

Fonds de recherche du Québec

Nature et Technologies Santé Société et Culture



Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

2021-2026

Table of Contents

Background..... 3

The FRQ’s EDI Vision..... 5

The FRQ’s EDI Principles..... 6

Four main objectives 7

Implementation Plan..... 12

Notes and references 13

Background

The mandate of the Fonds de recherche du Québec (FRQ) is to promote and provide financial support for research, the dissemination and mobilization of scientific knowledge, and the training of researchers. Being public agencies, the research they fund should be relevant to the whole of society, taking into account the diversity of interests, concerns and needs of the population. In addition, all individuals should have access to the same opportunities to be recognized for their skills and ability to contribute to research. Every member of the research community should have the opportunity to develop and reach their full potential.

In their 2018-2022 strategic plans, the Fonds therefore committed to strengthening equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in research. In addition to representing a moral obligation, the FRQ's commitment to EDI aims to increase the quality, relevance, creativity and benefits of the research they fund, notably by promoting a diversity of perspectives and approaches. This commitment is part of a broader awareness, not only within the research community, but in society as a whole. The FRQ's reflections and actions on EDI are therefore not conducted in a vacuum, but in consultation and collaboration with other players in the research ecosystem at the provincial, federal and international levels, including other granting agencies, government departments and agencies, and institutions of higher education and research.

The development of an EDI strategy follows strategic discussions among each of the three Fonds' board of directors (Board) in October 2020, which resulted in the creation of an EDI committee that included members from each Board. The work of this committee and a series of internal meetings led to consensus and the identification of priority courses of action. A consultation was then held with partner organizations and individuals with expertise in EDI, acquired through research or experiential knowledge. This strategy is thus the result of the work of a large number of people, to whom the FRQ extend their warmest thanks.

What do we mean by equity, diversity and inclusion?

While the acronym EDI is widely used, it is important to distinguish between its three components, each of which is essential for research to reach its full potential. For the FRQ:

- **Equity** refers to fair treatment, including the elimination of systemic barriers that disadvantage particular groups. Fair treatment is not necessarily the same for everyone, but takes into account different personal realities, both present and historical, to provide all individuals with access to the same opportunities for the promotion and support of research.
- **Diversity** refers to the presence, within the research ecosystem and society, of people from different groups, which promotes the expression of diverse perspectives, approaches and experiences, including those of underrepresented groups. The FRQ value the contribution of this diversity to research.
- **Inclusion** refers to the establishment of practices that allow all members of the research community to be and to feel valued, supported and respected, paying particular attention to underrepresented groups within the research community and in research itself.

EDI within the research community

Among university and college faculty in Canada, across all sectors, there is an underrepresentation of Indigenous peoples and members of certain groups identified as visible minorities, with women from visible minorities being particularly underrepresented. Women are also less present in the higher ranks.ⁱ Indeed, in June 2021, they were a minority among directors of Fonds de recherche du Québec – Santé (FRQS) centres and institutes (5 out of 22), Fonds de recherche du Québec – Nature et technologies (FRQNT) strategic clusters (5 out of 36) and Fonds de recherche du Québec – Société et culture (FRQSC) strategic clusters (10 out of 30). Furthermore, women, Indigenous people and visible minorities are poorly represented among the leadership of Canada’s research universities.ⁱⁱ

Statistics Canada’s 2019 Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchersⁱⁱⁱ revealed similar results. Among survey respondents from Québec, those who identify as a visible minority are underrepresented among college faculty compared to the general population. They are also underrepresented among university faculty compared to their representation among people with a PhD. In addition, there is an underrepresentation of people identifying as Indigenous or reporting a disability among college and university faculty compared to the general population.^{iv}

Some challenges are more prevalent in certain sectors. The underrepresentation of women in science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) is well known, but a similar situation can be observed in some social science and humanities (SSH) fields, such as economics and philosophy.^v On the other hand, Canada’s universities have a lower proportion of visible minorities among faculty in SSH than in engineering.^{vi} Finally, a higher proportion of male sexual minority STEM students abandon their studies than their heterosexual counterparts.^{vii}

