SME's Self-Directed DEI Training Tool

Contents

Introduction

This Self-Directed Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Training Tool is designed for small and medium-sized employers in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area, across sectors such as construction, real estate, manufacturing, hospitality, and entertainment. It is a practical, self-paced resource built from the real experiences shared in RIWC's 2025 community roundtable discussions with racialized and newcomer women, gender-diverse people, and 2SLGBTQI+ participants. It also reflects Canadian and Ontario DEI best practices, along with strategies that are realistic for employers with limited capacity.

Each module combines plain-language explanations, lived experience quotes, guided activities, and local resources so you can turn learning into action right away. The content is grounded in participant voices, human rights and accessibility legislation, and research-backed best practices tailored for SMEs.

You can work through the modules in any order, but they are designed to align with the RIWC SME's DEI Self-Audit Tool and the Inclusive Hiring Guide. This means that what you learn here can directly inform your hiring, retention, workplace culture, and accessibility practices.

By working through the modules at your own pace, you will build the skills and confidence to:

- Recognize and remove barriers to economic inclusion.
- Build respectful, inclusive workplace cultures.
- Strengthen your ability to attract, hire, and retain talent from underrepresented groups.

This tool was developed as part of RIWC's DEI Leadership Strategy and Employer Outreach Campaign, which aims to change gender norms, remove employment barriers, and promote the economic inclusion of underrepresented communities. Your participation in this training supports not only your organization's success but also a more equitable Toronto labour market.

How to Use This Tool

This Self-Directed DEI Training Tool is designed so you can start right where you are — no prior training, big budgets, or HR department required.

You can use it:

- Individually, to strengthen your own leadership and decision-making.
- With your team, as a shared learning activity in meetings or training sessions.
- Across your workplace, to inform policy updates, recruitment practices, and day-to-day interactions.

Getting Started

1. Choose a Module
   You can start at Module 1 and work through in order, or select the topic most relevant to your workplace right now.
2. Read the Learning Snapshot
   This gives you the "why" behind the topic in plain language.
3. Explore the Key Concepts
   These short definitions help everyone use the same language.
4. Reflect on the Real-Life Quote
   Each quote comes directly from RIWC's 2025 community conversation groups and reflects real workplace experiences.

5. Complete the Guided Activity
   Every module has a practical action you can take right away — most can be done in under an hour.
6. Review the Framing Insight & Local Resources
   These provide inspiration and direct you to Canadian tools, organizations, and supports.
7. Connect to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
   After completing a module, check the related sections in the DEI Self-Audit Tool to track progress and identify next steps.

Tips for Success

- Work at your own pace; even 20 minutes a week can make a difference.
- Involve others: invite employees, managers, or partners to complete activities together.
- Keep it visible, post your progress in a shared space so DEI stays part of everyday conversation.
- Start small, stay consistent, lasting change comes from steady action over time.
- By using this tool regularly, you'll build skills, confidence, and a workplace culture where everyone can thrive.

Module 1: DEI Foundations

Learning Snapshot

Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, Accessibility, and Access (IDEAA) is about more than hiring people from different backgrounds. It means creating a workplace where everyone feels welcomed, respected, and supported to succeed. For small and medium-sized employers, this can be done with low-cost or no-cost changes that make a big difference in attracting and keeping loyal, motivated, productive, and talented people.

Key Concepts

- **Inclusion**: Ensuring all people feel valued, respected, and able to participate fully.
- **Diversity:** The presence of different identities and experiences such as race, gender, age, ability, religion, language, and sexual orientation.
- **Equity:** Fair treatment, access, and opportunities by removing barriers.
- **Accessibility:** Designing workplaces, systems, and tools so everyone can use them.
- **Access:** Making sure people can actually reach and use resources, services, and opportunities.
- **Belonging:** The feeling of being accepted and valued for who you are.

Real-Life Reflection

"When my new manager took time to learn how I communicate best, I finally felt like my ideas mattered." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Guided Activity

1. Look around your workplace and ask: "Would a new hire from a different background feel welcome here?"
2. Pick one small change you can make this month, such as:
   - Adding pronouns to email signatures
   - Sharing meeting agendas in advance

- Including salary ranges in job postings

3. Tell your team about the change and invite their ideas for the next step.

Framing Insight
"Inclusion is not a one-time initiative. It is the daily choice to create spaces where people feel they belong." Brené Brown

Examples / Mini Case Studies

Example 1: Inclusion:
At a 25-person marketing firm, the team noticed that new hires from different cultural backgrounds rarely spoke up in meetings. The manager began asking each person directly for input and created a "round-robin" format, so everyone had a chance to contribute. Within a month, employees reported feeling more comfortable sharing ideas, and several new suggestions led to improved client campaigns.

Example 2: Accessibility & Equity:
A small construction company realized that some training materials were only available in PDF format, which made them hard to access for employees with visual impairments. The company converted all training documents into accessible Word files and offered audio recordings. Employees who had previously struggled to follow the material were now able to participate fully in training sessions.

Example 3: Belonging:
In a hospitality business, a new team member felt hesitant to join team lunches due to dietary restrictions. The manager started sending a monthly survey asking employees about food preferences and made sure catering included vegetarian, halal, and allergen-free options. The new hire reported feeling much more included and engaged, which boosted overall morale.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: Which of the following best describes equity in the workplace?
A) Treating everyone exactly the same, regardless of their needs
B) Removing barriers so all employees have fair access to opportunities
C) Hiring employees only from underrepresented groups
D) Creating social events for the team

Answer: B
Explanation: Equity is about removing barriers and providing fair access and opportunities. Treating everyone exactly the same (A) may not address systemic barriers, and options C and D do not reflect the broader concept of equity.

