

TRANSFORMING CLIMATE ACTION

Respectful Workplace & Research Teams Recruitment and Retention Guidelines

Highly qualified personnel (HQP), such as students and postdoctoral fellows (PDF), may be hired and funded through the Transforming Climate Action (TCA) training programs, such as the Ocean Graduate Excellence Network and the International Postdoctoral Fellowship program, and/or through large research projects (LRPs). The TCA Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, Accessibility (EDIA) Action Plan, supported by research (Henry et al., 2017; Johri et al., 2021; Ocean Frontier Institute, 2024), has identified that science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) lack adequate representation from underrepresented groups (UGs) including women, Indigenous and racialized individuals, persons with (dis)abilities, and members from the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities. TCA is committed to providing equitable and fair opportunities to everyone regardless of gender, gender identity or expression, ethnicity, race, national background, (dis)ability, or other diversity factors. Without concrete recruitment guidelines, TCA runs the risk of not achieving its goal of balanced representation at all levels of TCA participation. A lack of diversity of perspectives will perpetuate barriers faced by underrepresented groups, leading to inequitable conditions whereby talented individuals are not provided fair opportunities. Targeted recruitment of people from underrepresented groups into positions within TCA, including leadership roles, is important to improve the diversity of perspectives, increase innovation, and provide mentorship to students and early career researchers.

In line with Canada First Research Excellence Fund (CFREF) EDI expectations and the balanced representation goals of the TCA program, it is proposed that there be formal recruitment and retention guidelines for HQP within TCA. This will ensure equitable and fair opportunities are made available to everyone in an open and transparent manner. Formal recruitment and retention processes may empower historically underrepresented groups and individuals who have been systematically excluded and denied opportunities to be part of the Canadian research ecosystem, including, but not limited to STEM and marine science educational and training opportunities

Recruitment and Retention Guidelines

These guidelines apply to all researchers hiring students and/or postdoctoral fellows with funding from the TCA research program. Researchers hiring HQP under formal TCA programs, such as the Ocean Graduate Excellence Network and the International Postdoctoral Fellowship program, must follow these guidelines; researchers receiving TCA funding are strongly encouraged to follow these guidelines when hiring outside the formal TCA HQP programs. In the few instances where, due to the nature of the TCA program, a recruitment process is not possible (e.g., Industrial post-doctoral program where Mitacs funding has already been secured for a specific HQP), other ways to promote respectful engagement and balanced representation principles throughout that specific program are strongly encouraged (e.g., Indigenous cultural training, attending professional development focused on respectful engagement, etc.) and should be communicated to the relevant TCA program manager.

All researchers conducting HQP recruitment, interviews, and/or selection should complete a bias training module before commencing the recruitment process, which can be found here: <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/lms/e/bias/>

Hiring and employment practices must adhere to institutional Collective Agreements or Handbooks (if applicable,) or to the relevant institution's Faculty of Graduate Studies guidelines for student recruitment. It is strongly encouraged to consult with the institutional Human Resources department for guidance in supporting respectful engagement and equity throughout the hiring process. In cases where there is a discrepancy between TCA guidelines and institutional policies, handbooks, collective Agreements, or other institutional policies, the institutional documents take precedence.

Since members of some communities are over-represented in some disciplines and under-represented in others (e.g., education faculties in Quebec have far more women professors than men), opportunities for interdisciplinarity should be incorporated into all TCA student and postdoctoral fellow positions. This may be done through secondment, internship, training, co-supervision, co-curricular activities, or other opportunities.

Opportunities should be shared with the TCA Communications team and with the Training and Early Career Development Program Manager for promotion on the TCA website and social media platforms, as well as to EDG organizations. Additional targeted platforms may be identified, particularly to ensure the diversity of applicants. Opportunities should also be shared with TCA partner institutions and international partner institutes for promotion.

Research has shown that affinity bias, also known as familiarity bias, leads to negative assessments of candidates with backgrounds different from those of the interview panel (De Roo & Newman, 2021). Affinity bias is a bias towards others with shared backgrounds, educational levels, interests, traits, gender or race (Thakrar, 2018). To mitigate the risks of familiarity bias, researchers should avoid hiring HQP solely based on professional connections and should rather focus on promoting and advertising open opportunities through an open call. This will allow HQP from all backgrounds to declare their candidacy for open roles in an open and equitable manner.

When the HQP is part of/funded through the Ocean Graduate Excellence Network or the International Postdoctoral Fellowship Program, the Training and Early Career Development Program Manager will work with the academic supervisor(s) to support the recruitment and selection processes, following the Program Terms of Reference. This may include additional TCA program-specific application materials and a robust and diverse selection committee and process.