The representation data collected among faculty are reflected in the funding applications submitted to the federal granting agencies.^{viii} The differences observed between men and women are also present in FRQ competitions, where women are underrepresented in applications submitted to the FRQNT, which covers STEM fields. Moreover, in the programs of all three Fonds, the proportion of women among applicants decreases between the master’s and postdoctoral levels. This trend continues with grant and salary support programs at the FRQS and FRQNT, but not at the FRQSC, where women remain the majority in grant programs.^{ix} In order to study the representation of other disadvantaged groups in FRQ programs, a self-identification questionnaire was introduced in April 2021.

The underrepresentation of certain groups is not the only issue pointing to the need to strengthen EDI in the research community. Among all Canadian respondents of the Survey of Postsecondary Faculty and Researchers, those who identified as a visible minority, Indigenous or having a disability were more likely to report having experienced unfair treatment or discrimination during the year prior to the survey. Moreover, men were less likely to report unfair treatment or discrimination than women and gender minorities.^x

Because the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified several inequalities,^{xi} including some in the research community,^{xii} strengthening EDI will be even more important in the years ahead.

EDI in research projects

In addition to targeting the people who conduct research, EDI actions must also apply to the research itself, that is, the way in which research is planned, conducted and disseminated. Research should take into account the diversity of realities, concerns and needs that exist within society as a whole. In addition to allowing for more equitable outcomes, this leads to better research with greater impacts.

It has been shown that a diverse research community tends to foster greater consideration of diversity in research, with scientific papers written by women, for example, being more likely to report sex-specific results.^{xiii} However, the research community as a whole should consider diversity in their projects when appropriate.

Indeed, failure to consider diversity in research methodology or the interpretation of results may limit the quality or scope of the research. For example, in the field of artificial intelligence, the use of low diversity datasets in training algorithms has led to the development of facial analysis tools that perform poorly on faces with darker skin or of different ages.^{xiv}

In some cases, the consequences can be serious. Examples include the underdiagnosis of heart disease in women and gender minorities due to clinical models developed based on symptoms observed in men,^{xv} and the more severe injuries sustained by women and elderly or obese individuals in car accidents due to crash test dummies developed based on the average male body.^{xvi}

The FRQ therefore expect human diversity to be considered, whenever relevant, in the research projects that they fund.^{xvii} Applicants are required, for instance, to indicate in their application whether their project takes into account sex or gender, and to provide justification if this is not the case.

EDI and inclusive excellence

Despite some progress in EDI, the way research excellence is defined and evaluated remains a source of inequity and exclusion, which can prevent the research community from recognizing the talent and potential of certain groups. Through their EDI strategy, the FRQ wish to strengthen Québec research by promoting inclusive excellence, a concept that is based on the three principles of EDI. According to the Congress Advisory Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization:

“The individual and institutional pursuit of excellence, quality, or merit is best achieved in equitable, diverse, inclusive, and decolonial conditions in which everyone can thrive. (...) how [excellence] is socially and institutionally defined, operationalized, and recognized historically has often been exclusionary of, among other things, diverse ways of knowing, knowledges, methodologies, and perspectives. (...) Inclusive excellence affirms how diversity can deepen learning, enhance critical thinking and problem solving, and fuel creativity and innovation (...).”^{xviii}

The FRQ therefore seek to enhance the quality of the research funded, by ensuring that the way in which research excellence is evaluated allows for the recognition of excellence in all its diversity.

The FRQ’s EDI Vision

Québec’s research ecosystem as a leader in EDI

The FRQ aspire to achieve a research ecosystem whose strength lies in:

- Greater equity and inclusive practices that allow all individuals to be recognized for their skills and ability to contribute to research excellence.
- A diversity of people, perspectives, methodologies and research questions that reflect the concerns and needs of society as a whole.
- Diverse and inclusive models of excellence that make Québec research stand out for its quality, relevance, creativity and impact.