Question 2: What is the difference between diversity and inclusion?
A) Diversity is about representation; inclusion is about participation and belonging
B) Diversity is about making everyone feel welcome; inclusion is about hiring different people
C) Diversity and inclusion mean the same thing
D) Diversity is optional; inclusion is required by law

Answer: A
Explanation: Diversity refers to the presence of different identities and experiences, while inclusion ensures those individuals feel valued, respected, and able to participate fully.

Question 3: Which small change could improve belonging in a workplace?
A) Posting salaries only after hiring decisions are made
B) Asking new hires about their preferred communication style
C) Limiting meetings to senior management only
D) Keeping job postings vague to attract more applicants

Answer: B
Explanation: Asking about communication preferences helps new employees feel seen and included, fostering a sense of belonging. The other options do not promote inclusion or belonging.

Local Resources
- Ontario Human Rights Commission – Provides guidance on workplace rights and responsibilities under the Ontario Human Rights Code. www.ohrc.on.ca
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) – Offers training, tools, and research to build inclusive workplaces. www.ccdi.ca
- Government of Ontario – Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act (AODA) Standards – Sets legal accessibility requirements for Ontario employers. www.ontario.ca/accessibility

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module is connected to Sections A: Legal Compliance & Fair Policies. The audit questions will help you check if your policies, communication, and hiring practices reflect these foundations.

Module 2: Identity & Intersectionality

Learning Snapshot
Identity is made up of many parts, such as race, culture, gender, age, religion, ability, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic background. Intersectionality means these parts overlap and create unique experiences of advantage or disadvantage. For SMEs, understanding this helps create policies and practices that work for everyone, not just the majority.

Key Concepts
- **Intersectionality:** How different parts of a person's identity combine to shape their experiences at work and in society.
- **BIPOC:** Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour.
- **2SLGBTQIA+:** Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, plus other diverse sexual and gender identities.
- **Invisible identities:** Aspects of identity that may not be obvious, such as disability, religion, or mental health conditions.
- **Socioeconomic background:** The combination of income, education, and occupation that can influence access to opportunities.

Real-Life Reflection
"I am an immigrant woman of colour with a disability. Each part of my identity shapes how I am treated at work and in my community." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Guided Activity

1. Review your workplace policies with an intersectional lens.

2. Ask:
    - Do our schedules work for parents, caregivers, and people observing religious practices?
    - Do our dress codes allow cultural and religious attire?
    - Do we offer flexible accommodations for disability and mental health?

3. Use an anonymous survey to learn if employees feel they can bring their whole selves to work.

Framing Insight
"When we see people, for all that they are, not just one label, we make space for them to thrive." Tanya Sinclair is a Canadian DEI strategist and advocate for workplace inclusion. She is known for her work on equity, belonging, and anti-racism initiatives.

Examples / Mini Case Studies

Example 1: Intersectionality & Scheduling:
At a 40-person retail company, managers noticed that some employees struggled with scheduling around religious observances and caregiving responsibilities. They implemented a flexible shift system and allowed employees to swap shifts without penalty. Employees reported feeling more supported, and absenteeism decreased.

Example 2: Invisible Identities & Accessibility:
A small tech startup realized that a team member with a mental health condition was hesitant to participate in brainstorming sessions. The manager offered optional quiet spaces and virtual brainstorming tools, allowing the employee to contribute comfortably. This small adjustment improved team collaboration and innovation.

Example 3: Socioeconomic Background & Training Opportunities:
A local manufacturing company recognized that some employees couldn't attend in-person professional development due to commuting costs. They began offering online workshops and stipends for internet access, ensuring all employees had equal access to learning and advancement opportunities.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: What does intersectionality help SMEs understand?
A) How a single aspect of identity affects all employees equally
B) How multiple aspects of a person's identity combine to create unique experiences
C) How to focus only on the majority group's needs
D) How to ignore invisible identities in policy

Answer: B
Explanation: Intersectionality shows that multiple aspects of identity interact, creating different experiences of advantage or disadvantage in the workplace.

Question 2: Which of the following is an example of supporting invisible identities?
A) Offering flexible accommodations for employees with disabilities or mental health conditions
B) Posting photos of team members on the company website
C) Holding a single annual holiday party for all employees
D) Limiting flexible work options to managers only

Answer: A

Explanation: Invisible identities, such as disabilities or mental health conditions, may not be obvious but still affect employees' ability to participate fully. Flexible accommodations show support for these identities.

Question 3: Why is it important to consider socioeconomic background in workplace policies?
A) It ensures all employees have equal access to opportunities, regardless of income or education
B) It allows employers to hire only from privileged backgrounds
C) It guarantees employees will receive promotions automatically
D) It reduces the need for flexible work arrangements

Answer: A
Explanation: Considering socioeconomic background helps create policies and practices that remove barriers and provide fair access to opportunities for all employees.

Local Resources
- Egale Canada – National organization advancing equality for 2SLGBTQIA+ people through research, education, and advocacy. www.egale.ca
- Indigenous Works – Supports Indigenous and non-Indigenous organizations in building effective, respectful partnerships. www.indigenousworks.ca
- Canadian Centre for Gender and Sexual Diversity (CCGSD) – Provides education and resources to combat gender-based violence and discrimination. www.ccgsd-ccdgs.org

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module connects to Section K: Training & Learning Culture and Section L: Community Engagement & Partnerships. The audit questions will help you find gaps and create changes that respect and support people's full identities.

Module 3: Psychological Safety & Belonging

Learning Snapshot
When employees feel safe to speak up, share ideas, and be themselves without fear of embarrassment or punishment, they are more engaged and innovative. This is called psychological safety. For SMEs, building this environment is essential for creating belonging, and it does not require large budgets—small actions can make a big difference.

