Fostering a Strong and Inclusive Workplace: 2018-2021 Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

DURHAM REGION

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Message from Garry Cubitt, Chief Administrative Officer

On behalf of the senior management team, I am pleased to present the Region's first Diversity and Inclusion Strategy. Developed by a cross-departmental Diversity Task Force, the recommendations captured here are based on feedback received through focus groups and our first staff diversity and inclusion survey. A broad cross-section of employees shared very personal stories, experiences and observations throughout this process. I am grateful for your honesty and your enthusiasm.

Our people are the Region's most important asset. Every day they invest their skills, energy and passion into the work of our municipality. The objective of this strategy is to create an inclusive, people-first organization where Regional employees feel empowered to succeed and serve the best interests of our citizens. By seeking out and respecting different perspectives, we can find new ways of collaborating and approaching everyday problems and decisions. This plan gives us the opportunity to move beyond simply caring about the ideals of diversity, towards taking meaningful collective action.

The senior management team recognizes that diversity and inclusion is a journey – a continuum rather than a final destination. Change is constant. As our organization gains forward momentum, there will be many successes and maybe a few setbacks along the way. Your continued feedback will help us know whether we are on the right track.

There are no quick answers for how to achieve greater diversity and inclusion. As an organization, we are committed to a process of ongoing learning and continuous improvement. The result will be a better understanding of each other and our residents, so we can take a more informed approach in how we design and deliver our policies, programs and services.

I look forward to reporting on our progress as we implement these recommendations.

Garry Cubitt

Garry H. Cubitt, M.S.W.
Chief Administrative Officer

Purpose of the Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

Having a sense of belonging is critical to our personal and collective success. Who we are in terms of our cultural identity, race, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, religious affiliation, age, etc. helps to shape our life experience. It is important that the Region of Durham is a place where diversity is embraced and each one of us is valued and included. Creating a strong sense of belonging helps us harness individual differences in ways that drive leadership, co-operation, innovation and service excellence.

Our community looks very different than when the Region was formed over 40 years ago. Durham has continued to grow and the needs of today's citizens are not the same as previous generations. Between 2001 and 2006, the immigrant population in Durham increased by 19 per cent, and foreign-born Canadians accounted for 34 per cent of Durham's overall population growth. Over half of this group was recent immigrants, having arrived in Canada during the previous five years[1]. This strategy will help us become better equipped to serve the needs of a much more diverse Durham population.

The priorities outlined in this strategy are the result of extensive staff input. Over the next three years, our organization will strengthen diversity and inclusion by focusing on four goals and areas for improvement:

1. **Improve our understanding of diversity and deepen everyone's commitment to inclusion.**

2. **Strengthen diversity and inclusion within our organizational culture.**

3. **Engage staff in diversity and inclusion efforts, and foster opportunities for leadership, advancement and employee development.**

4. **Identify and address barriers to inclusion in the delivery of Regional programs and services.**

The senior management team is committed to reporting annually on our progress, and ensuring staff have the chance to provide ongoing feedback. The success of this strategy relies on shared responsibility along with individual accountability. It requires all areas of the organization to engage in specific activities that will promote a respectful and inclusive workplace. These activities are outlined under each of the four diversity and inclusion goals.

1. Diverse Voices: Understanding the Experience of Immigration in the Region of Durham (Ontario)". Community Development Council Durham report. March 2011.

How Did We Get Here?

In 2013, the Region committed to developing a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy and formed a cross-departmental Diversity Task Force. Through an expression of interest process, staff at all levels of the organization were invited to participate. Applications were reviewed, and 10 representatives were chosen to help develop a framework and action plan for diversity and inclusion. The goal of this team was to engage all departments, divisions and staff in the development of a plan that places diversity and inclusion at the forefront of how we do business and how we support our staff. The senior management team did not want to focus on diversity only in terms of increasing the numbers of under-represented groups. Instead, they wanted to focus on aspects of inclusion, so that our organization can best serve the community, as well as attract the brightest and the best to work for us.

