DEI Self-Audit Tool for SMEs – Quick Start Guide

A simple, practical way to measure and improve your organization's inclusion, diversity, equity accessibility, access, and belonging practices.

Purpose:
This tool helps your organization take an honest look at how inclusive and equitable your workplace really is. It is designed specifically for small and medium-sized enterprises, so it's short, simple, and action-focused. It can be completed in accessible formats (digital, print, large print, braille or read-aloud) so all staff can participate.

Why It Works:
- **Practical:** 6-7 questions per section make it manageable, even for small teams.
- **Action-Focused:** Identifies real opportunities for improvement instead of staying theoretical.
- **Employee-Driven:** Involves voices from across your organization to capture a true picture.
- **Measurable:** Uses a clear scoring scale so you can track progress over time.
- **Confidential:** Responses stay within your organization unless you choose to share them.

Structure:
The audit has **13 sections**, grouped into **three pillars:**
1. **Compliance & Policy** – Meeting legal requirements and having clear, fair systems.
2. **Inclusion & Culture** – Building a workplace where everyone feels valued and respected.
3. **Leadership & Accountability** – Leaders driving DEI progress with transparency and responsibility.

Scoring System:
For each question, select the number that best reflects your current workplace:
- 5 – Fully embedded in practice / Always true here
- 4 – Strong, only small gaps / Often true here
- 3 – Progress underway, still gaps / Sometimes true here
- 2 – Some action taken, not consistent / Rarely true here
- 1 – Needs major improvement / Never true here

How to Complete the Audit:
1. **Who should participate:** Include staff from different roles, departments, and backgrounds to get a balanced perspective.
2. **Time commitment:** Each section should take 5-15 minutes to complete.
3. **Honesty matters:** Be honest and open. The more accurate your answers, the more useful your results will be.
4. **Discussion:** Consider reviewing results as a team to spark conversation and ideas.

Your Results:
- Calculate your average score for each section and each pillar.
- Review where your strengths are and where to focus next:
  - 0–40% - Just starting out
  - 41–70% - Building consistency
  - 71–100% - Established and ready to deepen

- Use your scores to guide next steps in the **Inclusive Hiring Guide** and the **Self-Directed DEI Training Tool**. For example, if your recruitment section scores lowest, start there by reviewing job postings, interview processes, and outreach.

Tip for SMEs:
You do not need big budgets or large human resources teams to make progress. Small, consistent changes in recruitment, culture, and leadership can have a big impact. This audit helps you find where to start, measure your progress, and connect actions across the full DEI Employer Toolkit.

Instructions – Quick & Doable for SMEs
- This tool has 13 short sections, grouped into 3 pillars: Compliance & Policy, Inclusion & Culture, and Leadership & Accountability.
- Each section starts with a Reflection Prompt, then asks 2–3 short questions you can answer quickly.
- You do not need to complete the whole tool at once. Tip: If you are short on time, do one pillar per month and review results every quarter.
- Scoring:
  - 5 – Always true here
  - 4 – Often true here
  - 3 – Sometimes true here
  - 2 – Rarely true here
  - 1 – Never true here
- The goal is progress, not perfection. Use your results to guide action steps in the Inclusive Hiring Guide and Self-Directed DEI Training Tool.

Why This Matters for Your Business
- Organizations with strong inclusion practices see up to 22% lower turnover and higher team performance (Deloitte, 2023).
- Small changes, like posting job ads in English & French and another community language, can expand your talent pool and increase applicant quality.

Pillar 1: Compliance & Policy – Meeting legal requirements and having clear, fair systems

Section A: Legal Compliance & Fair Policies

Glossary
- **Accommodation:** Adjustments or supports that help someone do their job, such as modified duties, flexible schedules, or assistive technology.
- **Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA):** Ontario law that sets accessibility standards for workplaces and services.

Reflection Prompt
Think about whether your workplace is meeting employment laws, human rights requirements, and accessibility standards and whether these expectations are clearly explained to everyone.

Questions
1. Do our policies meet all current Ontario employment, human rights, and accessibility laws?
2. Do all employees know their workplace rights and responsibilities?

3. Are our policies written in plain language and shared with all staff?
4. Do new employees get and go over all work rules, role expectations and polices when they start?
5. Are policies kept up to date and shared in ways that all staff can easily understand (simple words, translations, read out loud?
6. Do we regularly review and update polices to reflect changes in employment legislation (law) or organizational practices?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"I never saw the company policies until I had an issue. By then, it was too late to know my rights." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 1: DEI Foundations' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Section B: Inclusive Recruitment Practices

Glossary
- **BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.
- **Inclusive hiring:** Recruitment and selection processes that give fair opportunities to people from all backgrounds and abilities.

Reflection Prompt
Think about how your recruitment process reaches diverse candidates and removes barriers for applicants.

