

The background is a solid green color with several large, overlapping, organic shapes in various shades of green (light green, medium green, and dark green). These shapes resemble stylized leaves or abstract human figures, creating a layered and textured effect.

Report

**ASSESSING THE READINESS AND CAPACITY
OF BIOSPHERE REGIONS TO IMPLEMENT
EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION -
A DESKTOP REVIEW**

September 2024

AUTHORS



John Boakye-Danquah
University of Saskatchewan



Crenda O. Marfo
Dalhousie University

How to cite this document:

Boakye-Danquah J., and Marfo O.C. (2024). Assessing the readiness and capacity of Biosphere Regions to implement equity, diversity and inclusion: A desktop review. A report submitted to TRANSECTS.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS



Dr. Maureen G. Reed

Program Director, TRANSECTS

Marlis Merry

Program Manager, TRANSECTS

DISCLAIMER

This report presents findings based on a review of publicly available information on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) from the websites of Biosphere Region organizations at a specific point in time.

Please note that the report may not capture the full extent of EDI initiatives currently undertaken by these organizations, as efforts in this area may evolve or expand over time.

The content reflects the information accessible during the period of review and may not account for subsequent updates or changes to EDI strategies.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report presents the findings of a desktop review sponsored by the TRANSECTS to examine the readiness and capacity of Biosphere Regions (BR) in Canada and other conservation organizations to implement Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI).

The search was limited to broad EDI considerations focusing on terms such as "equity", "diversity", "equality", "inclusion", "accessibility", "justice", "minority", "reconciliation", "SDG 5" and "SDG 10".

The findings revealed that majority of BRs and similar conservation organizations are actively engaging in reconciliation efforts. These efforts include collaborative planning with Indigenous communities, acknowledging traditional territories, providing services for Indigenous youth, and incorporating Indigenous knowledge into conservation and sustainability initiatives. The integration of EDI varies across BRs. Twelve BR websites included at least one reference to an EDI term, while five did not mention EDI terms. Key findings include:

- 66% of BRs referenced "diversity," primarily highlighting the inclusion of cultural knowledge in work practices and ensuring diverse representation among staff, board members, and volunteers.
- 28% of BRs mentioned "inclusion" as a core value, particularly in hiring practices, community engagement, and knowledge creation.
- 22% of BRs integrated "equity" into mission and vision statements, focusing on improving recruitment, promoting economic fairness, and ensuring justice for diverse community needs. Some also emphasized internal equity initiatives for staff.
- Only 6% of BRs referenced "accessibility," acknowledging the need for accommodations for people with disabilities in hiring practices.
- 22% of BRs referenced SDG 5 (gender equality) and SDG 10 (reduced inequalities).

BRs primarily emphasized Indigenous Peoples and Youth in their equity efforts. Other equity groups, including women, people with disabilities, racialized/visible minorities, older adults, and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, received comparatively less focus from BRs.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1

BACKGROUND

Introduction	1
--------------------	---

2

APPROACH

Data sources consulted	3
Data collection	3
Data analysis	5

3

RESULTS

Quantitative Reporting	5
Qualitative Reporting	8

4

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION 14

5

ENGAGEMENT & NEXT STEPS 15



1. BACKGROUND

The United Nations Sustainable Development Goals 5 and 10 emphasize the urgency and importance of reducing all forms of inequality within and between countries. In response, the pursuit of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) has become a key issue in development discourse and practice across governments, and private and non-profit sectors.

Conservation/sustainability organizations such as UNESCO Biosphere Regions (BR) play a significant role not only in the stewardship of natural resources and biodiversity but also in uniting people through education, science, and culture. Hence, BRs are ideally positioned to spearhead EDI initiatives within the realm of conservation and sustainable development. However, to be effective in this role, BRs must ensure that their policies and practices reflect the diverse needs and perspectives of the communities they serve, including historically underrepresented and marginalized groups.

**There is
increasing
attention and
intentional
efforts
towards EDI.**

EDI is a process that ensures the engagement of diverse groups, and equity-denied groups in particular, in the design, planning, and implementation of BR activities and research. By centering EDI in their work, BRs can enhance their impact, and legitimacy, address systemic inequities, and drive more equitable, innovative, and sustainable outcomes



1.BACKGROUND

In Canada, some BRs have initiated the integration of EDI principles and related approaches into their missions and operational frameworks. For example, many Canadian BRs are at the forefront of this journey and are working to amplify equity and inclusivity in their operations through reconciliation and indigenization initiatives. Despite these efforts, there is no unified strategy or framework to guide the operationalization of EDI across all BRs, thus limiting opportunities to share insights and experiences.

