

EQUITY DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

TIPS FOR SUPPORTING EQUITY,
DIVERSITY, AND INCLUSION
DURING CRISIS & DISRUPTION

LESSONS FROM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC



Recommendations from the NSERC Chair's Network



Chairs for Women in Science and Engineering
Chaires pour les femmes en sciences et en génie

Introduction

Supporting EDI during crisis/disruption requires focusing on **people**; putting people's diverse needs ahead of the usual institutional processes and rules by first differentiating what is "needed" from what is "wanted". Moreover, one-size-fits-all solutions will result in inequities because these solutions often implicitly assume a particular type of (privileged) worker, such as full-time faculty members and staff; those with relatively light service responsibilities; or those with a partner that shares caregiving/domestic responsibilities, for example.^{1,2}

Why EDI Matters During Crisis/Disruption

Maintaining a commitment to EDI during crisis/disruption is essential to guard against creating new (or worsening existing^{3,4}) structural career inequities such as long-term salary inequalities associated with delayed hiring and promotion until after a crisis/disruption has passed^{1,5,6,7}; loss of income/experience when full- and part-time employees' courses and lab sections are reduced; and loss of research time, perhaps due to new crisis/disruption-related administrative work (and the subsequent effect that reduced research productivity may have on faculty members' future outcomes, such as performance reviews).^{8,9,10,11}

Accordingly, the NSERC Chairs for Women in Science and Engineering's tips for protecting and promoting EDI are informed by three core, underlying assumptions:

- Proposed solutions to crisis/disruption must be developed through consultation with diverse stakeholders⁶; and be flexible so that they may fit a wide range of personal circumstances
- Faculty members, staff, and student workloads must be defined holistically; recognizing both paid and unpaid labour performed at work and home
- Regular, consistent communication amongst team members¹² and across institutional levels/units is essential (e.g., senior administration, faculty members, staff, and students)⁶

Tips

1. Redefine "normal"

- Recognize that home and family lives will be a priority, perhaps more than ever before¹²
- Moderate productivity expectations⁴: determine which tasks are "necessary", as opposed to "desired" (e.g., suspend or cancel certain non-essential activities, such as committees and internal reports²); and encourage taking breaks
- Allow team members to set their own flexible schedule under their new circumstances, including preferred methods of contact (e.g., telephone calls vs. video conferencing)
- Recognize faculty members' right to be disconnected from technology; and discuss/respect the boundaries they have set regarding their work and non-work time (e.g., requesting that emails be limited to standard daytime work hours and not assuming someone is available whenever their calendar shows an opening)

- Check-in to determine team members' new availability for meetings², etc. (especially important for those with caregiving responsibilities)
- Set aside contingency resources/funds for all faculty members to transition to new work environments, as necessary⁶ (e.g., appropriate chairs and equipment to work from home). Alternative solutions may include allowing faculty members to take their office equipment home with them (e.g., computers, printers, and printing supplies etc.)

2. Recognize and support women's disproportionate responsibility for caregiving^{2,9,13}

- Continually communicate with team members about their caregiving demands (e.g., children, elderly relatives, and other dependents), as their circumstances may change over time (i.e., an initial check-in regarding non-work demands is not enough)
- Ask women what support structures they have and which resources they need to continue to contribute and feel supported (e.g., help with scheduling meetings/clerical tasks; or teaching relief/deferral)⁴
- Recognize that women faculty members' care workload is likely to include a disproportionate responsibility for their students' emotional/personal concerns relative to their male colleagues¹⁴ (i.e., acknowledge that professors' check-ins with their students, especially international students with smaller local support networks^{15,16}, are necessary and can require a significant investment of professors' time/effort). As a result, faculty members have less time for required tasks (e.g., research or teaching preparation) and may experience greater emotional stress¹⁴
 - Develop mechanisms to account for these efforts, so that the full scope of faculty members' care workloads can be understood and supported (e.g., monthly activity reports)¹⁴
- Explicitly communicate to men that their caregiving/household labour efforts are encouraged and will be supported; and acknowledge that sharing the domestic workload is essential for women to fully participate in their careers^{4,11}

3. Support mental health and well-being^{1,12}

- Check-in with team members about their mental health throughout the crisis/disruption
- Plan to allocate additional mental health resources² (e.g., counselling services and workshops)

4. Collect new data to inform equitable decision-making and policy development^{1,17}

- Develop and administer a comprehensive crisis and disruption experiences survey to faculty and staff members
 - Suggested core topics include: caregiving loads (e.g., children, elders, and students), including asking how these loads may have changed through the course of the crisis/disruption; academic workload assessment, including new work arising from the crisis/disruption; and the time/impact of caring for students; work-life balance; mental health and well-being

- Develop and administer short mid- and end-term surveys to senior administrative committee members tasked with responding to the crisis/disruption to gauge their perceived level of inclusion and assess how well EDI has been promoted