Key Concepts
- **Psychological safety:** A workplace climate where people feel safe to express ideas, concerns, or questions without fear of negative consequences.
- **Belonging:** Feeling accepted, valued, respected, and included as oneself in the workplace.
- **Microaggressions:** Subtle comments or actions that convey bias, exclusion, or disrespect—often unintentional but harmful.
- **Allyship:** Actively supporting people from equity-deserving groups through words and actions.

Real-Life Reflection
"I never felt safe admitting I was struggling with burnout. I thought my team would see it as a weakness." *Conversation Group Participant, 2025*

Guided Activity

1. Ask your team anonymously: “What helps you feel safe to speak up? What makes it harder?”
2. Share one change you will make based on their feedback, such as:
   - Setting meeting norms so everyone has time to speak
   - Interrupting biased comments or microaggressions in real time
   - Recognizing contributions in ways that matter to each individual

Framing Insight
“Respectful workplaces aren’t created by rules, they’re built by actions that say, ‘Your voice matters here.” Rumeet Billan, Canadian DEI educator and emotional intelligence expert

Examples / Mini Case Studies

Example 1: Psychological Safety:
In a 30-person software company, a junior developer noticed errors in a new product design but was hesitant to speak up. The manager started holding “safe space” meetings where team members could voice concerns without judgment. The developer shared their insights, preventing a costly mistake and improving team trust.

Example 2: Belonging & Recognition:
A small hospitality team noticed that certain employees rarely spoke during meetings. The manager implemented a system to recognize contributions publicly and privately, tailored to each individual’s preferences. Employees reported feeling valued, more engaged, and willing to share ideas openly.

Example 3: Microaggressions & Allyship:
At a 20-person marketing agency, a team member made a dismissive comment about a colleague’s accent. Another colleague intervened in the moment, explaining respectfully why the comment was inappropriate and supporting the affected employee. This action strengthened trust and reinforced inclusive behaviour in the team.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: What is psychological safety in the workplace?
A) Ensuring everyone agrees with management decisions
B) A workplace climate where people feel safe to express ideas without fear of negative consequences
C) Offering team-building retreats once a year
D) Only allowing senior staff to speak in meetings

Answer: B
Explanation: Psychological safety is about creating an environment where employees can share ideas, ask questions, and express concerns without fear of embarrassment or punishment.

Question 2: Which of the following is an example of promoting belonging?
A) Publicly recognizing contributions in ways that matter to each individual
B) Assigning tasks only based on seniority
C) Limiting participation in meetings to a small group
D) Ignoring personal preferences in recognition

Answer: A
Explanation: Belonging means employees feel valued and included. Recognizing contributions in ways meaningful to them fosters this sense of inclusion.

Question 3: How can a team member demonstrate allyship when they witness a microaggression?
A) Ignore it to avoid conflict
B) Call out the behaviour respectfully and support the affected person
C) Make a joke to lighten the mood
D) Wait for management to address it

Answer: B
Explanation: Allyship involves actively supporting colleagues from equity-deserving groups. Addressing microaggressions respectfully helps create a safe and inclusive environment.

Local Resources
- Wellness Works Canada – National non-profit offering tools and training to improve employee wellbeing and workplace mental health. www.wellnessworkscanada.ca
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI) – Offers guides like the Inclusion in Meetings Checklist to help teams communicate respectfully. www.ccdi.ca
- Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC) – Provides information on workplace harassment, discrimination, and human rights protections. www.ohrc.on.ca
- Canadian Mental Health Association (CMHA): Provides workplace mental health resources. https://cmha.ca
- Workplace Safety & Prevention Services (WSPS): Offers resources on workplace safety and psychological health. https://www.wsps.ca
- Toronto Employment & Social Services: Provides employment support and services in Toronto. https://www.toronto.ca/community-people/employment-social-support/employment-support/

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module connects to Section D: Inclusive Onboarding and Section E: Anti-Harassment, Microaggressions & Psychological Safety. The audit questions can help you assess whether your workplace fosters safety, trust, and respect for all employees.

Module 4: Interrupting Bias

Learning Snapshot
Bias is a natural human tendency to prefer or judge people based on personal experiences, assumptions, or stereotypes. In the workplace, bias can affect who gets hired, promoted, or included in important conversations. For SMEs, interrupting bias helps ensure fair decisions and stronger team performance.

Key Concepts
- **Bias:** Personal preferences or assumptions that can unfairly influence decisions and actions.
- **Unconscious bias:** Bias we are not aware of, often shaped by cultural and social influences.
- **Confirmation bias:** Focusing on information that supports our existing beliefs while ignoring other evidence.

- **Affinity bias:** Favouring people who are similar to us in background, interests, or appearance.

Real-Life Reflection
"I noticed we always promoted the people who were most like the manager. It wasn't about skill, it was about comfort." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Guided Activity

1. Choose one common decision-making process in your workplace, such as hiring, assigning projects, or promotions.
2. Pause at each step to ask:
   - What criteria are we using?
   - Could bias be influencing this decision?
3. Use structured checklists or scoring tools to keep decisions objective.

Framing Insight
"Bias will show up whether you invite it or not. The question is, will you notice it and take action?" Tanya Sinclair, Canadian workplace inclusion strategist

Examples / Mini Case Studies

Example 1: Bias in Hiring:
A small manufacturing company noticed that most new hires came from the same neighbourhood as the manager. By using structured interview questions and scoring tools, they evaluated candidates based on skills and experience rather than personal similarities. This change led to a more diverse team and better problem-solving.

Example 2: Bias in Promotions:
At a 15-person retail store, promotions were often given to employees the manager felt most comfortable with. The store introduced a clear performance rubric for promotion decisions, focusing on measurable achievements. Employees from different backgrounds now had an equal opportunity to advance.