The CBRA Executive Director and TRANSECTS initiated a discussion to address these gaps through an action research project that would provide opportunities for academics and BR practitioners to engage in a learning process by evaluating and assessing the status and readiness of EDI implementation.

To initiate this project, TRANSECTS sponsored a desktop review to examine how EDI is embedded in the websites of Biosphere Regions in Canada and other conservation organizations.

The outcome of this learning process is to co-create a framework and tools that advance EDI within the broad field of conservation and sustainable development.



2. APPROACH- DATA COLLECTION

In the summer of 2024, TRANSECTS sponsored an environmental scan (e-scan) to review the websites of Canadian BR websites to understand the status of EDI implementation. The review was also extended to other conservation organizations (OCO) with similar roles as BRs.

List of BRs in Canada

- 1.CBRA*
- 2.Howe Sound
- 3.Clayoquot
- 4.Redberry Lake
- 5.Waterton
- 6.Mount Arrowsmith
- 7.Tsa Tué*
- 8.Beaver Hills
- 9.Long Point
- 10.Georgian Bay
- 11.Frontenac Arch
- 12.Mont Saint- Hilaire
- 13.Charlevoix
- 14.Lac-St-Pierre
- 15.Manicouagan- Uapishka
- 16.Southwest Ova
- 17.Fundy
- 18.Bras d'Or Lake
- 19.Niagara Escarpment
- 20.Riding Mountain

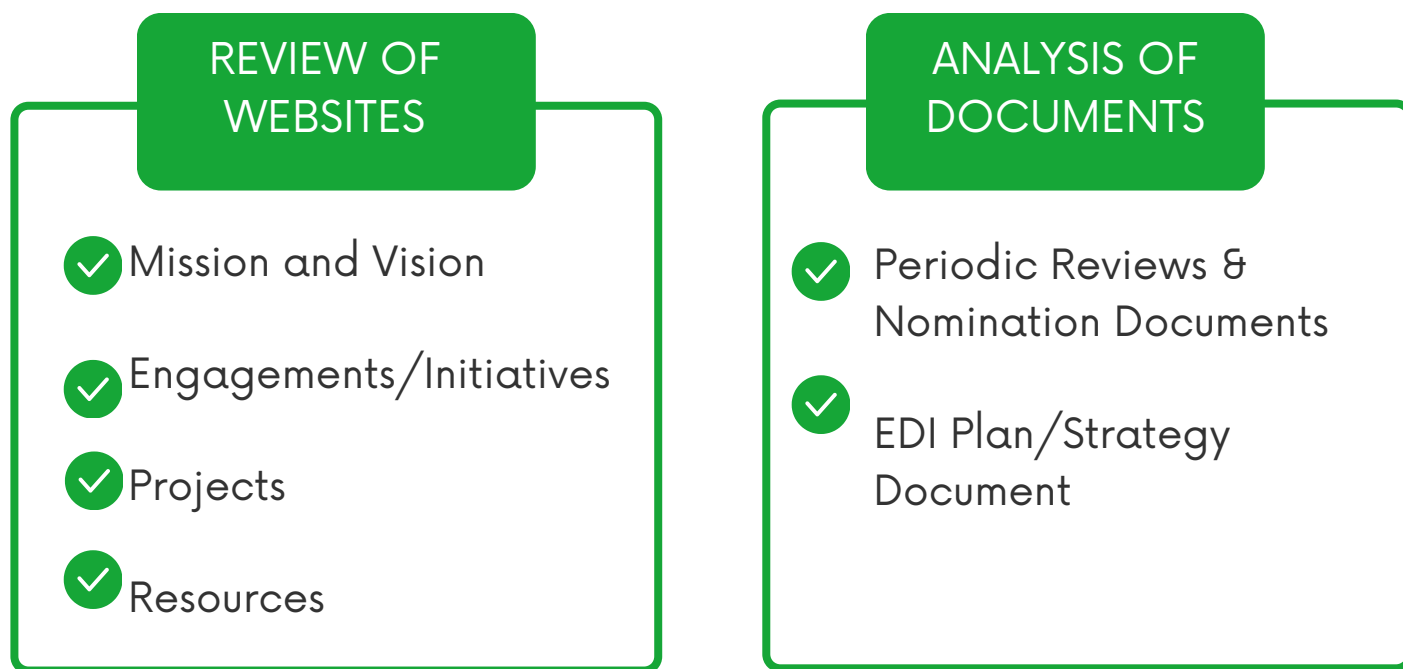
Other conservation organizations (OCO)