5. Develop new multi-level communication mechanisms

- Create a diverse/inclusive, multi-level crisis advisory committee¹ made up of staff, faculty members, and senior administration to advise on the equity effects of proposed institutional decisions (e.g., closing down campus child care services^{1,18,19}; or reducing labs/classes for part-time vs. full-time employees)
- Identify additional stakeholder communities and invite them to develop and share their own recommendations for responding to the crisis/disruption in a way that promotes EDI¹ (e.g., a group to make recommendations for inclusive online teaching)
 - For example, it may be necessary to establish structures to support students who may be vulnerable to authority figures during times of disruption/crisis (e.g., supervisors who may exert power regarding financial support or thesis work)
- Create a special ombudsperson position to facilitate safe and confidential communication between campus groups (faculty members, staff, and administration)
- Appoint an EDI representative to sit in on high-level decision-making bodies to observe the process and make suggestions for improvement, if needed
- Provide regular updates to the university community about all on-going initiatives, changes, and resources related to the crisis/disruption; and specifically discuss how EDI is being protected/enhanced by these actions
- Schedule workshops specifically for senior male administrators/leaders so that they may learn about how the crisis/disruption has impacted female, immigrant, and Black, Indigenous, and People of Colour (BIPOC) faculty¹⁵ (e.g., report results from the faculty/staff members' experiences surveys that may describe experiences of harassment or worrying about their families overseas, etc.)
- Establish a committee to evaluate the institutional response to crises/disruption (e.g., mandatory transition from in-person to online learning)^{4,6}

6. Develop new policies and procedures based on data collection and diverse stakeholder input

- Flexible work arrangements: provide clear wording and policies around building flexible work environments during crisis/disruption recognizing that faculty/staff also need to support their families (i.e., demonstrate compassion through official policy)
- Teaching: provide faculty members with the option to defer teaching; and either waive course evaluations or encourage professors and instructors to use the feedback for pedagogical purposes only, as students' opinions may be significantly influenced by external factors related to the crisis/disruption (e.g., mandatory transition from in-person to online learning)^{4,6}

- New administrative work: ensure faculty/staff are recognized⁶ and/or compensated for new work arising from crises/disruption², such as advisory/evaluation committees or administrative work (e.g., provide course releases, research support, stipend, etc.)
 - Ensure new EDI, administrative, and procedural work arising from crisis/disruption (e.g., applications to continue work on campus/conduct research with human subjects) is fairly distributed (e.g., that women and marginalized identity faculty members are not assigned a disproportionate amount of this work)^{3,19,20}
- Hiring, tenure, and promotion: develop and circulate hiring, tenure, and promotion guidelines⁵ that take crisis/disruption into account in a timely manner (e.g., how to evaluate job candidates whose research, teaching, and service was affected by the COVID-19 pandemic; or how to credit EDI and service work performed in response to crisis/disruption)^{1,2,4,7,19}

EDI Reminders

1. For online teaching/learning

- Provide increased technical support/resources to faculty members who are learning to navigate online teaching (e.g., daily drop-in training sessions); and recognize that faculty members with disabilities⁵ may require additional supports^{1,15}
- Recognize that class sizes may significantly increase when courses migrate online, which means that professors'/instructors' workloads also increase (e.g., professors/instructors must dedicate more time to e-mail communication, student meetings, and grading)
- Establish new methods of communication (e.g., a hotline) for faculty members and students struggling with the online environment
- Ensure that all online teaching materials are compliant with disability rights legislation and that online teaching policies, resources, and guidelines are developed by a committee that includes EDI experts

2. For online/video conference meetings

- Maintain professionalism prior, during, and following video conference calls. Online meetings are no different than in-person meetings on campus; bias and/or incivility (e.g., sexist jokes or comments) towards colleagues remain inappropriate
- Respect fairness during online conference calls; ensure all attendees have a chance to speak by using the "raise your hand" option; and do not ask for cameras to be turned on

3. For faculty/staff presentations

- Ensure a diversity of speakers for seminars, panels, and workshops scheduled as part of crisis/disruption response
- Recommend the use of subtitling for all online presentations for those who may be hearing impaired (provide guidelines for presenters on how to do this)

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NSERC Chairs for Women in Science and Engineering:

Dr. Tamara Franz-Ondendaal (Atlantic Region)
E: Tamara.Franz-Ondendaal@msvu.ca

Dr. Laleh Behjat (Prairies Region)
E: laleh@ucalgary.ca

Dr. Lesley Shannon (BC & Yukon Region)
E: lshannon@sfu.ca

Dr. Shohini Ghose (Ontario Region)
E: sghose@wlu.ca

Dr. Eve Langelier (Québec Region)
E: Eve.Langelier@usherbrooke.ca

University of Manitoba:

Centre for Social Science Research & Policy
Dr. Jennifer Dengate E: Jennifer.Dengate@umanitoba.ca
Dr. Tracey Peter E: Tracey.Peter@umanitoba.ca

Faculty of Agricultural & Food Sciences
Dr. Annemieke Farenhorst
E: Annemieke.Farenhorst@umanitoba.ca