The FRQ's EDI Principles

Equity, diversity and inclusion are **essential to achieving scientific excellence and the full potential of the research ecosystem**. They enrich the research community and the quality, relevance and impacts of the research it produces. As granting agencies, **the Fonds de recherche du Québec have the duty and the power to exercise leadership** with respect to EDI in research, which includes research training.

Four key principles guide the FRQ's approach to EDI:

A concerted approach within the research ecosystem is paramount.

It is important to ensure coherence between the actions of the FRQ, the federal granting agencies and the higher education institutions with respect to EDI. In addition, these actions must take into account the work of researchers and students who have long advocated for EDI within the research community. Collaboration and dialogue will be essential to achieve the systemic changes that a real culture shift entails.

Diversity is broad and intersectional.

The FRQ have a broad vision of diversity, which includes, but is not limited to, gender, disability, Indigenous identity, being part of a racialized group¹, ethnic origin, sexual orientation, religion, age, language, parenthood, immigration, geographic location, and socioeconomic status.

Additionally, EDI actions must be part of an intersectional approach, i.e., one that takes into account interactions between the multiple forms of discrimination (linked to racism, to sexism, or to homophobia, for instance) or privilege that an individual may experience.^{xix}

EDI objectives go far beyond diversity statistics.

In order to avoid the tokenism of underrepresented groups, efforts must be directed not only at diversity, but also at equitable and inclusive practices that allow every individual to participate in research, develop his or her full potential, and feel respected and valued.

The principles of EDI must be integrated in all aspects of research.

Every step of the research process must be equitable and inclusive and take diversity into account. For the FRQ, this applies to program development and management, and to the evaluation of funding applications. For the community, this applies to the creation of research teams; the training and mentoring of the next generation of researchers; the formulation of research questions and choice of methodological approach, where relevant; the planning and execution of projects, including fieldwork; and the interpretation and dissemination of results to a relevant target audience.

¹ The Commission des droits de la personne et des droits de la jeunesse favours the terms “racialized person” and “racialized group” in order to « emphasize that, far from corresponding to an objective reality, the concept of “race” refers to an essentializing and stigmatizing category applied by the majority group to minorities that were formerly colonized or subject to slavery. » [Racial profiling and systemic discrimination of racialized youth](#) (2011), note 4, p. 9.

Four main objectives

1. Make EDI core values within the organizational culture of the FRQ
2. Ensure equitable access to FRQ funding
3. Support and accelerate the research community's move toward inclusive excellence
4. Accelerate the advancement and sharing of knowledge on EDI

Objective 1. Make EDI core values within the organizational culture of the FRQ

In carrying out their mandate, the FRQ rely on a competent and dedicated staff whose diversity represents an asset. For that reason, they pay special attention to EDI in their organizational practices, particularly in the area of human resources. However, the FRQ do not have data on their employees' sense of inclusion, or on staff who are members of groups targeted by the Québec *Act respecting equal access to employment*, except for women. The FRQ therefore commit to collecting these data from their staff members in order to make informed decisions concerning the implementation of measures to promote EDI in their workplace.

The FRQ want to ensure that senior management's commitment to EDI is reflected in a coherent manner in all FRQ actions. EDI training is offered to staff on a regular basis. However, this training could be improved in order to facilitate the integration of EDI in all spheres of activity of the FRQ.

In addition to their staff, the FRQ are assisted in their work by three boards of directors (Boards) – one per Fonds. In 2019, knowledge of EDI issues was added to the skill set sought on each of the Boards. An EDI committee was also created in 2020, bringing together members from the three Boards to discuss the major orientations and actions of the FRQ in this area. Furthermore, although Board members are appointed by the government, the FRQ will increase their efforts to promote diverse candidates for the positions that become vacant in the coming years.