The Task Force began by identifying promising practices in diversity and inclusion, looking at the work of other organizations and municipalities, including the City of Edmonton, City of Toronto, City of Ottawa, City of Guelph, Peel Region, Region of Waterloo, Town of Ajax, and the Ontario Public Service. A benchmarking exercise was completed to look at the current state of diversity and inclusion in our organization. From there, a staff consultation process was developed to gather additional baseline information about our workforce. This process involved:

- **An anonymous online staff survey conducted by a third-party organization specializing in diversity and inclusion.**

- **A series of eight focus groups with diverse employees from multiple work sites.**

- **Meetings, presentations, and discussions with community leaders in the area of diversity and inclusion.**

- **Three solution-focused brainstorming sessions attended by a cross-section of staff who responded to the CAO's open invitation.**

This Diversity and Inclusion Strategy complements our Employee Code of Conduct and provides a series of strategic goals to be implemented in stages. Some of the activities will build on work already underway across the organization, including compliance with provincial accessibility standards, the Diversity and Immigration Community Plan, the Age-Friendly Durham Strategy, and the Durham Regional Police Service Diversity Equity and Inclusion Plan. Other recommendations will require new investments of time and resources.

Creating this strategy has been an inclusive process, from the leadership demonstrated by the members of the Task Force, to the input staff provided through the focus groups and survey, to the employees who took up the Chief Administrative Officer's invitation and gathered to problem-solve the issues that were identified. This is part of an ongoing commitment to engage staff in an open and meaningful dialogue about diversity issues. Conducting the research and developing a strategy is simply the beginning of that conversation.

We all play an important part in bringing these recommendations to life and ensuring we have an inclusive work environment. Organisational change happens from the top down, the bottom up, as well as across the organization. We all have a shared responsibility for diversity and inclusion regardless of our role or qualifications. This strategy creates a common language to help us understand diversity and inclusion. It prepares us to address both existing challenges and ones that will emerge over time.

What is Diversity and Inclusion?

Diversity is any factor that can be used to differentiate groups and people from one another. This may include visible traits such as race, ethnicity, gender, age, culture and physical abilities, as well as invisible traits such as religion, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, education and parental status. People and their identities are complex and multi-faceted. Every person is a unique combination of these visible and invisible traits, combined with their skills, knowledge and experiences. Individuals may choose, or be required to, show different aspects of their identity at different times and places.

Inclusion suggests a sense of belonging. Inclusive organizations create environments where people have both the feeling and the reality of belonging, and are able to work to their full potential. Being inclusive is about empowering people by respecting and appreciating what makes them different. It means ensuring that we are all accepted, welcomed and have an equal opportunity to contribute and succeed within the organization.

Why Diversity and Inclusion Matter

We all have biases, and these biases shape how we make every day decisions like where we want to live, what clothes we want to wear and who our friends are. Many of these biases are unconscious, and so it is important that in the workplace we become aware of these unconscious assumptions in order to treat everyone fairly. When we do this, we ensure that everyone has the same opportunity to be successful in the workplace. Diversity and inclusion is more than just a question of social justice and "the right thing to do." Managing diversity and inclusion effectively has many tangible benefits. By investing in diversity and inclusion, the Region of Durham will:

• Attract and retain top talent

• Reduce staff turnover

• Reflect the citizens that we serve

• Enhance our credibility in the community

This strategy is the first step on a much longer journey. By beginning this conversation, and then taking action, our organization will demonstrate a commitment to work on the issues. This involves getting comfortable with a dialogue that may make people feel uncomfortable at times. Moving through our discomfort helps us become a more creative and innovative organization that can use our diversity as an asset. When people are top of mind, we are all empowered to grow and achieve more. We are also better able to recognize and respond to the needs of a diverse and changing community.