Example 3: Affinity Bias in Project Assignments:
A hospitality business realized managers tended to assign high-profile tasks to employees who shared their hobbies. They started rotating assignments and using a checklist to ensure tasks were distributed fairly based on skills and development goals. This improved employee engagement and performance.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: What is unconscious bias?
A) Bias you are aware of and actively choose
B) Bias you are not aware of, shaped by social and cultural influences
C) Only preferences related to hiring decisions
D) A legal requirement for workplace policies

Answer: B
Explanation: Unconscious bias refers to attitudes or stereotypes we are unaware of that influence our decisions and actions.

Question 2: Which strategy helps reduce confirmation bias in workplace decisions?
A) Only considering information that supports existing beliefs
B) Using structured checklists or scoring tools for decisions
C) Asking managers to rely on intuition
D) Ignoring diversity in team composition

Answer: B
Explanation: Structured tools help ensure decisions are objective and based on evidence, rather than only on information that confirms pre-existing beliefs.

Question 3: What is an example of interrupting affinity bias?
A) Assigning high-profile projects only to employees who share your interests
B) Rotating assignments and using a skills-based checklist for fairness
C) Promoting employees based on personal comfort
D) Ignoring employee performance data

Answer: B
Explanation: Affinity bias is the tendency to favour people similar to ourselves. Rotating assignments and using objective criteria reduces this bias and promotes fairness.

Local Resources
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI): Offers bias awareness training and toolkits for employers. www.ccdi.ca
- Pride at Work Canada: Provides workshops and resources for inclusive workplace practices, especially for 2SLGBTQIA+ employees. www.prideatwork.ca
- Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC): Guidance on preventing discrimination in hiring and promotion. www.ohrc.on.ca

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module connects to Section F: Equitable Career Development. The audit questions will help you identify where bias may appear and how to reduce its impact on your workplace decisions.

Module 5: Inclusive Hiring

Learning Snapshot
Inclusive hiring means finding and selecting candidates in ways that welcome people from all backgrounds while removing unnecessary barriers. For small and medium-sized employers, small and low-cost actions like posting jobs in community networks, offering flexible interview formats, and clearly stating salary ranges can attract a wider range of talent. This is not about lowering standards. It is about ensuring qualified candidates are not excluded simply because of where or how you recruit.

Key Concepts
- **Inclusive hiring:** A recruitment process that gives all candidates fair access and opportunity.
- **Barrier:** Any requirement, policy, or practice that might unintentionally exclude people. Examples include requiring “Canadian experience” or only accepting online applications in English.

- **Accommodations:** Adjustments that allow candidates to fully participate in the hiring process. Examples include providing interview questions in advance, ensuring interview spaces are physically accessible, or allowing a support person for candidates who request one.

Real-Life Reflection
"I only got the interview because the posting was shared through a community agency that supports newcomers. I never would have found it otherwise." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Guided Activity

1. Review your last three job postings.
2. Check for plain language, a clear description of the role, and whether you included the salary range.
3. Share the posting with at least one community or employment agency that serves equity-deserving groups.
4. If possible, offer at least two ways for candidates to apply, for example, online and in-person, to make it easier for those with limited internet access.

Framing Insight
"When you hire inclusively, you are not lowering the bar. You are removing the obstacles that keep great people from getting through the door." Rumeet Billan, Canadian educator and workplace inclusion expert

Examples / Mini Case Studies

Example 1: Inclusive Job Postings:
A small hospitality company noticed that its job ads were only posted on mainstream websites, and few applicants from diverse backgrounds applied. They started sharing postings with local newcomer agencies and community networks. Within a few months, the applicant pool became more diverse, and they hired two skilled employees they would not have reached otherwise.

Example 2: Accommodations in Interviews:
A retail store received an applicant who uses a mobility aid. The store rearranged the interview space to be fully accessible and provided the questions in advance. The candidate felt supported, performed confidently, and was successfully hired.

Example 3: Multiple Application Methods:
In a manufacturing SME, some candidates could not easily submit online applications due to limited internet access. The company allowed paper applications and in-person drop-offs at a local community centre. This small adjustment increased both the number and diversity of applicants.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: What is the goal of inclusive hiring?
A) Lowering standards to hire more people
B) Ensuring all qualified candidates have fair access to opportunities
C) Hiring only from community agencies

D) Requiring all candidates to have Canadian experience

Answer: B
Explanation: Inclusive hiring focuses on removing barriers so qualified candidates from all backgrounds can compete fairly. It does not lower standards.

Question 2: Which of the following is an example of a barrier in hiring?
A) Providing salary ranges in job postings
B) Requiring "Canadian experience" when not necessary
C) Offering interviews in multiple formats
D) Posting jobs with clear role descriptions

Answer: B
Explanation: Requiring "Canadian experience" can unintentionally exclude fully qualified newcomers. Other options listed remove barriers and support accessibility.

Question 3: Which action demonstrates providing accommodations in the hiring process?
A) Asking candidates to submit applications only online
B) Allowing candidates to have a support person during interviews
C) Scheduling interviews only at inconvenient times
D) Ignoring accessibility needs

Answer: B
Explanation: Accommodations are adjustments that allow candidates to fully participate, such as allowing support persons, accessible spaces, or providing interview questions in advance.

