



Equity Reporting in Procurement

June 2023

Considerations when
applying metrics to
design consultants



ACEC
BRITISH COLUMBIA



ACEC-BC members are energized when we collaborate, when our work is innovative, when we invest in our community, and when our words and actions are inclusive. We celebrate diversity and strive for equity in all that we do.

As professionals, we aspire to reflect the population we serve in the people who are on our team, and we believe our work will benefit from the diversity of perspective this will bring. The industry has long acknowledged that we are not meeting this aspiration, and we have invested significantly in our community to better engage people from underrepresented groups.

An important lever in encouraging action to address underrepresentation is the use of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) metrics in procurement. Qualification-based selection¹ (QBS) is an approach to procurement that supports better project outcomes for owners and project partners and is a procurement process that has

the potential to better integrate EDI metrics critical to advancing aspirations of the industry and their clients.

Through collaboration with ACEC-BC members and our partners in procurement, project delivery, and construction, we have observed an increase in EDI metrics in procurement. While the industry enthusiastically supports the intentions associated with this shift, disparate approaches and administration of reporting are inefficient and difficult. Further, they may also unintentionally promote inequity and marginalize people from underrepresented groups.

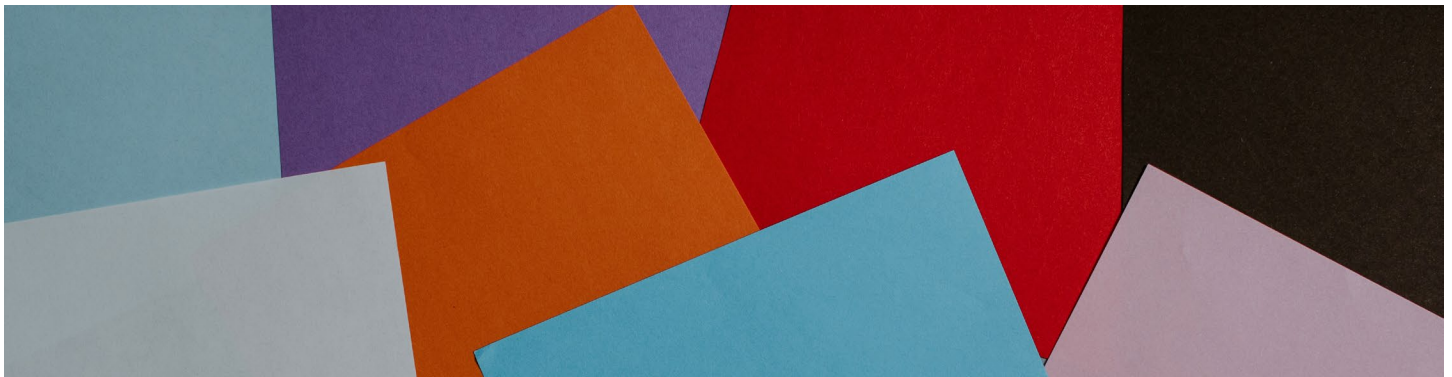
This bulletin is intended to provide foundational information on EDI in procurement to support dialogue between member firms and their clients. In turn, we hope this will encourage broader action to help to deliver on our aspiration of an industry that reflects the diversity of the general population.

Approach

This bulletin reviews current thinking on principles that we believe will engage project partners and advance EDI aspirations in consulting engineering project delivery. The bulletin also introduces further research planned by ACEC-BC to support members and their partners to integrate EDI in qualification-based selection.

The information and perspective provided is based in a common belief that project partners (owners, consulting engineering companies, contractors) seek to provide local economic benefit and to engage people from

underrepresented groups in design and construction. Underrepresented groups in design may include women² or non-binary people, Indigenous people³, people who identify as LGBTQ2S+, people with differing physical abilities, and other people whose identities are underrepresented in design and construction. From a design perspective, the gender-based analysis plus (GBA Plus) framework is a convenient way to recognize the diversity in our population and identify people who are underrepresented in a system.



¹ Qualification-based selection is a procurement practice for the selection of consulting engineering firms that bases selection on the engineering team's qualifications. Project scope and price are negotiated after selection. See: <https://www.acec.ca/advocacy/yes2qbs.html>

² Women refers to people who identify as women regardless of sex assignment at birth.

³ Indigenous people include First Nations, Inuit, and Métis.



Through discussion with members and organizations procuring engineering services, many different approaches have been observed to engage and encourage EDI. Following are common examples based on experiences reported in British Columbia.

