



# Equity, diversity and inclusion in climate action in Canada: **The role of philanthropy**

A summary report of findings by  
Dr. Christina Hoicka and research team  
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Photo credit: Eyoel Kahssay



McConnell

# Introduction

**Many organizations are working to advance a transition to a net-zero carbon economy in Canada.** Policy research and advocacy, program development and delivery, citizen engagement, movement organizing, shareholder engagement, public campaigning, and sustainable finance research are some of the diverse strategies deployed by climate organizations across the country. In order to see equitable outcomes, it is important to ask: who is at the table when climate mitigation measures, programs and policies are developed and implemented? Who will be impacted by these decisions? Who are the people most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change? And how do we ensure that gender parity, Indigenous rights and equity considerations are built into climate mitigation policies from the outset?

The face of the climate movement is changing in Canada thanks to the growing recognition of intersectionality and social justice movements. For philanthropy to keep pace with this change, funders must help to identify and overcome some of the systemic barriers faced by individuals and communities that are taking action to tackle the climate crisis.

**To address this need, McConnell asked Dr. Hoicka and her research team to assess the level of equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) in the ecosystem of climate organizations in Canada and to make recommendations for philanthropy's role in advancing EDI.**

The research found that when organizations are led by youth, Indigenous people and gender diverse people, those organizations tend to address a wide range of equity-deserving groups, demonstrating that stakeholder-led groups are concerned about intersectional issues.

**We are happy to share our summary of the research report by Dr. Hoicka and her team that will inform our journey in supporting an equitable and just transition to a net-zero carbon economy.** We hope that this summary of the research findings will be useful to other organizations in the sector as well.

# Definitions

## EDI and EDIA

The authors use the acronym **EDI**, which stands for Equity, Diversity and Inclusion. Many organizations, McConnell included, also use the term **EDIA**, for Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility. These terms are used by organizations looking to improve the social representation in the composition of their staff across all ranks, to ensure the fair distribution of opportunities and access to benefits associated with organizational practices and activities, and to foster an environment in which all skills and experiences are validated, and each individual's contributions are properly recognized.

## Decolonization

**Decolonization** refers to creating the space and support for non-Western traditions, knowledge and perspectives (some organizations use the EDID acronym: Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Decolonization)

## Intersectionality

The authors use the term **intersectionality** to refer to the multiple and combined identities a person holds, which ultimately shape their experiences and life chances. Intersectionality offers a frame to investigate the challenges and barriers people face, and how systems, procedures, and institutions impact people differently, depending on their combined identities. Coutinho et al.

The term intersectionality was originally coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 to describe how overlapping and interdependent systems of discrimination or disadvantage create distinct experiences for people with multiple identity categories.

Dr. Hoicka and the team of researchers use the terms **"conventional-led"** and **"stakeholder-led"** to distinguish between the groups they analyzed.



## Conventional-led

**Conventional-led organizations** are those with a structure that might respond to stakeholder concerns, however they are **not necessarily led by and staffed by** the stakeholders in question. From Dr. Hoicka's research, we learned that 82% of the organizations working to advance a net-zero carbon economy in Canada are "conventional-led" organizations.

## Stakeholder-led

**Stakeholder-led organizations** are the organizations **led by** stakeholders who are members of equity-deserving groups.

# Highlights from the report



## *Philanthropic organisations advancing equity, diversity and inclusion in the net-zero carbon economy in Canada.*

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Researchers: Dr. Christina E. Hoicka (PI), Yuxu Zhao, Jessica Conroy, Dr. Aline Coutinho, Dr. Rachana Devkota, Dr. Jennifer Taylor. Research carried out at York University and University of Victoria, Canada.

The research identified **456 organizations** operating to advance the net-zero carbon economy in Canada. Organizations were analysed as to whether and how they addressed or involved stakeholders from specific equity-deserving groups. The selected categories reflect socioeconomic identity factors, such as gender, age, race, economic status, place of residence, newcomer status, and other factors.

Initial analysis of this list of organizations found that **the vast majority of organizations engaged in the net-zero carbon economy in Canada do not appear to be led by equity-deserving groups** [described in the full report as “equity-seeking” groups], and approximately half are “addressing” equity-deserving groups. Few organizations led by youth, Indigenous Peoples, racialized communities, immigrants, low-income individuals, disabled people, seniors, and Northern and coastal communities were found in the net zero carbon economy landscape. It is unclear whether this is because there are few organizations in the net-zero carbon economy led by equity-deserving groups, or whether they are not often recognized or funded for the work that they do.

When analyzing organizational leadership, the report found that 348 organizations, **approximately 82%, are conventional-led**. The remaining organizations are stakeholder-led, meaning they are led by members of equity-deserving groups. Of concern was that the initial analysis found only five gender diversity-led organizations, two led from Northern and coastal communities, two led by seniors, one led by racialized communities, one immigrant/refugee-led organization, and no low-income households led organizations operating in the net-zero carbon economy in Canada.