Local Resources
- Ontario Human Rights Commission (OHRC): Guidance on inclusive hiring and workplace rights under the Ontario Human Rights Code. www.ohrc.on.ca
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI): Offers toolkits, guides, and training to help employers hire inclusively. www.ccdi.ca
- ACCES Employment (Toronto/GTA): Supports newcomers with job postings, career guidance, and recruitment connections for employers. www.accesemployment.ca
- WoodGreen Employment Services (Toronto/GTA): Provides programs to connect employers with newcomer talent and diverse candidates. www.woodgreen.org
- 50-30 Challenge Resources: Offers guidance for small organizations on equitable and inclusive hiring practices. 50–30 Challenge – Government of Canada

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module connects to Section B: Inclusive Recruitment Practices and Section D: Inclusive Onboarding. The audit questions will help you identify where bias may appear and how to reduce its impact on your workplace decisions.

Module 6: Microaggressions

Learning Snapshot
Microaggressions are subtle comments, jokes, or actions that communicate bias, exclusion, or disrespect toward people from equity-deserving groups. They may seem small in the moment, but repeated experiences can have a significant negative impact on mental health, productivity,

and retention. For SMEs, learning to recognize and address microaggressions helps create a respectful, inclusive workplace.

Key Concepts

- **Microaggressions:** Everyday comments, actions, or behaviours that demean or exclude people, often unintentionally.
- **Impact vs. intent:** Intent is what you meant to do or say; impact is how it was received. Impact matters more when addressing harm.
- **Stereotypes:** Oversimplified ideas about a group of people that fuel bias and exclusion.
- **Calling in:** Addressing harmful comments or actions in a way that invites learning rather than public shaming.

Real-Life Reflection

"When a coworker kept making jokes about my accent, I stopped speaking up in meetings. It didn't feel worth it anymore." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Guided Activity

1. Think about the last month at work. Have you heard comments that might make someone feel excluded?
2. Pick one example and reflect: How could you address it in the moment using respectful language?
3. Practice a "calling in" phrase, such as:
   - "I know you didn't mean harm, but that comment might not land well."
   - "Let's use a different term; this one can be offensive."

Framing Insight

"It's not about being politically correct, it's about being kind, aware, and respectful in every interaction." Wanda Deschamps, Canadian advocate for disability inclusion and belonging

Examples / Mini Case Studies

Example 1: Microaggressions in Meetings:
A small retail store owned by a newcomer noticed that employees often joked about colleagues' accents. The owner started modelling "calling in" language during meetings, such as politely redirecting the conversation and explaining why the comment could hurt someone. Over time, employees became more aware and respectful, and quieter team members started speaking up.

Example 2: Stereotypes & Hiring:
In a hospitality SME, the manager realized that assumptions were being made about applicants based on their country of origin. By introducing structured interview questions and sharing examples of respectful language, the hiring team reduced bias and ensured all candidates were treated fairly.

Example 3: Impact vs. Intent in Daily Operations:
A logistics company employee made a joking comment about a coworker's religious attire. The newcomer owner addressed it immediately, highlighting the impact rather than assuming negative intent. This approach educated the team without shaming, creating a more inclusive and trusting workplace.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: What is the most important factor to consider when addressing a microaggression?
A) The intent of the person who made the comment
B) The impact the comment had on the person affected
C) How many people heard the comment
D) The manager's personal feelings

Answer: B
Explanation: While intent can provide context, the impact on the person receiving the comment matters most in addressing harm and fostering an inclusive workplace.

Question 2: Which of the following is an example of *calling in*?
A) Publicly shaming a coworker for a comment
B) Politely explaining why, a comment might be offensive and suggesting alternative language
C) Ignoring the comment to avoid conflict
D) Complaining to HR without addressing the person

Answer: B
Explanation: Calling in involves addressing harmful behaviour respectfully, aiming to educate and invite learning rather than punish or shame.

Question 3: A newcomer SME owner notices employees making jokes about cultural backgrounds. What is the best first step?
A) Send an email criticizing all staff
B) Model respectful language and gently address the comments in the moment
C) Wait for complaints to escalate
D) Remove employees without discussion

Answer: B
Explanation: Modelling respectful behaviour and addressing comments in real time teaches employees the expected standards and helps create psychological safety.

Local Resources
- **Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI):** Offers training and resources on addressing bias and microaggressions. www.ccdi.ca
- **Egale Canada:** Provides workplace inclusion workshops for 2SLGBTQI+ employees and allies. www.egale.ca
- **Pride at Work Canada**: Helps organizations create safe, respectful spaces for gender-diverse employees. www.prideatwork.ca

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module connects to Section E: Anti-Harassment, Microaggressions & Psychological Safety. The audit questions will help you identify and address behaviours that undermine inclusion.

Module 7: Inclusive Communication

Learning Snapshot
Inclusive communication ensures that messages are clear, respectful, and accessible to everyone, regardless of background, ability, or language. For SMEs, this can be as simple as

using plain language, avoiding jargon, and making sure materials are available in multiple formats.

Key Concepts

- **Plain language:** Writing and speaking so your message is clear and easy to understand.
- **Accessible formats:** Providing materials in formats such as large print, braille, captions, or plain-text versions.
- **Gender-inclusive language:** Avoiding gendered terms unless necessary, and using pronouns correctly.
- **Cultural awareness:** Being mindful of cultural differences in communication styles, greetings, and body language.

Real-Life Reflection

"When my manager started sending meeting notes in plain language, I finally felt confident contributing to the conversation." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Guided Activity

1. Review one workplace document or email.
2. Check for:
   - Plain, jargon-free language
   - Inclusive pronouns and terminology
   - Clear headings and bullet points for readability
3. Ask a colleague from a different background to review it for clarity.

Framing Insight

"Inclusive communication is not just about what you say, it's about making sure people can hear, understand, and feel included in the conversation." Brené Brown

Mini Case Studies / Examples

Example 1: Plain Language in Manufacturing:

A small manufacturing SME owned by a newcomer often used technical jargon in safety emails. The owner simplified language, added visuals, and translated key points into the main languages spoken by staff. Workers now understand instructions clearly, reducing errors and improving safety.