Course of action 1. Provide FRQ staff with an equitable, diverse and inclusive workplace

- Gather data on the representation of groups targeted by the Québec *Act respecting equal access to employment* among FRQ staff and introduce equal access to employment measures, including targets and means to achieve them.
- Gather data on staff members' sense of inclusion and introduce measures for improvement as needed.
- Ensure that hiring, nomination and promotion processes are equitable and inclusive and that they encourage diversity among staff. Update them as needed.
- Update the EDI knowledge of FRQ's senior management, management and human resources staff.

Course of action 2. Integrate EDI in all spheres of activity of the FRQ

- Promote greater diversity among members of the boards of directors.
- Increase FRQ budgets for EDI.
- Add EDI training to the mandatory training for new staff members and increase the availability of in-service training for all staff.
- Adopt the policies, regulations and guidelines necessary for the integration of EDI in FRQ procedures.
- Pursue efforts to ensure that FRQ communications and events are as inclusive as possible and reflect the diversity of the Québec population.

Targets of Objective 1

- By 2026, have representation of groups targeted in the Act respecting equal access to employment among FRQ staff be proportional to their demographic weight in Québec
- Offer EDI training to 100% of new staff members during their first year with the FRQ.

Objective 2. Ensure equitable access to FRQ funding

Ensuring equitable access to FRQ funding requires equitable eligibility rules and evaluation processes. As part of their 2018-2022 strategic plans, the FRQ have put in place measures to strengthen this equity, including educating committees about unconscious biases that may affect peer review. In addition, in April 2021, the FRQ put in place a new self-identification questionnaire that allows applicants to indicate whether they identify as part of each of the groups targeted by the Québec *Act respecting equal access to employment*.

This questionnaire will enable the FRQ to know the proportion of marginalized or underrepresented groups — other than women, for whom data are already available — among eligible, recommended and funded applications for each of their programs. Success rates for members of these groups will be compared to those of other applicants. In keeping with the *Politique sur la collecte de données sociodémographiques visant à planifier des mesures en matière d'équité, de diversité et d'inclusion*, adopted by the three Boards, these data will be used by the FRQ to detect potentially inequitable situations, plan measures for improvement, and monitor their impact.

In accordance with the *Act*, the FRQ must limit their self-identification questionnaire to certain specific groups. However, these are not the only groups experiencing barriers that need to be targeted by this strategy. Furthermore, representation data and success rates are not sufficient for understanding the complexity of the barriers faced by different groups. Thus, the FRQ will also rely on research data and consultation with various marginalized or underrepresented groups in planning EDI measures.

Equitable access to funding from granting agencies like the FRQ depends not only on the agencies' rules and procedures, but also on access to graduate studies and to the research community. In addition to barriers that may limit opportunities for some groups, other factors such as stereotypes and a lack of role models may also reduce their interest in science and research.^{xx} The FRQ therefore intend to support initiatives to increase participation of marginalized or underrepresented groups in science and research, which may be implemented directly by the FRQ, by members of the research community, or by external organizations.

Course of action 3. Collect data to better understand the barriers faced by different groups in accessing FRQ funding

- Analyze the data collected through the self-identification questionnaire on an annual basis and publish statistics on the proportion of individuals from target groups among funding applicants and their success rates in FRQ competitions.
- Consult with representatives of marginalized or underrepresented groups in research to better understand the barriers they face, identify possible solutions, and assess the impacts of the measures put in place.
- Develop monitoring indicators and a common process for the three Fonds to document the issues raised by applicants and funding recipients.

Course of action 4. Correct inequities and contribute to reducing barriers identified in the access to FRQ funding

- Review FRQ policies and programs and put in place measures for improvement based on research, consultation, collected data, and monitoring of best practices in EDI.
- Assess the impacts of EDI measures put in place by the FRQ and adjust them as needed.
- Support initiatives to increase the participation of underrepresented groups in science and research, particularly among young people.

