Using Evidence to Advance EDI: Inventory of existing knowledge

This tool provides a starting point for units (faculties, divisions, or departments) to develop an evidence base on which to build their EDI plans and actions. After using this tool, teams will have established what they already know about EDI in their unit and any gaps in knowledge that may exist.

Version: January 2021

Overview

As an early part of their process many units creating EDI action plans look to data collection but encounter challenges in determining exactly what types of evidence are needed. Using evidence to inform your EDI initiatives can be highly effective, if you can ensure that the information you collect is meaningful and actionable. This tool offers a starting point to establish an evidence base for EDI within your unit by accessing the knowledge that your unit already holds. It will help you identify next steps to collect additional meaningful and actionable evidence where necessary.

Making use of data and evidence in EDI work comes with tensions and contradictions. It is important to consider how you are using evidence to avoid undermining your EDI goals. Consider:

- **What constitutes "evidence":** In many mainstream "evidence-based" initiatives, stories and experiences offered by those most deeply connected to EDI issues are often not considered evidence at all. These common misunderstandings of what is considered "valid data" have been shaped by systems of power and oppression (especially colonization), as well as the expectations of various academic disciplines, particularly around concepts like "objectivity." For example, qualitative data is often undervalued in comparison to quantitative data.

- **What constitutes "rigor":** We may feel that we cannot move forward or justify taking action until an issue is established as "real" through rigorous data collection and analysis. There can be a tendency to focus on the limitations of any particular form of evidence rather than using it for insight. In many cases, this approach only further reinforces systems of oppression by narrowly defining what constitutes "proof." This can also lead to a cycle of collecting additional evidence that addresses the limitations identified, only for new limitations to surface in the next round of analysis.

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This tool is designed to help navigate these tensions and contradictions by providing a process that supports accessing multiple ways of knowing and that encourages gaining insights even from "imperfect" evidence.

Types of EDI Information

An EDI evidence base is drawn from a number of sources. This can include:

- **Formal data sources:** institutional data, your unit's internal records, formal research activities such as surveys or focus groups, etc.

- **Informal data sources:** informal feedback from people in your unit, lived experiences and stories of people who interact with your unit, information received through consultation or listening sessions, etc.

These sources of evidence may cover a number of different types of information about EDI, as identified in the EDI Information Framework:

EDI Information Framework

Information Type	Description	Example
Demographics	Information about the composition of your unit	Proportion of staff working in our unit who identify as having a disability
Pathways	Information about the career or degree trajectories of people in your unit or whom your unit serves, including those who leave the unit	Time to tenure for racialized faculty
Perceptions and experiences	Information about the self-reported experiences of people in your unit; their perceptions and impressions of your unit	Sense of belonging among 2SLGBTQIA+ students
Equity-minded[1] behaviors and practices	Information about the extent to which people in your unit have adopted behaviors and practices or that advance EDI	Proportion of faculty incorporating inclusive pedagogies
Processes and systems that promote EDI	Information about the extent to which your unit has applied an EDI lens to its processes and procedures	Presence of a procedure to ensure that events your unit hosts are inclusive

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Inventory of existing knowledge: What you already know

EDI knowledge and evidence comes from many sources and in many forms. Using the table below, compile the existing knowledge and assumptions about EDI in your unit. What do you already know, or think you know? Capturing this information can help you:

- Build a shared understanding of the EDI landscape in your unit, or clarify where there are disagreements in team members' perceptions of EDI in the unit.

- Assess if you already have enough information to take action – perhaps you don't need to gather more evidence.

- Identify assumptions that you may want to test, or gaps in knowledge that you want to fill, through data collection.

Inventory Exercise

Start by considering the many sources of information your committee already has access to. Remember that this can include both formal and informal sources of information. Use the chart below to capture your existing knowledge about EDI in your unit.

Tips:

- Keep in mind that the more diverse your committee is, the more sources of informal information you are likely to have access to.

- You can limit the scope of this inventory if you already have a sense of where you want to focus your initiatives (e.g. you could limit the scope to focus on students only if you plan to focus your initiatives on student EDI issues).

- If you have access to a formal data source (such as survey results or employment equity data), you can also use the chart by starting with the "evidence source" column and then extrapolating the "information points" from there.