Example 2: Accessible Formats in Hospitality:

A small hotel shared staff schedules only in PDF format, which some employees with visual impairments could not access. The owner provided schedules in large print and text-only formats, ensuring all team members could plan their shifts independently.

Example 3: Gender-Inclusive Language in Retail:

A retail SME used "salesman" in job postings and emails. After updating to gender-neutral terms like "sales associate" and sharing proper pronoun usage, staff felt more respected and included, and job postings attracted a more diverse pool of applicants.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: What is the main goal of inclusive communication?
A) Using complex language to show professionalism
B) Ensuring everyone can understand, access, and feel included in messages
C) Limiting messages to senior management only
D) Avoiding communication with employees from different backgrounds

Answer: B
Explanation: Inclusive communication ensures clarity, respect, and accessibility for all employees, regardless of background or ability.

Question 2: Which of the following is an example of plain language?
A) "Utilize the aforementioned protocols to mitigate operational discrepancies."
B) "Follow these steps to avoid mistakes in your work."
C) "Per our procedural directives, ensure compliance with the aforementioned mandates."
D) "Employees must adhere to company policies."

Answer: B
Explanation: Plain language is clear, simple, and easy to understand. Option B communicates instructions directly without jargon.

Question 3: What is a key step in making workplace communication accessible?
A) Only sending emails in English PDF format
B) Providing materials in multiple formats (text, large print, captions)
C) Limiting communication to verbal announcements
D) Using slang to connect with employees

Answer: B
Explanation: Accessible formats allow all employees, including those with disabilities or language barriers, to access and understand workplace information.

Local Resources (SME-Relevant Options)
- Government of Ontario – Inclusive Language Guide: Tips for respectful, inclusive communication. https://www.ontario.ca/page/inclusive-language-guide
- Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB): Guidance on accessible formats for workplace documents. www.cnib.ca
- CCDI – Inclusive Communication Tools: Templates and resources for SMEs to improve written and verbal communication. www.ccdi.ca
- ACCES Employment – Workplace Resources for Newcomers: Provides guidance to employers on communicating clearly with diverse staff. www.accesemployment.ca
- The Inclusive Workplace – Communication Strategies: Practical tips for plain-language, accessible, and culturally aware communication. https://theinclusiveworkplace.ca/en/articles/inclusive-communication-strategies

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module connects to Section G: Recognition & Employee Voice and Section K: Training & Learning Culture. The audit questions will help you ensure your messages are inclusive and accessible for everyone.

Module 8: Accessibility, Disability Inclusion & Universal Design

Learning Snapshot
Accessibility means removing barriers so everyone can fully participate in work. Disability inclusion ensures people with visible and invisible disabilities are welcomed, supported, and valued. Universal design creates spaces, systems, and tools that work for all people from the start.

Key Concepts
- **AODA:** The Accessibility for Ontarians with Disabilities Act sets legal standards for accessibility.
- **Assistive technology:** Tools like screen readers, voice-to-text software, and ergonomic equipment.
- **Attitudinal barriers:** Misconceptions or stereotypes that limit opportunities for people with disabilities.
- **Universal design:** Designing spaces and processes to be usable by everyone without adaptation.

Real-Life Reflection
"I had the skills, but no one thought to ask if the online test was accessible for my screen reader. I lost the job before I could even start." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Guided Activity

1. Conduct an accessibility walk-through of your workplace.
2. Ask:
   - Can everyone physically access entrances, restrooms, and meeting spaces?
   - Are hiring, onboarding, and training materials available in accessible formats?
   - Do job postings clearly state your commitment to accommodations?
3. Identify one barrier you can remove this month.

Framing Insight
"Accessibility is not an accommodation; it is a right, and it benefits everyone." Rod Michalko, Canadian disability studies scholar

Mini Case Studies / Examples

Example 1: Accessible Hiring in Hospitality:
A newcomer-owned restaurant noticed that online job applications were not screen-reader friendly. The owner revised the form to a plain-text version, ensured all instructions were simple, and offered alternative ways to apply, enabling candidates with disabilities to apply independently.

Example 2: Universal Design in Manufacturing:
A small manufacturing SME redesigned its workstation layout with adjustable-height tables and ergonomic tools. Employees of all abilities could work safely and efficiently, reducing injury risk and improving productivity.

Example 3: Attitudinal Barrier in Logistics:
In a logistics SME, a newcomer owner realized managers assumed employees with disabilities couldn't handle certain tasks. After holding training on disability inclusion and providing assistive technology, employees were empowered to contribute fully and safely.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: What is the difference between accessibility and accommodation?
A) Accessibility is optional; accommodation is mandatory
B) Accessibility benefits everyone proactively; accommodation addresses a specific person's needs
C) They are the same
D) Accommodation only applies to physical spaces

Answer: B
Explanation: Accessibility proactively removes barriers for all, while accommodation provides specific adjustments for individuals.

Question 2: Which of the following is an example of universal design?
A) Adding ramps only after complaints
B) Designing workstations adjustable for all employees from the start
C) Only providing screen readers for one employee with a disability
D) Using specialized equipment that only some staff can use

Answer: B
Explanation: Universal design ensures spaces and tools are usable by everyone without needing individual modifications.

Question 3: A newcomer SME wants to make its hiring process accessible. What is the first step?
A) Use complex online forms to test tech skills
B) Only hire employees without disabilities
C) Offer applications in accessible formats and include a statement about accommodations
D) Avoid discussing accessibility to save costs

Answer: C
Explanation: Providing accessible application formats and clearly stating accommodation policies ensures fair access for all candidates.