- 1.International Union for Conservation of Nature
- 2.United Nations Biodiversity Lab
- 3.Nature United Canada
- 4.Nature Conservancy
- 5.Wildlife Trust
- 6.Canadian Wildlife Federations
- 7.One Ocean Hub
- 8.Global Water Futures
- 9.David Suzuki Foundation
- 10.UNESCO
- 11.World Wildlife Fund
- 12.Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem (IPBES)

*The Canadian Biosphere Regions Association(CBRA) is the national organization representing the network of 19 Canadian biosphere regions.

2. APPROACH- DATA COLLECTION

- Out of the 19 BR organizations, the e-scan was conducted on 17. The websites of the remaining 3 BRs were not accessible at the time of the review.
- In addition to the websites, periodic reviews and other documents/plans developed over the last years by BRs were also reviewed.



For each organizational website, all tabs were searched, particularly the “About” section, which provides information on the mission and vision statements, strategic objectives or plan (if any), and composition of the team and board of directors. Particular emphasis and scrutiny were placed on the “About” section which usually reflects the mission and vision statements, strategic objectives or plan (if any), and composition of the team and board of directors.

Search Teams

The search was limited to broad EDI considerations such as:
“equity”, “diversity”, “diverse”, “equality”, “inclusion”, “accessibility”, “justice”, “minority”,
“reconciliation*”, “SDG 5” and “SDG 10”.

*Although reconciliation is viewed separate from EDI, we included the word “reconciliation” in our search to see understand broadly how much BRs are working toward it

2. APPROACH- DATA ANALYSIS

Data was analyzed through a thematic analysis approach using NVIVO in two ways.

1. Quantitative Reporting - Counts of EDI Terms

First we report on how many BRs and conservation organizations mention key EDI terms on their websites and in other reports using raw counts and percentages.

Second, we provide a detailed analysis of how these organizations frame, apply or implement each EDI term.

2. Qualitative Reporting - How EDI terms are used

3. QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

The tables below show where on the websites of BR EDI terms appear. There are three main sections on the websites of BRs where EDI terms appear. These are: About us:

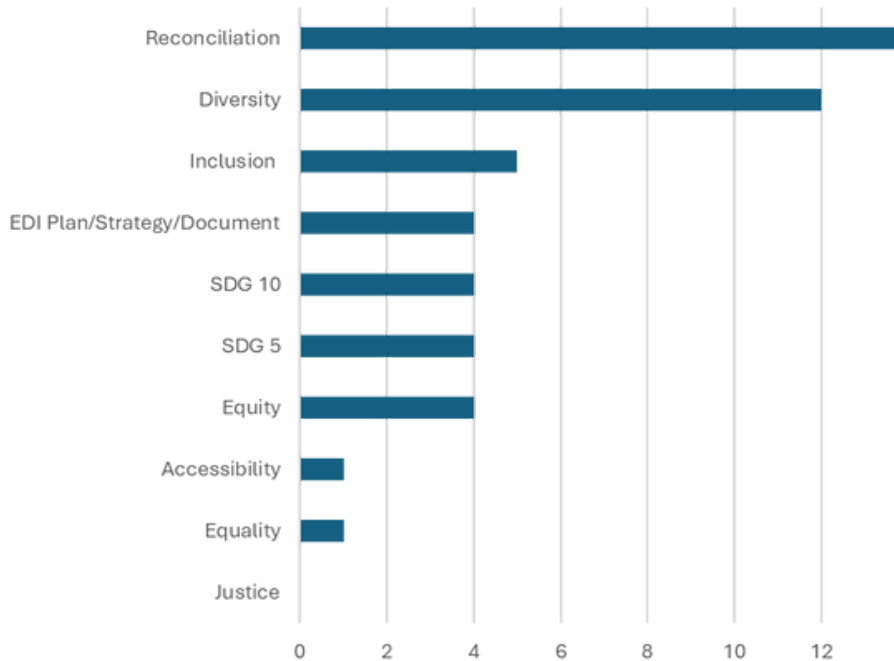
- Mission and vision
- Board, staff and career/employment opportunities/volunteers
- Management plan/decision