Researchers leading the search for HQP within their research teams are encouraged to conduct interviews with support from and in the presence of two other researchers. Reasonable effort should be made to ensure the interview panel includes members from diverse ethnic, gender and other diversity backgrounds. This will help provide a welcoming, respectful, and diverse environment, as well as helping to counteract the risks of unconscious bias by bringing a variety of perspectives to the interview process and addressing bias when it occurs.

Applicants from underrepresented groups and/or with a history of active involvement in, or commitment to respectful engagement improvement efforts should be considered favourably when multiple candidates are equivalent in qualifications and experiences.

With support from TCA and the Training and Early Career Development Program Manager, HQP should be provided with access to professional development opportunities and funding for skill development beyond those required for research or academic programs.

Retention of underrepresented HQP, students, and PDF is important and requires respectful, and psychologically safe working and research environments that respect and respond to diverse needs. Researchers are expected to be empathetic leaders on their teams and take proactive measures to foster respectful engagement, including inclusive behaviour, taking the above-mentioned bias training, and open-mindedness, among other measures.

Respectful behaviour includes but is not limited to: i) educating oneself by taking the time to learn about different cultures, identities (race, colour, gender identities, (dis)abilities, as well as other perspectives; ii) listening actively to others without interrupting them; iii) practicing empathy by putting oneself in other's shoes and imagine how they might experience a situation from their own perspective; iv) avoiding stereotypes and assumptions about others based on their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, (dis)ability, gender identity or expression, and other protected characteristics, and v) accommodating differences in perspectives, religions, cultures, genders, and societal norms. Recognize that diversity leads to innovation and that everyone is unique in their way and should be treated with dignity and respect based on their legally protected characteristics. When in doubt or if you have questions about **respectful** behaviour, you are invited to reach out to the TCA Respectful Engagement Project Manager, Aria Russell by email: aria.russell@dal.ca.

Additional recommended respectful engagement measures include:

- i) Using inclusive language in all recruitment postings. Inclusive language guidelines may differ by institution. Where guidelines are lacking, researchers and recruiters may wish to use: [Inclusive writing – Guidelines and resources](#). (maybe add French version)
- ii) Keeping postings open for at least 3 weeks.
- iii) Always include interview accommodation statements in postings, in line with institutional policies.

Avoiding Tokenism

Recruiters and managers must be intentional about the recruitment and hiring from within underrepresented groups, meaning that they must support and value respectful engagement in committees and/or group discussions where everyone's input is valued. This will help prevent tokenism, which is when equity work is done in a symbolic fashion, particularly the recruitment of individuals from underrepresented groups to create an appearance of diversity without truly valuing their contributions, expertise, lived experience, or knowledge.

The TCA Respectful Engagement Project Manager will monitor the progress of underrepresented communities' representation in TCA across all levels of participation. If the abovementioned strategy does not support balanced representation, other strategies will be explored.

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- ☐ I have completed the bias training module which can be found here: <https://cihr-irsc.gc.ca/lms/e/bias/>
- ☐ Considering the overrepresentation of some communities in some disciplines and underrepresentation in others, I will create opportunities for interdisciplinarity TCA student and postdoctoral fellow positions. This may be done through secondment, internship, training, co-supervision, co-curricular activities, or other opportunities.
- ☐ I will increase the visibility of opportunities to underrepresented groups by sharing available opportunities with the TCA communications team, TCA partner institutions, the Training and Early Career Program Manager, and targeted community associations.
- ☐ I will have an interview panel that reflects the diversity of applicants when conducting interviews with at least 1-2 other researchers.
- ☐ I will consider the lived experience of underrepresented groups as a qualification where they hold the same qualifications and professional experiences as other applicants.
- ☐ I am aware of respectful behaviour. Examples include but are not limited to: i) actively educating myself on different cultures, backgrounds, identities, and perspectives; ii) avoiding stereotypes and assumptions about others based on their gender, race, ethnicity, religion, (dis)ability, gender identity, or expression, and other protected characteristics.
- ☐ I have used inclusive language in all recruitment postings when recruiting for opportunities. Inclusive language guidelines may differ by institution. Where guidelines are lacking, researchers and recruiters may wish to use: [Inclusive writing – Guidelines and resources](#).
- ☐ I have kept postings open for at least 3 weeks.
- ☐ I have included accommodation statements in postings that are in line with institutional policies.

References

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