- Be aware of how stereotypes may be surfaced by this exercise—documenting "how you know" something can be useful to mitigate this.

- In your initial brainstorming session, try not to spend too long thinking about any one row in the chart. You do not need to identify all the causes of the information points you are listing.

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Information point What you think you need to know	Evidence source How you know	Information Type	Equity Group (if available)
Black faculty members don't tend to stay in our department for more than a few years – they often leave for other institutions	*Several Black faculty members have left the department in recent years*	*Pathways*	*Black faculty members*
Some racialized students have felt alienated by our programming	*A social media campaign by racialized alumni*	*Perceptions and experiences*	*Racialized students*
Staff with disabilities are under-represented in our area	*Employment Systems Review*	*Demographics*	*Staff with disabilities*
About half of our staff now include their pronouns in their signature	*Consensus of what our committee has noticed*	*Equity-minded behaviors and practices*	*NA (all staff)*
We have a robust process for ensuring official communications from our office are reviewed with an EDI lens, but are less clear on how this would apply to informal communications.	*Reflection from our unit's engagement with the Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool (ISAT)*	*Processes and systems that promote EDI*	*NA (all equity groups)*

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Inventory of existing knowledge: What you already know

Looking at all the pieces of evidence you have gathered above, use the following reflection questions to guide a discussion about your evidence base thus far. You can document the insights gained through this reflection in the "Insights Table" below.

1. As individuals, who are we and what lenses do we bring to understanding this evidence? What assumptions do we bring about the validity of different forms of evidence, either from our academic disciplinary background or from other perspectives?

2. How well-rounded is our inventory of existing knowledge?

   • Whose perspectives were included in the generation of this inventory?

   • Whose perspectives were missing?

   • Which types of information are missing from this inventory, and for which groups?

3. What patterns or themes do we observe from this inventory? What stands out?

4. Among our committee, and/or in our unit overall, is there broad agreement about what we have documented here, or would some people disagree with this evidence base?

5. What new questions have arisen as a result of this exercise? What more do we need to know to move forward?

Insight Table What insights and learnings did you gain from this process that you will use to inform your EDI efforts going forward?	
Insight	**How you will use the insight**
Racialized students as well as faculty have felt unsupported by our department	*Focus some of our EDI efforts specifically on issues of race*
Our evidence base is missing information about the experiences of 2SLGBTQIA+ students in our unit	*Develop a plan for how we will learn more about these experiences, in consultation with key members of the community. Explore whether the kinds of information we would be interested in would be best accessed through a survey, a focus group, or some other method.*

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Next Steps

The act of inventorying existing knowledge is only one step towards advancing EDI. The "next steps" you have identified in your insights table will help identify concrete actions that you can take.

If you are looking to generate further action ideas, you may find the *Inclusion Self-Assessment Tool* or *Setting Your Inclusion Action Agenda* useful. If you have already generated a large number of action ideas through this process, you might find *Prioritizing Your Inclusive Actions* helpful to identify which actions you will tackle first.

If this process has identified gaps in your evidence base that are important to your goals, you may want to undertake additional data collection. EIO will be publishing additional tools and resources to support this in the near future.

Endnotes

[1] Center for Urban Education. (2020). Laying the Groundwork: Concept and activities for racial equity work. Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California.

Additional Resources

Burgoyne, John. (2019, September 23). "Tale of the Converted: How complex social problems have made me question the use of data in driving impact." LSE Impact Blog. London School of Economics. Accessed at: *https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2019/09/23/tale-of-the-converted-how-complex-social-problems-have-made-me-question-the-use-of-data-in-driving-impact/*

British Columbia's Office of the Human Rights Commissioner. (2020). Disaggregated demographic data collection in British Columbia: The grandmother perspective. Accessed at: *http://bchumanrights.ca/publications/datacollection/*

Center for Urban Education. (2020). Laying the Groundwork: Concepts and activities for racial equity work. Rossier School of Education, University of Southern California. Accessed at: *https://www.cue-tools.usc.edu/phase-one-laying-the-groundwork*

Equality Challenge Unit (2014). Measuring Progress on Equality: Qualitative evidence. Accessed at: *https://www.ecu.ac.uk/wp-content/uploads/external/measuring-progress-on-equality-qualitative-evidence.pdf*

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