Local Resources
- Ontario Accessibility Directorate: Guides to meet AODA standards. www.ontario.ca/accessibility
- Canadian Council on Rehabilitation and Work (CCRW): Supports employers in hiring and accommodating people with disabilities. www.ccrw.org
- CNIB: Accessibility tools, workplace inclusion resources, and training. www.cnib.ca
- Rick Hansen Foundation – Accessibility Certification: Tools to evaluate and improve workplace accessibility. www.rickhansen.com/what-we-do/accessibility-certification
- Accessible Workplace Toolkit – CCDI: Strategies and guides for newcomer-owned SMEs to implement universal design and disability inclusion. www.ccdi.ca

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module connects to Section C: Accessibility & Accommodations. The audit questions will help ensure your workplace meets legal standards and actively supports disability inclusion.

Module 9: Power & Accountability

Learning Snapshot
Equitable workplaces hold leaders and employees accountable for upholding DEI values. Power dynamics influence who feels safe to speak up, who gets opportunities, and whose concerns are acted on. For SMEs, creating accountability systems ensures DEI commitments are not just words on paper.

Key Concepts
- **Accountability:** Following through on commitments and being answerable for results.
- **Power dynamics:** How decision-making and influence are distributed in the workplace.
- **Transparency:** Openly sharing decisions, processes, and results.
- **Ethical data use:** Collecting and using DEI-related data responsibly.

Real-Life Reflection
"We did a DEI survey, but nothing changed. People stopped believing leadership was serious." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Guided Activity

1. Identify one DEI commitment your workplace has made.
2. Ask:
   - Who is responsible for making it happen?
   - How will progress be measured?
   - How will results be shared with employees?
3. Set a review date and follow up.

Framing Insight
"Accountability is the bridge between intention and impact." Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie, TED speaker and author. Even in small businesses, accountability is the bridge between intention and impact, ensuring commitments turn into real change."

Mini Case Studies / Examples

Example 1: Accountability in Retail:
A newcomer-owned retail store implemented a DEI feedback box for staff to share concerns anonymously. The owner reviewed submissions weekly, shared trends with staff, and made small changes like adjusting schedules to respect religious practices. Employees reported feeling heard and valued.

Example 2: Power Dynamics in Manufacturing:
In a small manufacturing SME, only senior staff were consulted on safety improvements. The owner created a rotating committee including line workers and introduced transparent decision-making meetings. Workers felt empowered, and new ideas led to safer, more efficient processes.

Example 3: Ethical Data Use in Hospitality:
A small hotel collected employee survey data on DEI. Instead of just storing it, the owner analyzed trends, shared insights with staff, and implemented policy changes around flexible work and training. Staff noticed real changes, building trust in leadership.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: Which of the following demonstrates accountability in an SME?
A) Ignoring employee feedback
B) Sharing DEI goals but never measuring results
C) Following through on DEI commitments and reviewing progress regularly
D) Only addressing complaints when legally required

Answer: C
Explanation: Accountability involves acting on commitments, tracking progress, and ensuring employees see real follow-through.

Question 2: What is an example of using power responsibly in a workplace?
A) Making all decisions without staff input
B) Giving promotions only to friends or family
C) Rotating decision-making opportunities and inviting all staff to share ideas
D) Avoiding discussion of workplace barriers

Answer: C
Explanation: Inclusive power-sharing ensures diverse voices are heard, and decision-making benefits the whole team.

Question 3: Ethical data use in DEI means:
A) Collecting DEI data responsibly, analyzing trends, and using insights to improve workplace inclusion
B) Collecting employee data and sharing it publicly without context
C) Ignoring survey results because analysis is time-consuming
D) Only tracking complaints to avoid legal issues

Answer: A
Explanation: Ethical use involves responsibly collecting data, analyzing it fairly, and taking action to support inclusion.

Local & Practical Resources
- CCDI Measurement Tools: Guides for tracking and reporting DEI progress. www.ccdi.ca
- Government of Canada – Workplace Harassment & Violence Prevention: Guidance for transparent reporting and accountability. www.canada.ca
- Canadian Human Rights Commission: Guidance on human rights compliance and accountability. www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca
- Indigenous Works – Leadership & Equity Resources: Tools for equitable decision-making and leadership. www.indigenousworks.ca
- 50–30 Challenge – Leadership & Diversity: Guidance for SME owners on gender parity and diversity in governance. www.5030challenge.ca
- Canadian Women's Foundation – Leadership & Workplace Equity: Resources for inclusive leadership and mentorship. www.canadianwomen.org

- Workplace Strategies for Mental Health – Leadership & Inclusion: Practical tools for creating psychologically safe and inclusive workplaces. www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module connects to Section F: Equitable Career Development, Section H: Inclusive Decision-Making and Section I: Representation in Leadership. The audit questions will help you assess how power and accountability are distributed and acted on in your workplace.

Module 10: DEI Action Planning

Learning Snapshot
DEI action planning turns learning into measurable change. For SMEs, a simple, focused plan can keep DEI efforts realistic, achievable, and sustainable. Plans work best when they are co-created with employees and reviewed regularly.

Key Concepts
- **SMART goals:** Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, Time-bound.
- **Prioritization:** Focusing on a few high-impact actions at a time.
- **Employee involvement:** including staff voices in creating and reviewing DEI goals.
- **Continuous improvement:** Reviewing and updating plans based on progress and feedback.

Real-Life Reflection
"When we set just three DEI goals for the year and tracked them quarterly, we actually saw change happen." Conversation Group Participant, 2025

Guided Activity

1. Pick one DEI area to improve in the next six months.
2. Write one SMART goal for it.
3. Identify:
   - Who is responsible
   - What resources are needed
   - How success will be measured
4. Share the plan with your team and revisit progress quarterly.