Biosphere Region	Section of website where EDI is referenced
CBRA	<i>Mission</i>
Howe Sound	<i>About us; Mission; Vision; management plan</i>
Clayoquot	<i>About us; Vision; Biosphere Centre; Annual Report</i>
Redberry Lake	<i>Vision and Mission</i>
Waterton	<i>About us; Vision; Board of Directors & Staff</i>
Mount Arrowsmith	<i>About us; mandate; resources; Guiding principles</i>
Beaver Hills	<i>About us</i>
Long Point	<i>About us- Values</i>

Biosphere Region	Section of website where EDI is referenced
Frontenac Arch	<i>About us: employment</i>
Mont Saint- Hilaire	<i>About us: who are we?</i>
Lac-St-Pierre	<i>About us</i>
Manicouagan-Uapishka	<i>Our organization: Ambition</i>
Bras d'Or Lake	<i>Become a volunteer</i>
Niagara Escarpment	<i>Governance, Management and Decision making</i>
Georgian Bay	<i>Our Organization, Staff and Board, Careers & Opportunities; Our values</i>

Specific reference to EDI terms from BR websites

Biosphere Regions



Reconciliation is the most common EDI focus across Canada's Biosphere Regions. Rooted in the historical and ongoing relationships between Indigenous communities and broader Canadian society, reconciliation seeks to address and heal the deep-seated wounds caused by colonization.

83% of the BRs made references to **"reconciliation"** on their website.

66% of the BRs made reference to **"diversity"** on their website.

28% of the BRs made reference to **"inclusion"** on their website.

22% of the BRs made reference to **"equity"** on their website.

6% of the BRs made reference to **"accessibility"** on their website.

None of the BRs mentioned the term "JUSTICE"



Specific reference to EDI terms from periodic reviews and other BR documents

Biosphere Region	Document Reviewed
1. Howe Sound	Plan Draft
2. Clayoquot	Periodic Review Self Study
3. Redberry Lake	Periodic Review
4. Mount Arrowsmith	Periodic Review
5. Georgian Bay	Self Study Document
6. Lac-St-Pierre	Periodic Review (French)
7. Manicouagan- Uapishka	Periodic Evaluation Report (French)
8. Southwest Nova	Periodic Review
9. Bras d'Or Lake	Periodic Review
10. Niagara Escarpment	Periodic Review
11. Howe Sound	Nomination report
12. Beaver Hills	Nomination Report

Only four equity denied groups* appeared in the periodic reviews: Youth, Women, Indigenous Peoples, and Visible Minorities.

83% of the documents made reference to **"Youth"**

58% of the documents made reference to **"Women"**

66% of the documents made reference to **"Indigenous Peoples"**

8% of the documents made reference to **"Visible minorities"**

*Equity-denied groups:

Individuals or communities that face barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources due to systemic disadvantage and discrimination, and who actively seek social justice. These groups include, but are not limited to, Indigenous Peoples, racialized groups or visible minorities, women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, people living with disabilities or mobility needs, and those experiencing poverty or low income.

Reference to specific equity denied groups* on BR and other organizations websites

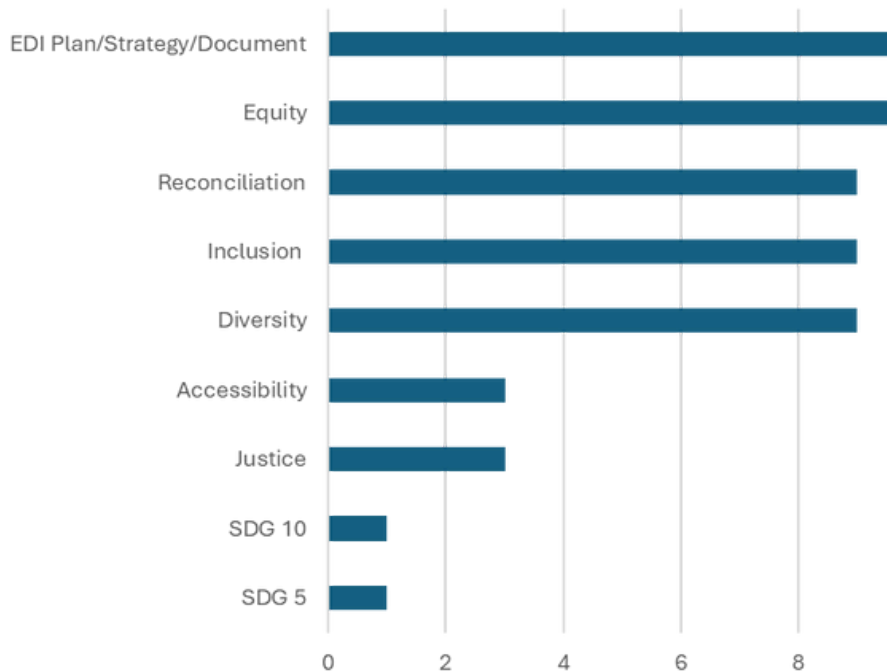
References to specific equity-denied groups on the websites of BRs:

