

Allyship Practices to Foster Inclusion & Belonging

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Allyship is...

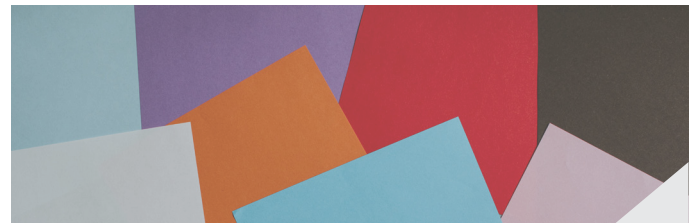
the practice of fostering inclusion. It is a practice where those with relative privilege and power support those who have been historically marginalized. Groups that have been historically marginalized are also referred to as equity-seeking or equity-deserving groups. Allies work to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion in our workplaces and communities by bringing awareness to and educating others on the realities and histories of marginalized people.

Allyship is vital in consulting engineering because...

many individuals experience diminished levels of psychological safety and belonging in our offices, in our client offices, on work sites, and in our communities.

Allies help create a positive environment for all, which is particularly important for those who are underrepresented in our workplaces or are part of an equity-deserving group because they are more likely to experience discrimination and inequities.

Positive environments for all result in teams that perform better, leading to improved problem solving and innovation. Workplaces that foster equity, diversity and inclusion result in teams that can best develop designs and deliver projects that meet the diverse needs of the communities and groups that consulting engineers serve.



Those in the engineering consulting industry can support culture change, which also enhances business and societal change, by acting as allies and creating a positive work environment for all people.

Did you know:

- Engineers Canada reports that only 14% of practicing professional engineers in Canada are women¹.
- Only 1% of professional engineers are Indigenous people², according to Engineers Canada.
- An Association of Professional Engineers and Geoscientists of Alberta's (APEGA) study found that women engineers were paid 11% less than engineers who are men³.
- Significantly less research has been conducted to examine the representation and experiences of professional engineers who are disabled, visible minorities, or members of the 2SLGBTQ+ community, especially within the consulting engineering industry.

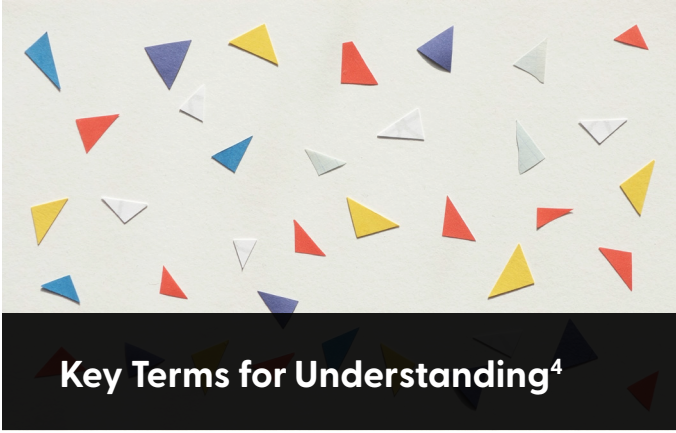
Some communities or groups of people experience barriers, based on their identities, to participate in society and the workplace. These communities, or equity-deserving groups, are frequently underrepresented in our workplaces, as evidenced in the above data, as a result of barriers to equal access, opportunities, and resources due to disadvantage and discrimination. This marginalization can be created by attitudinal, historic, social, and environmental barriers based on characteristics that are not limited to but include factors such as sex, gender, gender expression, age, ethnicity, race, nationality, disability, sexual orientation, religion, and family or marital status.



¹Engineers Canada. (2020). Sex representation in Engineering.

²Engineers Canada. (2020). Indigenous Engineering in Canada.

³APEGA. (2022). Women in the workplace: A shift in industry work culture.



Key Terms for Understanding⁴

Equity

Addresses the specific and unique needs of individuals with a focus on systems, programs, or policies which create environments without barriers to participation and advancement.

Equity is sometimes used interchangeably with the concept of equality. Equality is focused on providing everyone with the same amount or types of resources rather than treating people fairly based on their unique needs.