Framing Insight
"DEI is not a one-time project; it's a continuous practice." Susan Scott, author of Fierce Conversations

Mini Case Studies / Examples

Example 1: Retail SME:
A small clothing store set a SMART goal to increase hires from newcomer communities by 20% in six months. The owner partnered with local community agencies, updated job postings to include salary ranges, and offered flexible interviews. Progress was tracked monthly, and staff reported feeling the workplace was more inclusive.

Example 2: Manufacturing SME:
A manufacturing business identified that shift schedules were a barrier for parents. They set a goal to implement flexible shift options within three months. Employees were involved in planning, and feedback was collected anonymously. Adjustments were made based on survey results, leading to higher engagement and retention.

Example 3: Hospitality SME:
A small hotel wanted to improve accessibility for staff with disabilities. Their goal was to make all training materials available in accessible formats within four months. They partnered with a local disability support organization, trained managers, and shared updates with all staff. Employees felt more supported and valued.

Example 4: Construction SME:
A newcomer-owned construction company noticed that safety and DEI communications were mostly in English, making it hard for non-English-speaking staff to fully participate. They set a goal to provide key safety briefings, work instructions, and signage in multiple languages over six months. Employees were consulted on preferred languages, and supervisors were trained to check comprehension. As a result, staff felt safer, included, and more confident contributing ideas on the job site.

Multiple-Choice Benchmarking Questions

Question 1: Which of the following is an example of a SMART DEI goal for an SME?
A) Increase hires from equity-deserving groups by 15% in six months and track progress monthly
B) Write DEI goals, but never involve staff
C) Hire as many people as possible without tracking progress
D) Only review goals if a complaint arises

Answer: A
Explanation: SMART goals are specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound, and progress should be tracked regularly.

Question 2: A construction SME wants all staff to understand safety and DEI procedures. What is a practical action that demonstrates employee involvement?
A) Only provide safety materials in English
B) Ask employees which languages they prefer for safety and DEI communications and provide translated materials
C) Ignore feedback from non-English-speaking staff
D) Post instructions on a bulletin board without discussion

Answer: B
Explanation: Including employees in decisions about communication ensures DEI actions are accessible and effective.

Question 3: Why is continuous improvement important in DEI action planning?
A) Reviewing progress quarterly and updating plans based on feedback
B) Setting one-time goals and moving on
C) Ignoring employee feedback to save time
D) Only tracking outputs, not outcomes

Answer: A

Explanation: Continuous improvement ensures DEI plans remain relevant, actionable, and inclusive, based on real-world feedback.

Question 4: Which of the following demonstrates prioritization in DEI planning?
A) Trying to change everything at once with no clear focus
B) Selecting a few high-impact DEI actions to implement over the next six months
C) Focusing only on legal compliance and ignoring culture
D) Completing DEI initiatives without employee input

Answer: B
Explanation: Prioritizing high-impact actions makes DEI efforts achievable and sustainable, especially for SMEs with limited resources.

Local & Practical Resources

- **CCDI DEI Planning Guides:** Templates for setting and tracking DEI goals. www.ccdi.ca
- **Pride at Work Canada:** Helps employers create inclusive recruitment processes for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual, and other diverse sexual and gender identities. Website: www.prideatwork.ca
- **Indigenous Works:** Supports employers in recruiting, retaining, and advancing Indigenous talent. Website: www.indigenousworks.ca
- **Toronto Community Employment Services (TCES):** Connects employers to job seekers from diverse backgrounds, including newcomers and youth. www.tces.ca
- **ACCES Employment:** Connects newcomers, refugees, and internationally trained professionals with employers. www.accesemployment.ca
- **Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Job Board:** Diversity-focused job board for Canadian employers. www.ccdi.ca
- **Workplace Strategies for Mental Health - Inclusive Action Tools:** Practical tools for building psychologically safe and inclusive workplaces. www.workplacestrategiesformentalhealth.com
- **Canadian Women's Foundation -Leadership & Inclusion:** Guidance for inclusive leadership and mentorship. www.canadianwomen.org
- **BuildForce Canada - Construction Workforce Development:** Provides guidance, training resources, and best practices for inclusive hiring and workforce development in the construction industry. www.buildforce.ca
- **Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion Job Board** – A national diversity, equity, and inclusion-focused job board connecting employers with diverse talent across Canada. Website: www.ccdi.ca

Connection to the DEI Self-Audit Tool
This module connects to Section I: Representation in Leadership, Section J: Measuring DEI Progress and Section L: Community Engagement & Partnerships. The audit questions will help you assess how power and accountability are distributed and acted on in your workplace.

Closing Section: Reflection and Next Steps

Reflection
Thank you for completing this Self-Directed DEI Training Tool. By working through the modules, you've explored key concepts, examined your organization's practices, and considered how to create a more inclusive workplace. Take a moment to reflect on your learnings:

- What insights will you carry forward into your daily work?
- Which practices or policies could you start implementing immediately?
- How will you track progress over time?

Next Steps
Consider creating an action plan based on what you learned. You might:

- Review your DEI Self-Audit results to identify priority areas.
- Set measurable goals and timelines for change.
- Assign responsibilities to team members and create accountability checkpoints.
- Foster ongoing learning by sharing insights with your colleagues and encouraging two-way feedback.

Acknowledgments

This toolkit was created to support Canadian SMEs in building inclusive workplaces. It brings together research, expert insights, and lived experiences to provide practical, actionable guidance.

Feedback

Your experience matters. Please share your feedback, suggestions, or questions to help improve this resource for other organizations.

Every step you take toward inclusion builds a workplace where everyone can thrive. Your commitment doesn't just change today. It sparks meaningful connections, fuels powerful conversations, and leaves a lasting legacy where everyone belongs." **Candace Sidoruk**