The majority referred of BRs mentioned Indigenous Peoples/Youth (15), followed by women (3), Persons With Disabilities (2), Racialized/visible minorities (2), Older Persons (1), and Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer+ [2SLGBTQ+] (1).



Specific reference to EDI terms by other conservation organizations (OCO's)

Other Conservation Organizations



Equity is the most common EDI term used by the other conservation organizations. In the context of conservation, equity emphasizes the importance of including diverse voices and perspectives in environmental decision-making processes. This helps to address historical injustices and systemic barriers that have often marginalized certain communities.

83% of the OCOs included references to **"equity"** on their website.

75% of the OCOs included references to **"reconciliation"** on their website.

75% of the OCOs included references to **"diversity"** on their website.

75% of the OCOs included references to **"inclusion"** on their website.

25% of the OCOs included references to **"accessibility"** on their website.

25% of the OCOs included references to **"justice"** on their website.



3. QUALITATIVE RESULTS

How is Equity framed and used by BRs?

- Equity appeared in the mission and vision statements, strategic objectives, and management plans and policies of the BRs.
- It was applied in two ways: externally to connect with the local Indigenous communities and internally to promote fairness in employment.
 - External usage of “equity” was targeted at improving recruitment and hiring processes, advancing economic parity, and promoting justice. The concept was leveraged to ensure that various community needs and perspectives were adequately represented and addressed.
 - Internally, equity initiatives were specifically directed towards employees to ensure appropriate compensation and fair treatment.

One BR mentioned becoming an equity-driven organization, indicating an initial step toward fully integrating equity into their operations and decision-making processes.

The table below shows several examples of how equity was applied in both external and internal contexts

Forms of Equity	Examples of usage
Equity as a core value/goal/outcome	“Contribute to building sustainable, healthy, and equitable societies, economies, and thriving human settlements in harmony with the biosphere” (Mount Arrowsmith)
Balancing equity with conservation and development	“We facilitate and support the organizing and planning of complex activities that bring allegiance to balancing development, conservation, and equity in the Átl’ka7tsem/Howe Sound region” (Howe Sound)
Employment equity and legal frameworks	“Canada’s Employment Equity Act and the Federal Contractors Program require employers to take active measures to improve the employment opportunities for specific groups of people in our country” (Howe Sound)
Recognition of current gaps in equity	“Equity, diversity, and inclusion are not at the levels they should be at” (Howe Sound)
Community-led and informed equity initiatives	“Continuing on our commitment to become a more equity driven organization, we began exploring changes to our granting programs: changes directly informed by community members leading the work we support. (Clayoquot Sound)
Anti-racist and inclusive hiring practices	“GBB’s hiring and standard employee policies and procedures recognize and uphold anti-racist, equitable, and inclusive processes. GBB welcomes and encourages applications from people with disabilities” (Georgian Bay)

How is diversity framed and used by BRs?

The term “diversity” appeared prominently in the “About” sections of their websites demonstrating a strong commitment to and accountability for its incorporation.

Diversity was applied both internally and externally, focusing on culture, community, leadership, staff, and decision-making processes.

- Cultural diversity was particularly emphasized, through intentional recognition and inclusion of diverse community priorities, ways of knowing, and participant engagements in organizational initiatives.
- Externally, “diversity” initiatives targeted Indigenous communities, volunteer participation, cultural knowledge, and inclusive hiring and recruitment practices.
- Internally, diversity was reflected in composition of team members including board members and volunteers who contributed unique skills, experiences, perspectives, and cultural backgrounds.

