



Niagara  Region

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Action Plan

Corporate Strategy and Innovation
1815 Sir Isaac Brock Way, Thorold, ON L2V 4T7

niagararegion.ca

June 2022