Questions
1. Do we post jobs in places that reach candidates from underrepresented communities (e.g., newcomer agencies, Indigenous employment centres, 2SLGBTQIA+ organizations)?
2. Do job postings state that we welcome applications from people of all backgrounds and abilities?
3. Are application instructions clear, written in plain language, and easy to follow, and do we offer help if needed?
4. Do job ads clearly say that applicants can ask for accommodations (like support or changes) during hiring?
5. Do we check our hiring steps for barriers (like technology needs, hard words, or difficult interview times)?
6. Do we aim to include different perspectives on interview panels when possible?
7. Do we track the diversity of applicants and hires to see if there are gaps or barriers in our recruitment process?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"The job posting said they were inclusive, but the process felt like it was designed for one type of applicant." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 5: Inclusive Hiring' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Section C: Accessibility & Accommodations

Glossary
- **Accommodation:** Supports or changes to a job or workplace that help an employee succeed (e.g., assistive technology, flexible schedules).
- **Universal design:** Designing spaces, tools, and processes to be usable by all people without the need for adaptation.

Reflection Prompt
Think about whether your workplace is physically, digitally, and culturally accessible, and whether you regularly check in on accommodation needs.

Questions
1. Our physical space, technology, and tools are accessible (e.g., ramps, adjustable desks, captioned videos).
2. We have a simple, private process for employees to request and receive accommodations.
3. We check in regularly with employees to see if new accommodations are needed.
4. Do you ask staff if they face any barriers that stop them from joining fully at work?
5. Do you set time or money each year to make work more accessible (buildings, online tools, workplace culture)?
6. Are employees aware of how to request accommodations and the support available to them?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"I had to fight to get my accommodation approved. It made me feel like a burden." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 8: Accessibility, Disability Inclusion & Universal Design' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Pillar 2: Inclusion & Culture – Building a workplace where everyone feels valued and respected

Section D: Inclusive Onboarding

Glossary
- Onboarding: The process of welcoming and integrating new hires into an organization.

Reflection Prompt
Think about how new hires are welcomed and supported, especially from equity-deserving groups.

Questions
1. Onboarding materials are available in accessible formats (digital, large print, translated versions).
2. We assign a workplace buddy or mentor to each new hire.
3. We ask for feedback from new hires to improve onboarding.
4. Are managers trained to support new hires from different backgrounds?

5. Do you check in with new hires after 30-90 days to see if they feel included and supported?
6. Do we evaluate onboarding satisfaction specifically for employees from equity-deserving groups?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"On my first day, no one seemed to know I was starting. I felt invisible." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 3: Psychological Safety & Belonging' and 'Module 5: Inclusive Hiring' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Section E: Anti-Harassment, Microaggressions & Psychological Safety

Glossary
- **Harassment:** Unwelcome behaviour that offends, humiliates, or intimidates someone.
- **Microaggressions:** Everyday comments or actions that subtly exclude or insult people, often unintentionally.
- **Psychological safety:** A work environment where people feel safe to speak up without fear of punishment.

Reflection Prompt
Think about whether employees feel safe reporting concerns and whether action is taken promptly.

Questions
1. We have a clear, confidential process for reporting harassment, microaggressions, or discrimination.
2. Employees trust that concerns will be taken seriously and addressed promptly.
3. Leaders model respectful behaviour and address inappropriate conduct right away.
4. Do you tell staff often how to report concerns (like posters, meetings, or emails)?
5. Are supervisors taught to notice and deal with microaggressions or harassment early?
6. Do employees feel confident that reporting concerns will not negatively affect their careers or risk losing their jobs?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"When I spoke up about harassment, I was told I was being 'too sensitive'." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 3: Psychological Safety & Belonging' and 'Module 6: Microaggressions' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Section F: Equitable Career Development

Glossary
- **Equity:** Fair treatment by providing people with what they need to succeed, which may be different for each person.

Reflection Prompt
Think about whether all employees have equal access to training, promotions, and growth.

Questions
1. Development/Continuous Improvement/Training opportunities are communicated openly to all staff.
2. Promotions are based on transparent, job-related criteria.
3. We track training and promotions to ensure fairness.
4. Do you ask staff what training or growth they want or need?
5. Do you check pay and promotions for unfair gaps between groups (like gender or race)?
6. Do employees have access to mentorship or career development planning tailored to their goals?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"It felt like promotions were based on who you golfed with, not your skills." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 4: Interrupting Bias' and 'Module 9: Power & Accountability' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Section G: Recognition & Employee Voice

Glossary
- **Recognition**: Acknowledging and appreciating an employee's work or contributions.

Reflection Prompt
Think about how contributions are recognized and whether staff feel their ideas matter.

Questions
1. Contributions are recognized in ways that are meaningful to different people.
2. We actively seek and act on employee input from across the organization.
3. We share back what was done with employee feedback.
4. Do you celebrate good work in different ways (spoken thanks, notes, team events) to match staff preferences?
5. Do you have a safe way for staff to share ideas or concerns anonymously?
6. Do we monitor whether recognition and feedback are fair across teams and identities?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"We were asked for feedback, but nothing ever changed." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 7: Inclusive Communication' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Section H: Inclusive Decision-Making

Reflection Prompt
Think about whether diverse voices are included in decisions.