Diversity and Inclusion Enhances Productivity

As an organization, we are stronger when the aspirations and contributions of all employees are taken into account. When people are valued they are more likely to perform at their fullest potential and highest productivity. An inclusive workplace culture sends a message that employees are respected and supported, and that their contributions matter. Inclusive workplaces also lead to lower staff turnover and better community relations. As a municipality, the Region is responsible for the quality of life of all Durham residents. It is more cost-effective and sustainable when we deliver programs and services that are inclusive and accessible. This will ultimately have a greater impact on the people we serve, and is the return-on-investment that we gain by paying attention to diversity and inclusion.

Diversity and Inclusion Leads to Innovation

There is compelling evidence that diverse and inclusive organizations out-perform and out-innovate their less inclusive counterparts. Diversity unlocks innovation by creating an environment where "out of the box" ideas can be heard. When leaders value difference, employees can find champions for their ideas and persuade others to invest resources to pursue them. Diverse workplaces also have an inherent understanding of the unmet needs of community members. Creating a workplace culture where all employees feel free to contribute ideas, and to question the status quo, can lead to new and improved programs that better meet the needs of our increasingly diverse community.

Consistency and Alignment with Region of Durham Corporate Values

Our corporate values help to drive our organizational culture. They provide the foundation for how we deliver on our mission **to meet the current and future needs of the Durham community through leadership, co-operation, innovation and service excellence**. By living our values in the day-to-day work of the Region, and in how we interact with each other, we will build an environment of inclusion that benefits both our customers and our employees.

Our Corporate Values

Ethical Leadership:

We demonstrate integrity and vision, providing the organization with good governance and management. Effective management generates an atmosphere of trust and confidence, where the contributions of all employees are valued and harnessed to achieve operational success.

Accountability:

We respond to the changing needs of residents and other organizations by providing transparent government within a framework of financial stability.

Service Excellence:

We encourage professional excellence through collaboration, partnerships and teamwork in an environment that fosters trust and respect.

Continuous Learning and Improvement:

We support life-long learning and commitment to innovation, research, knowledge exchange and ongoing program evaluation.

Inclusion:

We provide an accessible, inclusive environment that values the diversity of our staff and the community.

Our Current State:

While this strategy is a first attempt at formal, corporate-wide implementation, diversity and inclusion has been an area of focus in many departments for a number of years. In particular, the Region has significant diversity and inclusion expertise among public health and social services practitioners. Through our staff consultation process, the following key strengths and challenges were identified for our organization:

Strengths:

- Inclusion is identified as a core value for Regional employees.

- Diversity is included in the corporate vision statement.

- Attracting and retaining a skilled and diverse workforce, enhancing inclusive and welcoming communities, and celebrating cultural diversity are strategic plan priorities.

- Employees have a high rate of awareness about their rights and responsibilities to ensure a respectful and inclusive work environment.

- Diversity and inclusion are recognized as important and are being embedded in program and service delivery.

- Services are in place to meet the needs of diverse client groups.

- The Region is demonstrating leadership in community diversity planning and through the work of the Local Diversity and Immigration Partnership Council (LDIPC).

- Mutually beneficial collaborative relationships exist with external groups and partners.

- Employees were engaged at all stages of developing the corporate diversity and inclusion plan.

- Indigenous people, women, and persons with disabilities are proportionately represented in the Regional workforce compared to national averages.

- The number of LGBT2sQ[2] and Indigenous employees in management roles is proportional to their number in the Regional workforce overall.

2. LGBT2sQ is an acronym that refers to individuals who identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, two-spirited or queer.

Challenges:

- Departmental diversity and inclusion initiatives are happening in isolation, with no corporate-wide framework for accountability.

- There is no dedicated staff person to co-ordinate the implementation and evaluation of diversity and inclusion activities across the organization.

- Inadequate data and research exists to understand our workforce composition and workforce/community needs.

- Fiscal realities have an effect on the ability to implement diversity and inclusion initiatives.

- There is an absence of diversity-related performance measures to capture progress and return-on-investment.