Targets of Objective 2

- Publish an annual portrait of diversity among applicants, award recipients and evaluation committee members.
- Support at least three initiatives per year aimed at increasing the representation of marginalized or underrepresented groups in science and research.

Objective 3. Support and accelerate the research community's move toward inclusive excellence

The Québec research community is firmly committed to greater equity, diversity and inclusive practices. Universities have dedicated resources to EDI and have developed action plans and policies on EDI. The college research community has also embraced EDI and some colleges have implemented inspiring initiatives. In addition to ensuring equal access to funding under their own programs, the FRQ want to ensure that they support and propel this movement, in order to bring about a real cultural shift.

The FRQ wish to mobilize the entire research community in this process. For a long time, EDI work has been largely left to members of underrepresented or marginalized groups, whereas the defence of these principles should be of concern to everyone. In particular, research groups (such as centres and institutes, networks and strategic clusters) can play an important role, given their influence in training the next generation of researchers and advancing research careers.

Since EDI efforts enrich the research community and the impacts of research, they should be recognized when assessing research contributions. Evaluation criteria related to EDI are already present in FRQNT grant programs, which ask applicants to describe how they promote EDI in their research environment. The FRQ intend to pursue this approach, gradually incorporating criteria on EDI efforts into other programs of the three Funds.

In addition to efforts to promote EDI within the research community, the FRQ wish to encourage the consideration of EDI in research design in order to enhance the quality and impacts of the research they fund. In 2018, the Fonds added a section to most of their application forms where applicants must indicate whether their project considers sex or gender, and explain how this is done or provide justification if it is not the case. The FRQ recognize that the consideration of EDI in research design is not applicable to all projects, but would like to see applicants reflect on this question for each project submitted.

However, the integration of EDI in research design must go beyond sex and gender, and beyond the selection of analyses and participants. EDI principles must also guide the way in which research is conducted and results are shared, particularly when vulnerable or marginalized populations are involved. The FRQ will add requirements to this effect.

A diverse and inclusive vision of excellence is necessary to achieve the full potential of the research ecosystem. Evaluation criteria for the scholarship programs of the three Fonds have recently been revised in this sense. Moreover, in 2020, the FRQ signed the San Francisco Declaration on Research Assessment, committing to improving the methods used to evaluate research. Several institutions have also made commitments in this regard. To ensure coherence in this process, collaboration between higher education institutions and the FRQ will be essential.

Course of action 5. Mobilize the research community to include EDI in all facets of research

- Require the research groups funded by the three Fonds to implement actions to promote EDI in the research community, particularly in the training of the next generation.
- In the programs of the three Fonds, include requirements for consideration of EDI in research designs when it is relevant, particularly in the methodology and dissemination of results.
- Include a question on the actions taken to promote EDI in the reporting tools for award holders.

Course of action 6. Work with university and college communities to promote an inclusive and diverse vision of research excellence

- Consult with the research community and higher education institutions and collaborate with them to agree on a common roadmap to better integrate inclusive excellence in the culture of research, research training and evaluation.
- Continue to review the evaluation criteria, indicators and grids of FRQ programs to better reflect an inclusive and diverse vision of research excellence.
- Train and mobilize the community, FRQ staff, evaluation committee members and scientific advisors to ensure good uptake of the changes in evaluation culture.

Course of action 7. Support the research community in the cultural shift toward greater consideration of EDI

- Improve the information available on the FRQ website and hold or support EDI awareness and training activities for the research community.
- Recognize and value those committed to EDI within the research community, to help promote cultural change.
- Use the influence of the FRQ to promote EDI values to partner and collaborator organizations.

Targets of Objective 3

- Have 100% of FRQ-funded research groups reporting concrete actions to promote EDI by 2026.
- Produce a roadmap on inclusive excellence by 2023.
- Hold or support at least one awareness or training activity per year.