Questions
1. Do important decisions include input from employees at different levels and backgrounds?
2. Are meetings are structured so everyone can contribute?
3. Do we explain how and why final decisions are made?
4. Do you plan meeting times so staff with different needs can join (like caregiving or faith times)?
5. Do you explain how staff input helped shape the final decision?
6. Do we evaluate decisions afterward to see if all voices were meaningfully included?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"Decisions were always made before the meeting even happened." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 9: Power & Accountability' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Pillar 3: Leadership & Accountability – Leaders driving DEI progress with transparency and responsibility

Section I: Representation in Leadership

Glossary
- **Representation**: When the diversity of leadership reflects the diversity of the workforce and community.

Reflection Prompt
Think about whether leadership reflects the diversity of your workforce and community.

Questions
1. Do we track leadership diversity and compare it to our workforce and community?
2. Do we have strategies to address representation gaps in leadership?
3. Do we provide leadership pathways for underrepresented groups?
4. Do you offer mentoring or training for underrepresented staff who want to grow as leaders?
5. Do you check how board or leadership spots are advertised and filled to make sure they're open to all?
6. Do we use audit results to adjust policies, training, or programs based on findings?
7. Do we publicly share leadership or management diversity goals and progress with staff?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"I never saw anyone in leadership who looked like me or understood my experiences." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See ‘Module 9: Power & Accountability’ and ‘Module 10: DEI Action Planning’ in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Section J: Measuring DEI Progress

Glossary

- **DEI:** Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.
  - **Diversity** – The variety of identities, backgrounds, and experiences within a group (e.g., race, gender, age, disability, sexual orientation, education, lived experience).
  - **Equity:** Ensuring fair treatment and access to opportunities by providing people with what they need to succeed, which may be different for each person.
  - **Inclusion:** Actively creating environments where everyone feels welcomed, respected, supported, and able to fully participate.
- **IDEAA - Inclusion, Diversity, Equity, Accessibility, and Access.**
  - **Accessibility**: Designing environments, systems, and tools so everyone can use them, regardless of ability.
  - **Access**: The ability to reach, use, and benefit from resources, opportunities, and spaces.

Reflection Prompt
Think about how you track, share, and act on DEI progress and whether employees can see the results of your efforts.

Questions
1. Does our company review DEI or IDEAA data (e.g., demographics, surveys, feedback) at least annually?
2. Do we share key findings with staff in accessible formats (digital, plain language, large print, or read-aloud)?
3. Do we use both quantitative (numbers) and qualitative (stories) data to understand impact?
4. Do you set clear DEI goals and share progress with staff or the public?
5. Do you ask staff if DEI efforts are helping make work better?
6. Do we use audit results to adjust policies, training, or programs based on findings?”

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
“The company says they care about diversity, but we never see any proof.” – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See ‘Module 10: DEI Action Planning’ in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Section K: Training & Learning Culture

Reflection Prompt
Consider whether DEI learning is consistent, relevant, and aligned with your business goals.

Questions
1. Does our company provide DEI learning that is practical and relevant?
2. Is training offered to all staff, including leaders?
3. Do we revisit DEI learning regularly, not just once?
4. Do you connect DEI learning to real work examples in your industry?
5. Do you make DEI learning part of goals for teams or performance reviews?
6. Do we evaluate or measure the impact of DEI training on day-to-day work and culture?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"We had one training session, then never talked about inclusion again." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 2: Identity & Intersectionality' and 'Module 7: Inclusive Communication' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Section L: Community Engagement & Partnerships

Glossary
- **Community partnerships**: Relationships between an organization and community groups that benefit both.

Reflection Prompt
Think about how your organization connects with and supports diverse communities.

Questions
1. Does our company partner with organizations serving equity-deserving groups?
2. Do we participate in or support community events that reflect our workforce and customers?
3. Do we seek feedback from community partners to improve our DEI efforts?
4. Do you check if your community partnerships help both your business and the community?
5. Do we look for partners who reflect the diversity of your staff and customers?
6. Do we set goals for ongoing engagement and measure our impact in the community?

Quote from Conversation Groups (2025)
"They only showed up in our community when they needed to hire people." – Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Integration Note
See 'Module 2: Identity & Intersectionality' and 'Module 10: DEI Action Planning' in our DEI Self-Directed Training Tool for additional information, examples and resources.

Next Steps & Tool Integration

This Quick Start Guide is part of the full DEI Employer Toolkit for SMEs. Use your audit results to guide action across:
- Inclusive Hiring Guide: For practical templates, outreach ideas, and low-cost ways to remove barriers in recruitment, onboarding, and community partnerships.
- Self-Directed DEI Training Tool: For deeper guidance on learning, accessibility, inclusive culture, leadership, and DEI progress tracking.

Together, these tools help you move from assessment to action, creating measurable, sustainable improvements in inclusion, diversity, equity, access, accessibility, and belonging.