- Some diversity issues such as age, gender identities and sexual orientation are not discussed as frequently as religious and ethno-cultural diversity.

A Snapshot of Diversity in Durham Region

Durham Region is the fifth largest municipality in Ontario and the tenth largest in Canada, with an estimated total population of 673,000 people. Like many other municipalities, Durham continues to grow and become more ethno-culturally diverse. Between 2006 and 2011, Durham's population grew by 6.2 per cent (37,738 people), with the fastest growth taking place in the municipalities of Clarington, Ajax and Oshawa. Nearly 27 per cent of Durham residents in private households identify as a visible minority, approximately 2 per cent as Aboriginal, and close to 24 per cent are newcomers to Canada (either landed immigrants or permanent residents)[3].

3. Statistics Canada. 2017. Durham, RM [Census division], Ontario and Ontario [Province] (table). Census Profile. 2016 Census. Statistics Canada Catalogue no. 98-316-X2016001. Ottawa. Released November 29, 2017.
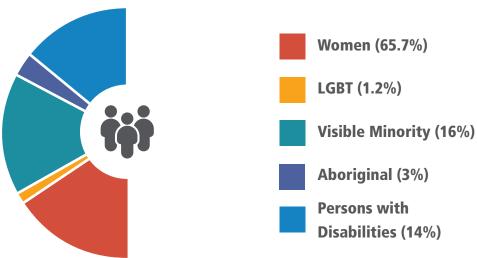
Region of Durham Workforce Diversity

The Region of Durham reflects some of this community diversity in a workforce of approximately 4,600 employees[4]. Through the Region's staff diversity and inclusion survey, employees were able to self-identify whether they belong to one or more designated equity-seeking groups:

Employee Responses

- Women (65.7%)
- LGBT (1.2%)
- Visible Minority (16%)
- Aboriginal (3%)
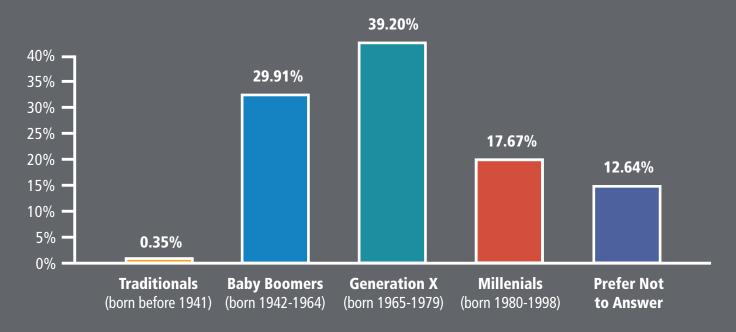- Persons with Disabilities (14%)

It is now quite common for organizations to have four different generations of employees working alongside each other. Different generations often have different values, needs, motivations, expectations, work styles and/or career goals. These differences have to be managed effectively both to build cohesive teams, and to create a sense of belonging for all employees, regardless of age.

The average age of Region of Durham employees is currently 45.5 years, with just over 12 years of service. In 2017, there were 1,131 job competitions and 410 new employees hired (not including temporary summer positions), and the Region has seen nearly 100 staff per year retire since 2015. There is potential for significant knowledge and skill losses in our workforce over the coming years, with skills shortages already noticeable in certain operational areas. Our ability to attract and retain the best and brightest is becoming more important in an increasingly competitive job market, where demand for top talent will soon outpace the supply of skilled municipal workers.

4. Excludes students, temporary staff, and employees of the Durham Regional Police Service.

Age Profile of Diversity Survey Respondents

Category	Percentage
Traditionals (born before 1941)	0.35%
Baby Boomers (born 1942-1964)	29.91%
Generation X (born 1965-1979)	39.20%
Millenials (born 1980-1998)	17.67%
Prefer Not to Answer	12.64%

Goals and Actions

Through research and data collection, the following four strategic diversity and inclusion goals were identified:

A. Improve our understanding of diversity and deepen everyone's commitment to inclusion.

B. Strengthen diversity and inclusion in our organizational culture.

C. Engage staff in diversity and inclusion efforts, and foster opportunities for leadership, advancement and employee development.