The report found that EDI activities focus on outward facing activities, such as commitments or targets, training and education and community engagement and participatory action. The categories with the least activity are those internal to organizations. **When organizations are led by youth, Indigenous people and gender diverse people, those organizations tend to address a range of equity-deserving groups, demonstrating stakeholder led groups are concerned about intersectional issues.** Conventional-led organizations are also addressing equity-deserving groups, primarily addressing youth (67.4%) and Indigenous peoples (55.7%), followed by racialized communities (27.7%) and gender diverse stakeholders (21.4%).

# Recommendations

**Based on this research, the authors made recommendations to McConnell as we seek to make positive changes in EDI and the net-zero carbon economy. They may be of interest to other philanthropic foundations. Below is a summary of the report's recommendations, including:**

- Develop an internal framework for evaluating EDI of a funding portfolio and provide ongoing support to improve EDI with partners, and
- Provide support to those who are currently marginalized or excluded from the transition to a net-zero carbon economy, as well as those who are most vulnerable to the impacts of climate change.

## **1. Scope**

The authors recommend that the Foundation consider the scope of equity-deserving groups to be addressed. Examples include youth, whose organizations are often ephemeral, as well as gender diversity, racialized, northern and coastal communities, seniors, immigrant and refugee, and low-income household led. Another consideration is whether to include skilled trades and labour organizations as they address a cross-section of equity-deserving groups.

## **2. Addressing conventional-led organizations**

In order to address EDI activities in conventional-led organizations, the authors recommend that McConnell find out more about whether they consider themselves to be conventional or stakeholder-led, as well as the types of activities they are engaging in that may not be listed on their websites. Gaining more information about what EDI activities they would like to implement, and what is limiting them, would be useful considerations to deepen the reflection, and, as a result, to find solutions as to what would be needed to provide support or encouragement to enhance these groups' work.

## **3. Aiming for transformative change**

The stakeholders consulted for this project recommend that EDI in well-resourced organizations should be addressed differently than with organizations run by equity-deserving groups. They also recommend that the McConnell Foundation focus on transformative change, not EDI checklists.



#### 4. Reflecting on Indigenous Peoples and communities

The authors recommend McConnell engage in decolonizing strategies in order to work directly with Indigenous groups and communities to co-create strategies of support that fit the context. There are several organizations, research projects and researchers in Canada that are taking decolonizing approaches to Indigenous rights holders' participation in the net-zero carbon economy that philanthropic foundations can engage with.

#### 5. Engage, listen and collaborate

The authors recommend that we need to engage and listen first and foremost. A collaborative approach must be taken, using co-design and participatory program development. Approaches and needs will defer within large conventional-led organizations and organizations that are led by equity-deserving groups. On this journey we should aim for transformational change, and not simply transactional changes.



Photo credit: Dulcey Lima



# What we learned

**Addressing EDIA across all our programs:** Improving equity, diversity, inclusion and accessibility is an effort not limited to our climate work, but across all of our Foundation's focus areas. Steps we have taken include simplifying our funding application process, publishing our due diligence criteria online, making ourselves available to potential partners through office hours and committing to implementing EDIA in our funding. We are grateful for the support of **The Inclusion Project** on this journey.

**Here are some of the useful and practical tools we are currently using to assess and improve our funding practices to be more accessible, equitable and inclusive:**

- **1. Equitable Grantmaking Continuum**

The US not-for-profit Rooted in Vibrant Communities (RVC) developed a practical assessment tool: **The Equitable Grantmaking Continuum**. The Continuum outlines a number of funding practices ranging from the most equitable practices (Level 3) to inequitable practices (Level 1). This tool can be used by funders to assess how equitable funding and grantmaking processes are, and to clearly identify steps that can be taken to improve grantmaking processes. This provides a transparent method to make funding more equitable. It is easy and straightforward to use: just go through and select which item is most closely aligned with your current funding practices. This will result in a score that will tell you how equitable your funding practices currently are, and highlights where you could be more equitable.

- **2. Vancouver Foundation: Flippin' Logic Cards**

The Vancouver Foundation has developed the **Flippin' Logic Cards** to help funders make their granting more equitable. Readers can find out how to flip that logic on its head to be more equitable.

- **3. Justice Funders: Just Transition for Philanthropy**

A useful assessment tool to determine where you are as a funder on a spectrum of more extractive, less extractive, restorative, regenerative and transformational.

McConnell is also a signatory of the **Canadian Philanthropic Commitment on Climate Change**, along with other Canadian foundations. Amongst the seven commitments in this declaration, it is specified that: “we will seek opportunities to contribute to a fair and lasting transition to a net zero world, and to support adaptation to climate change impacts, especially in the most affected communities.”

We were also grateful to participate in the **Justice, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Accelerator** organized by Philanthropic Foundations of Canada, a 10-month program where we found peer-support and many additional resources to continue to improve.

Research and early implementation shows that there is nothing inherent in the transition to a net-zero carbon economy that will make it equitable for all. There is a real risk that the urgency of ensuring a climate-safe world may come at the expense of Indigenous rights, gender parity, as well as income and wealth equality.

**We hope that these highlights from Dr. Hoicka’s report offer useful insights and recommendations to integrate EDIA practices when funding climate organizations.**





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