



This case summarizes lessons learned in adopting the GEET+ framework and assessment criteria.

Invest Ottawa (IO) is the lead economic development agency for knowledge-based industries in Canada's Capital, facilitating economic growth and job creation in Ottawa, Canada. In 2017, IO initiated the development of a new five-year strategic plan. This plan included a foundational goal to strengthen the organization's culture and service to the community through the prioritization of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI), with an initial focus on gender diversity.

IO initiated the execution of its strategic plan in 2018. Over four years, the organization established a Women Founders and Owners Sub-Committee of the Board of Directors; created an associated strategy; developed new EDI-specific practices, policies, procedures, and guidelines; and launched various programs, events, and initiatives that continue to explicitly serve women and BIPOC entrepreneurs. For additional details and resources, please reference the Appendix below.

To further build on this work and drive continued progress towards these critical goals, IO engaged Dr. Barbara Orser from Fall 2021 to Winter 2022 to work with senior personnel on the co-design and co-delivery of two GEET+ workshops. This project included close collaboration with 15 Invest Ottawa Venture Development leaders and team members to assess the full suite of IO programs.

Outcomes

- Hosted industry presentations and conferences to share learnings and further conversations around EDI (e.g., International Women's Day workshops, Accelerating Equitable Entrepreneurship Education & Training national conference: Panel 1 and Panel 2)
- Collaboratively established targets to measure the progress of EDI within programs (e.g., inclusive representation of speakers and advisors with lived experience, training advisors on principles of EDI and values of IO)
- Enhanced team understanding of gaps in IO culture and programs and created concrete opportunities to collaboratively address them with focused action
- Improved communication across the organization and increased collaboration and information sharing across the entire IO Venture Development team, enabling all employees and clients to benefit from shared learnings and experiences
- Achieved reciprocal benefit: This project helped to evolve Invest Ottawa's approach to EDI; allocate more focused time and collaboration on critical EDI goals and underscored the need and opportunity to leverage data in a greater way to inform decisions. It also enabled Invest Ottawa to contribute new EDI guiding principles and practices to the GEET+ team
- Increased awareness about the principles and forms of EDI, including groups of underrepresented entrepreneurs, sense of belonging, and use of language and colour. As an example, Invest Ottawa translated key learnings into an important affirmative statement on the SheBoot website entitled, Here for All Women (at the bottom of the homepage)
- Increased employee relationship development and cross-functional team collaboration, including the co-design and co-development of new programs and presentations. This was identified as an excellent development opportunity for all participants, and one of the greatest outcomes for the IO Venture Development team.



Lessons Learned

- To help drive change together with an external community, it is important to first look inward, come together as a team with the support of experts; identify internal strengths, areas for improvement, and opportunities; and collaborate on desired changes within the organization to support meaningful external action
- External, compensated EDI experts with lived experience from diverse communities are essential to help guide authentic and meaningful change. Together with internal EDI champions, these leaders are required to help intentional change and lead informed EDI discussions; facilitate introductions to underrepresented entrepreneurs; connect authentically and organically to diverse communities; and provide guidance and advice.
- Organizational buy-in across all levels of the organization is imperative, especially among senior leadership; every member has a critical role to play in the creation of a diverse and inclusive culture that fosters belonging
- Improving EDI in meaningful, intentional, and deliberate ways takes time. It requires long-term, sustained organizational commitment and prioritization to drive continuous change and improvement. It also requires funding and resources for critical mass, sustained action.
- The importance of benchmarking and evaluating performance, establishing well-defined goals with targets and metrics, and undertaking ongoing measurement and reporting
- It is critical to consistently disseminate knowledge gained (e.g., new insights), best practices, and tools, to encourage collaboration, equip every employee to help drive change and increase engagement with the local community.

IO recognizes that it is on a journey toward building an inclusive culture within the company and the community it serves. Meaningful, sustained change takes time, leadership, commitment, and extensive collaboration. The organization continues to take important steps, undertake transformative EDI work, initiatives, and activities, and focus on driving long-term, sustainable change.



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Learn more about Invest Ottawa at www.investottawa.ca



Appendix: Invest Ottawa's EDI Journey to Date

In support of the company's strategic plan's foundational goal and EDI objectives, Invest Ottawa:

- Established a [Women Founders and Owners Sub-Committee of the Board of Directors](#) with diverse and visionary leaders with entrepreneurship, business, and investment expertise, and created the organization's first [Gender Diversity and Inclusion Guidelines](#)
- Developed a Women Founders and Owners Strategy with clear near, medium, and long-term goals, targets, actions, resources, and measures, and consistent public reporting on progress annually in March
- Created and implemented with critical support from the community, this strategy is founded on a vision to be the best city in the world for women founders and business owners from every walk of life, and diverse intersections of identity, to launch, grow and scale commercially successful, global, and sustainable companies
- Evaluated and evolved all marketing and communications including imagery and language across the IO website and social media platforms as well as featured success stories, events, media pursuits, and role models, to help better target, engage, and support women founders
- Developed and implemented a variety of programs targeted to women founders and business owners, which include but are not limited to:
 - [IO Traction – Women in Tech](#), a program that aims to help women tech founders build a strong customer pipeline to generate critical early revenue
 - [SheBoot](#), the investment-readiness bootcamp designed by women entrepreneurs and investors for women founders leading tech and tech enabled startups, jointly established by IO and the Capital Angel Network.
 - [Starter Company Plus for BIPOC Entrepreneurs and Business Owners](#), helping aspiring founders start, expand, or purchase an early-stage, non-tech business
- Founded and leads the annual [International Women's Week](#) (IWW): Developed and delivered with and for the community, IWW brings together dozens of regional, national, and global partners during the entire month of March to participate in and benefit from a series of integrated and targeted women leadership events and initiatives.
 - A strategic driver for long-term sustainable change, IWW strives to help create a critical mass of successful women leaders from every walk of life who make a significant impact on our economy and society.
- Launched a EDI journey with defined goals and target outcomes and:
 - Confirmed participation in ISED's 50/30 Challenge with [a public commitment to become a better ally, and to drive action and sustainable change against racial injustice, hatred, and prejudice](#)
 - Developed and initiated implementation of an internal and external DEI strategy and action plan