D. Identify and address barriers to inclusion in the delivery of Regional programs and services.

Goal A: Improve our understanding of diversity and deepen everyone's commitment to inclusion.

Objective 1: Provide training, education, and resources to improve understanding of diversity and inclusion.

Actions:

1.1 Roll out mandatory diversity and inclusion training to all staff, beginning at the management level.

1.2 Continue to promote existing resources while creating additional corporate learning opportunities on diversity and inclusion topics that are available to all staff (e.g. mental health, unconscious bias, plain language, anti-oppression).

1.3 Ensure learning opportunities are available on a rolling basis in a variety of formats, and accessible from different work locations.

1.4 Develop anti-discrimination and diversity education campaigns and feature "diversity stories" to be shared across the organization.

1.5 Create a quick reference handbook on diversity and inclusion that includes definitions, FAQs and tips on the best way to address issues and inappropriate behaviour.

Goal B: Strengthen diversity and inclusion in our organizational culture.

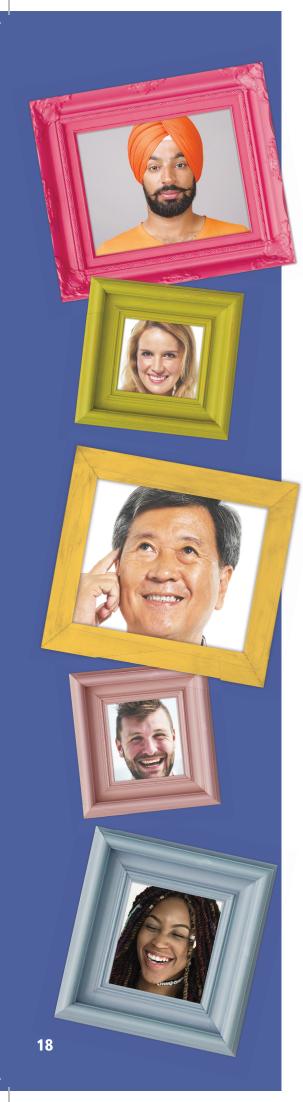## Objective 2: Strengthen organizational capacity and commitment to improve diversity and inclusion.

Actions:

2.1   Incorporate diversity and inclusion components into the performance management process.

2.2   Hire a Diversity Officer to oversee the implementation and measurement of corporate diversity and inclusion efforts.

2.3   Develop a set of benchmarks to measure progress, and conduct regular staff diversity and inclusion surveys.

2.4   Ensure that Regional events recognize and incorporate diversity and inclusion.

2.5   Create safe space options to meet the diverse needs of staff.

2.6   Provide clear, confidential processes for reporting any violations of harassment and discrimination policies.

2.7   Address diversity and inclusion issues and complaints according to the procedures outlined in the Harassment and Discrimination Prevention policy.

2.8   Review policy and identify barriers around inter-departmental transfers.

Objective 3: Recognize the diversity of the Regional workforce and provide greater workplace flexibility to accommodate the diverse needs of employees.

Actions:

3.1   Promote the existing Religious Observance policy which allows for accommodations to start times and working hours for religious holidays.

3.2   Continue working with unions to define alternative work arrangements (e.g. flex hours, working hours), and promote equitable access to the Alternative Work Arrangements Policy.

3.3   Create opportunities to raise awareness of Durham's diverse workforce and community.

Goal C: Engage staff in diversity and inclusion efforts and foster opportunities for leadership, advancement and employee development.

Objective 4: Attract and retain a talented workforce broadly reflective of the community we serve.