Forms of diversity	Examples of usage
Diversity of staff (experiences, skills & leadership)	“GBB relies on the vision and strategic direction of a committed Board of Directors representing a diversity of experience, skills, and interests that support our role as a UNESCO Biosphere and charitable organization” (Georgian Bay)
Inclusive hiring & representation of marginalized groups	“We welcome applications from women, racialized/visible minorities, Indigenous Peoples, persons with disabilities, and 2SLGBTQ+ persons” (Frontenac Arch)
Diversity in participation across community groups	“We acknowledge and value the diversity of participants and priorities within all community groups and organizations” (Mount Arrowsmith)
Diversity in economic sectors	“Diversity of economic sectors that benefit a variety of people such as real estate, low-impact business development” (Howe Sound)
Diversity as a source of innovation & collaboration	“We see the strengths and possibilities in diversity and encourage the sharing of knowledge, ideas, and responsibility to co-create the innovative solutions required to solve our challenges, together” (Howe Sound)

How is inclusion framed and used by BRs

- The term “inclusion” was referenced as an organizational value or outcome that translates into collaborative partnerships with local communities and marginalized groups.
- “Inclusion” was used to encourage engagement, drive innovation, and create a welcoming environment to cater to diverse audiences.
- The usage of “inclusion” spanned from internal hiring processes to external community partnerships.

Forms of inclusion	Examples of usage
Inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge & diverse perspectives	“Acts with respect and inclusion of Indigenous Knowledge of the lands, waters, air, and ecosystems and western knowledge systems” (CBRA)
Sectoral & demographic representation	“Desire for inclusion and representation from across sectors and demographics” (Howe Sound)
Acknowledgment of insufficient inclusion	“Equity, diversity, and inclusion are not at the levels they should be at” (Howe Sound)
Inclusive engagement & collaborative action	“The Association stewards the Biosphere and supports partners working together for a sustainable region, through shared initiatives and collaborative action. The work the Association does is grounded in its guiding principles of open collaboration, inclusive engagement, and shared knowledge” (Beaver Hills)
Inclusive organizational culture	“The Georgian Bay Biosphere (GBB) is an inclusive and dynamic organization that builds capacity for regional sustainability in eastern Georgian Bay” (Georgian Bay)
Inclusive hiring practices	“GBB’s hiring and standard employee policies and procedures recognize and uphold anti-racist, equitable, and inclusive processes. GBB welcomes and encourages applications from people with disabilities” (Georgian Bay)

4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

- Most BRs and other similar organizations acknowledge the significance of EDI within their visions, missions, and value propositions.
- References to diversity are the most prominent, followed by equity, with inclusion being the least emphasized.
- BR organizations are in the early stages of their EDI journey, focusing primarily on awareness and recognition.
- A few BRs have strategically integrated EDI into specific areas of their operations and mandates, such as grant-making, hiring, and employment practices.



The Five Stages of DEI Maturity (hbr.org)

5. ENGAGEMENT & NEXT STEPS

The results of this review were shared with both practitioners and academics at:

- The 2024 EUROMAB Workshop in Germany
- The 2024 TRANSECTS Program Institute at Vancouver Island University

During these sessions, participants discussed:

- The openness of other BR practitioners outside Canada, especially in Europe, to engage with EDI strategies.
- The need for disaggregated data on who lives and works in BR, including diversity breakdowns (e.g., gender, ethnicity, demographics).
- How to address structural challenges, such as inequality, that are deeply rooted in different cultures.
- Practical case studies for applying EDI in a BR

Given that this work was conducted without the direct input of BR practitioners, the next phase will involve actively engaging with BR practitioners across Canada. The aim is to share the research findings, gather feedback, and explore opportunities—including potential funding avenues—to co-create resources, materials, and approaches that can effectively support BRs in enhancing their knowledge and capacity related to EDI.

For the next steps, we propose the following initiatives:



Directly engage BR organizations to learn about challenges and opportunities



Analyse EDI documents developed by other conservation organizations to determine applicability to BRs



Examine where opportunities exist for BRs to adopt EDI principles to enhance BR mandate and operational activities

CONTACT

For questions, comments, and feedback contact:

John Boakye-Danquah

jmb357@mail.usask.ca