In an equitable workplace, individuals are treated fairly.

Diversity

Acknowledges the variety of unique dimensions, qualities, and characteristics we each possess. Diversity frequently categorizes aspects of our identities by age, gender, sex, abilities, race/ethnicity and could include other characteristics such as religion, education level, family and marital status.

A diverse workplace reflects the variety of viewpoints, perspectives and experiences present in the surrounding community.

Inclusion

Is a sense of belonging and/or being valued for one's unique contributions, as well as those held in common with others. We can be inclusive to others in our everyday behaviours.

An inclusive workplace fosters belonging and psychological safety for all.

Intersectionality

Describes how a person or group of people are affected by overlapping experiences with discrimination and disadvantage. It takes into account the layering of an individual's unique identity and/or characteristic factors, such as race, class, ability, or gender. People may experience cumulative adverse impacts based on multiple aspects of their identities.

An intersectional approach incorporates multiple viewpoints, perspectives and experiences which can occur concurrently.

Privilege

Innately grants access to resources and social power primarily to people in advantaged groups.

Privilege may not be visible to or understood by people who have it, however, those with relative privileges are best suited to act as allies.

⁴For more information, check out EGBC's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Professional Practice Guidelines.



How can I become an ally?

Potential allies can take action by first understanding and recognizing the challenges faced by underrepresented groups in our workplaces. To become an ally you can:

1. Increase your awareness of challenges faced by underrepresented groups
2. Foster inclusion through inclusive behaviours and actions

An allyship plan will help to formalize both your awareness and allyship practice by identifying behaviours and actions you can take.

Let's start with the end in mind: how can you foster inclusion? Researchers categorize inclusive allyship behaviours as either reactive or proactive⁵.

- Reactive allyship occurs in response to biased or psychologically unsafe behaviours when we see them (e.g. speaking up when witnessing sexism, racism, ableism, or homophobia)
- Proactive allyship involves efforts to increase inclusion and a sense of belonging (e.g. inviting someone from an underrepresented group to attend a workplace social event)

Inclusive acts which occur in the moment are reactive and could include:

- speaking up to interrupt biased behaviour such as discrimination and harassment,
- ensuring people are given credit for ideas or work during meetings, and
- listening and asking questions when someone describes an experience you haven't had while refraining from jumping in with your own personal stories.

Some examples of how we can plan to be proactively inclusive are:

- taking active bystander training,
- inviting those who are different from you to social events,
- ensuring those from underrepresented groups are meaningfully included in work assignments and promotion opportunities, and
- ensuring pay equity

⁵De Souza, L., & Schmader, T. (2022). The Misjudgment of men: Does pluralistic ignorance inhibit allyship? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 122(2), 265-285.

Allyship examples in consulting engineering

Professional Environment	Reactive Allyship Examples	Proactive Allyship Examples
<p>In Offices</p> <p>Key Challenge: Some people may not be credited with ideas or might not be given the same opportunities as others to advance in their careers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Immediately repeat what someone says at a meeting to ensure they are heard and receive credit for their ideas. ▪ Believe and validate others' experiences. Listen and do not make assumptions just because you haven't personally experienced it. ▪ Direct questions about specific topics to team members with subject-matter expertise rather than answering them yourself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Mentoring or coaching a young professional from an underrepresented group. ▪ Introducing people from underrepresented groups to key partners or clients to help bolster professional networks. ▪ Talk about the expertise you see in others and recommend people for assignments and learning opportunities. ▪ Share resources with others on topics related to allyship and the experiences of equity-seeking groups within consulting engineering.