Actions:

4.1   Review recruitment practices to remove barriers impacting the employment of a diverse workforce.

4.2   Provide specialized training to hiring managers to address unconscious bias in the recruitment process.

4.3   Provide mentorship opportunities for those internal to the organization.

4.4   Continue to offer internships and other skill-building opportunities that will develop our workforce of tomorrow.
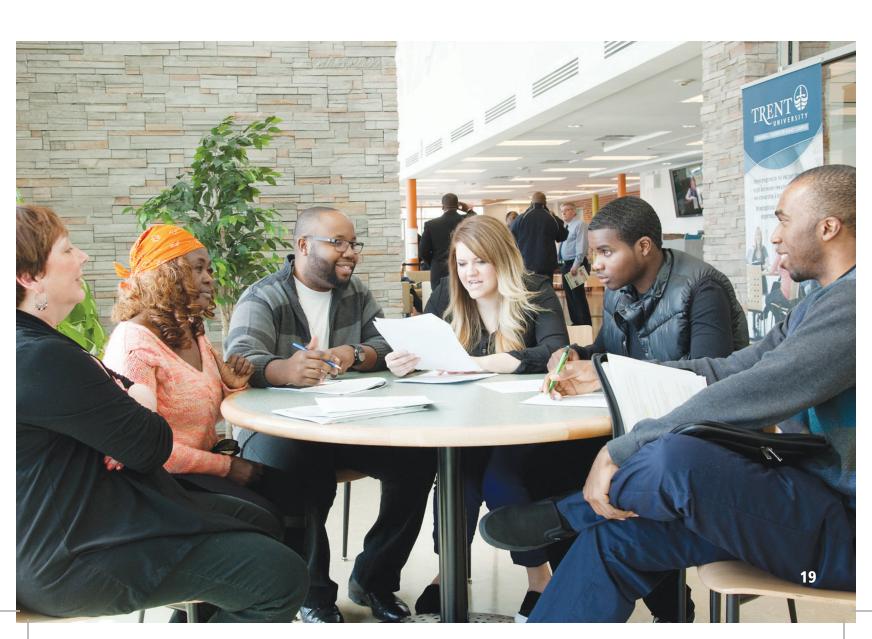
Objective 5: Support ongoing employee development and advancement by providing opportunities to enhance practical and leadership skills.

Actions:

5.1   Encourage opportunities for cross-training and job shadowing across the organization with increased use of courtesy postings.

5.2   Implement secondments and acting assignments as a tool for employee development and create supporting policies and procedures.

5.3   Embed performance management across the organization, providing all employees with regular performance feedback and the opportunity to discuss career goals.

5.4   Provide feedback to internal applicants on request, to support professional growth and improvement following interviews and unsuccessful job competitions.

Goal D: Address barriers to inclusion in the delivery of Regional programs and services.

Objective 6: Encourage innovation in service delivery by promoting diversity of thought and sharing of ideas.

Actions:

6.1   Develop and implement a diversity and inclusion lens to help staff identify barriers in Regional policies, programs and services.

6.2   Establish a staff diversity and inclusion think-tank as a forum for sharing ideas and best practices.

6.3   Facilitate networking and collaboration to learn from others with expertise in diversity and inclusion.

6.4   Ensure respectful debate and invite alternative ideas during group discussions and team meetings.

6.5   Facilitate the participation of diverse groups in Regional consultations and events.

6.6   Implement a consistent approach to providing interpretation and translation services.

Moving from Strategy to Implementation

By pursuing these initial goals and objectives, we are building a strong foundation to expand Regional diversity and inclusion efforts in the future. An important next step is to develop a detailed timeline for implementation and appropriate progress indicators. The appointment of a Diversity Officer – who can provide high-level support on corporate diversity activities, and the continuous measurement and evaluation of our progress   should be a priority. The CAO's Office will ultimately be responsible for monitoring and reporting on progress associated with this strategy. A Corporate Diversity Committee, consisting of management-level representatives from across the organization, will help to develop the implementation plan and related progress indicators.

For more information contact Sonya Hardman, Corporate Policy and Strategic Initiatives at (905) 668-4113 ext. 2049 or email diversity@durham.ca.

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