Objective 4. Accelerate the advancement and sharing of knowledge on EDI

Several areas of research have paved the way for EDI as a field of application, such as feminist, Indigenous, cultural diversity and disability studies. Granting agencies and institutions must be able to draw on research results, among other things, when planning their EDI actions. The FRQ therefore intend to support research that contributes to the advancement of knowledge about EDI.

In addition, the FRQ intend to create and support an advisory committee that will bring together a variety of EDI expertise, which may be related to research or experiential knowledge. The mandate of this committee will be to provide input on various issues and to advise the FRQ in the implementation of their EDI strategy.

Collaboration and exchange between the research and user communities are essential to the advancement of knowledge and practices in EDI. The FRQ want their actions not only to be informed by research, but also to contribute to knowledge about EDI practices. As such, the measures put in place by the FRQ will be monitored to assess their efficacy and adjust them as needed. The FRQ hope that researchers will assist them with this process.

Finally, the FRQ will continue to rely heavily on the sharing of best practices and cooperation with higher education and research institutions and other granting agencies, in particular to ensure coherence in the requests made to the research community.

Course of action 8. Better recognize and support EDI expertise

- Support research aimed at the development and transfer of EDI knowledge.
- Form an advisory committee whose mandate will be to advise the FRQ on the implementation of their EDI strategy.

Course of action 9. Use the FRQ's EDI process to build knowledge on EDI practices

- Assess the benefits of the strategy on the short, medium and long terms and disseminate the findings.
- Collaborate with researchers interested in studying the implementation and impacts of the FRQ's EDI strategy.
- Maintain regular exchanges with partner and collaborator organizations, including the federal granting agencies, to ensure the sharing of best practices and coherence in approaches.

Targets of Objective 4

- Launch at least one competition to support EDI research by July 2023.
- Publish an annual strategy report.

Implementation Plan

This plan will evolve, as the FRQ intend to remain agile and flexible in implementing their EDI Strategy.

	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026
Objective 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make EDI training mandatory for all new staff members • Propose increases to EDI budgets 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect data from FRQ staff • Create guidelines for inclusive communications and events 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduce equal access to employment measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue equal access to employment measures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Among FRQ staff, achieve proportional representation of groups targeted by the Act
Objective 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Produce the 1st annual portrait from the self-identification questionnaire data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with underrepresented groups • Introduce measures to reduce inequities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor the measures put in place • Continue or review the measures to reduce inequities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult with underrepresented groups • Continue or review the measures to reduce inequities 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Report on the measures to reduce inequities
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Every year, support initiatives to increase representation of marginalized and underrepresented groups in science and research 				
Objective 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include EDI requirements for FRQNT research groups • Improve information on EDI disseminated to the community • Mobilize those committed to EDI in the research community 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include EDI requirements for FRQS research groups • Work on inclusive excellence in collaboration with the research community and institutions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Include EDI requirements for FRQSC research groups • Produce a roadmap for inclusive excellence • Review the evaluation criteria and grids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to review the evaluation criteria and grids 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have concrete actions for EDI in place in 100% of research groups • Report on the measures to promote inclusive excellence
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offer at least one EDI awareness or training activity per year for the research community 				
Objective 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Form an advisory committee on EDI 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop a competition to support EDI research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Launch a competition to support EDI research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support EDI research 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support EDI research
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have regular exchanges with partner and collaborating organizations • Publish an annual strategy report 				

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- xvii Fonds de recherche du Québec [*Common General Rules*](#), Sec. 5.5.
- xviii Smith, Malinda S. et al. (2021). [*Igniting change: Final Report and Recommendations by the Congress Advisory Committee on Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Decolonization*](#), p. 9.
- xix The concept of intersectionality comes from 1970s Black feminist movements. The term itself was coined by Kimberlé Crenshaw, Professor of Law at the University of California in Los Angeles and at Columbia University. See Crenshaw, K. (1989). [*Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics*](#). *University of Chicago Legal Forum*, 1989, Iss. 1, art. 8.
- xx See for example Bian, L. et al. (2017). Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children's interests. *Science*, 355(6323), 389-391.

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