Professional Environment	Reactive Allyship Examples	Proactive Allyship Examples
<p>On-Site</p> <p>Key Challenge: Differing relationships and organizational norms between the consultant, contractors, and clients may result in site environments that are less inclusive and safe for some people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Interject when inappropriate comments are made by others on site – whether this is someone from your organization or another organization such as the contractor. Bystander training can help you practice ways to safely speak up and support others to speak up too. ▪ Follow up with the client to explain that your organization will not be sending people to site until issues of disrespectful, discriminatory, or harassing behaviour are addressed. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Review respectful workplace policies that exist on site and ensure that all of your team members are aware of how to report concerns. Any violations should also be brought to your organization's attention, not just the client's. ▪ Include considerations for access to washrooms during travel to/from site as well as on site. Washroom expectations can be communicated to your team ahead of time so that they all know what to expect. This is especially important in remote locations. ▪ Integrate staff psychological safety into safety plans for site visits and develop an escalation plan that is accessible to field staff (e.g. a contact list of senior staff, who are trained on how to respond) should the site become unsafe.

Allyship examples in consulting engineering - CONT'D

Professional Environment	Reactive Allyship Examples	Proactive Allyship Examples
<p>In Communities</p> <p>Key Challenge: Working in a community setting and potentially with other partners can lead to environments and behaviours from others, including community members, that are not inclusive</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Plan and practice ways to interrupt bias and inequity in community meetings. Listen to and believe others who describe experiences that are different from your own experiences. Establish a parking lot for questions that are off-topic and are only intended to test the credibility of the speaker. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establish a code of conduct for community events to ensure community members and employees and workers are treated with respect. Ask your team members what proactive and reactive actions they would like you to use. Review the attendee lists for meetings and if missing, advocate for people from equity-deserving groups to be invited.

Professional Environment	Reactive Allyship Examples	Proactive Allyship Examples
<p>In General Communications</p> <p>Key Challenge: People may use exclusive language or not feel comfortable engaging in EDI discussions</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be an active bystander by following up and providing feedback to anyone who uses gendered or offensive language in their written or verbal communication. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use gender-inclusive greetings rather than starting an email with “gentlemen” consider using “folks” or “all”. In addition to safety moments, include EDI moments at meetings to normalize EDI discussions.

Professional Environment	Reactive Allyship Examples	Proactive Allyship Examples
<p>Online</p> <p>Key Challenge: Flexible or remote work is not valued as much as in-person work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be curious, ask questions rather than making assumptions about someone’s work ethic or skill level. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ask about people’s needs and working preferences and get to know them personally. Initiate regular check-ins with staff on workload and mental health/wellbeing. Hold regular “virtual office hours” and encourage your team members to speak to you about issues of concern.

Create an allyship action plan

As professionals, we incorporate continuous learning to ensure we are staying relevant. Similarly, you can create a continuous improvement plan to take meaningful allyship actions. Research shows that allies are most effective when they create an action plan. Actions can include advancing your knowledge through structured or self-guided learning, reflecting on areas you might have social influence, and actively supporting others in your workplace.

Allyship action plans should use SMART goals. SMART stands for specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound. For added accountability and support on your allyship journey, you can share your action plan with other potential allies. Here is an example of an action plan:

Specific Goal	Measurable I will know its complete when...	Achievable What resources/ support do I need to complete?	Realistic I have the time/ capacity to complete...	Time-bound I will complete my goal by...
I will read Bob Joseph's book 21 Things you May Not Know About the Indian Act to advance my understanding of barriers faced by Indigenous people in Canada.	I will read Bob Joseph's book 21 Things you May Not Know About the Indian Act to advance my understanding of barriers faced by Indigenous people in Canada.	I need to buy the book from my local bookstore. I will find a friend/colleague who is willing to read the book as well and have regular conversations about what we have learned.	I will block time in my calendar to read the book. I will pre-schedule monthly times to meet with my friend/colleague for our discussions.	June 2023

Additional resources to add to your personal allyship action plan

- Resources – [Acceptable Workplace Policies by Builders Code \(2022\)](#)
- Podcasts – [Select an episode from Westcoast Women in Engineering, Science and Technology](#)
- Book – Inclusion on Purpose: An Intersectional Approach to Creating a Culture of Belonging at Work by Ruchika Tulshyan (2022)
- Video – [Allyship in Practice](#)
- Report – [Change Catalyst State of Allyship Report: The Key to Workplace Inclusion](#)
- Report – [How to be an Ally in the Workplace by WWEST](#)
- Video – [What Allyship Means and How to Build Accountability by Canadian Equality Consulting](#)