Equity reporting:

Equity reporting refers to requirements to report information that are included in procurement or project documents. There is little to no commonality in terms of the degree of information requested or means of reporting. Examples include –

- › Project team composition, for example proportion of team members who identify as being from an underrepresented group (e.g., gender, Indigenous people, people with disabilities).
- › Supplier diversity, for example suppliers or sub-consultants utilised by the primary consulting team who are owned, controlled, or staffed by underrepresented groups (e.g., women-owned, black-owned businesses).
- › Organization data, for example demographic or pay equity data collected by the consultant's organization.
- › EDI training, policies, and certifications, for example organizational efforts like social certifications (e.g., pay equity, living wage), organizational policies (e.g., bullying and harassment, social procurement), and workforce training (e.g., allyship, bias).
- › Other organization information, for example statements or strategies that support EDI.

Evaluation:

Evaluation refers to how EDI information is reviewed and applied in procurement. Like equity reporting, there is little commonality in evaluation of EDI information. Examples include –

- › Review without application, for example data is requested and required but not used in evaluation of the consultant's proposal response.
- › Target evaluation, for example a pass / fail qualification regarding the consultant's ability to meet or exceed EDI metrics or a weighted qualification based on the consultant's response.
- › Term qualification or pre-qualification, for example the issue of a qualification rating based on the consultant's response that will be applied to consultant responses over a defined period. The consultant may or may not be able to improve their rating; the rating is likely to be reviewed on a periodic basis.

Outcomes:

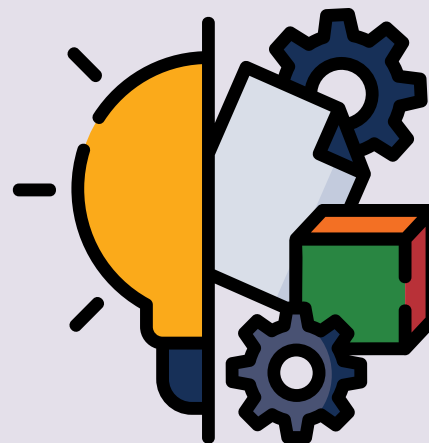
Outcomes refers to the inclusion in a consultant's proposal of how the consultant will deliver certain EDI outcomes during the project. Examples include –

- › Social outcomes, for example details on how selection of the project team will lead to broader community benefit (e.g., give-back to the community).
- › Consultation /collaboration outcomes, for example the consultant's approach to consulting or collaborating with a local or underrepresented population.
- › Design outcomes, for example how the consultant will integrate EDI in their design (e.g., use of design frameworks like GBA Plus).

The Opportunity

Including EDI in procurement is rooted in the goal of advancing the inclusion of people from underrepresented groups, with an overall goal of increasing diversity and equity within the industry. When procurement requirements are structured in a way that aligns with intended outcomes, it provides project partners with the opportunity to work together to advance EDI.

Beyond aspiration and culture, there are clear advantages that benefit industry performance and growth, for example by helping to address workforce capacity challenges through access to a larger population of potential team members and fostering relationships between project partners through mutual commitment to common goals and values.



The consulting engineering industry sees great value and opportunity in advancing EDI through project procurement and delivery. The industry acknowledges that taking different approaches as a means of identifying what actions will have the greatest impact is important. However, it is worth viewing each approach through an inclusion lens.

Data collection and reporting – team demographics:

Collection and reporting of people data like personal identity factors (e.g., gender, race) can be difficult or impossible for consulting engineering companies. Generally, this information is specifically not collected; it is considered deeply personal and not relevant to employment. Regardless, sharing data with external organizations including clients presents risk for both the firm and their team members. Data privacy obligations may restrict what can be held and shared; data reporting is only feasible if team members self-identify, and firms cannot obligate this requirement.

Disclosing identity can affect feelings of safety by threatening social identity; identity disclosure and reporting may introduce concerns regarding team qualification and selection, particularly where quotas or targets form part of consultant qualification.

Data collection and recording can be inconsistent, for example the basis for reporting proportional populations (e.g., metric is reported based on total workforce or metric is reported based on technical or regional workforce). Data collection and reporting significantly disadvantages smaller organizations where the population is too small to protect privacy or show progress toward defined

targets. Showing progress toward defined targets may be a disadvantage for large organizations as well, where the workforce is so large that broad engagement of underrepresented people may not be reflected in significant shifts in aggregate data.

Tokenization and barriers:

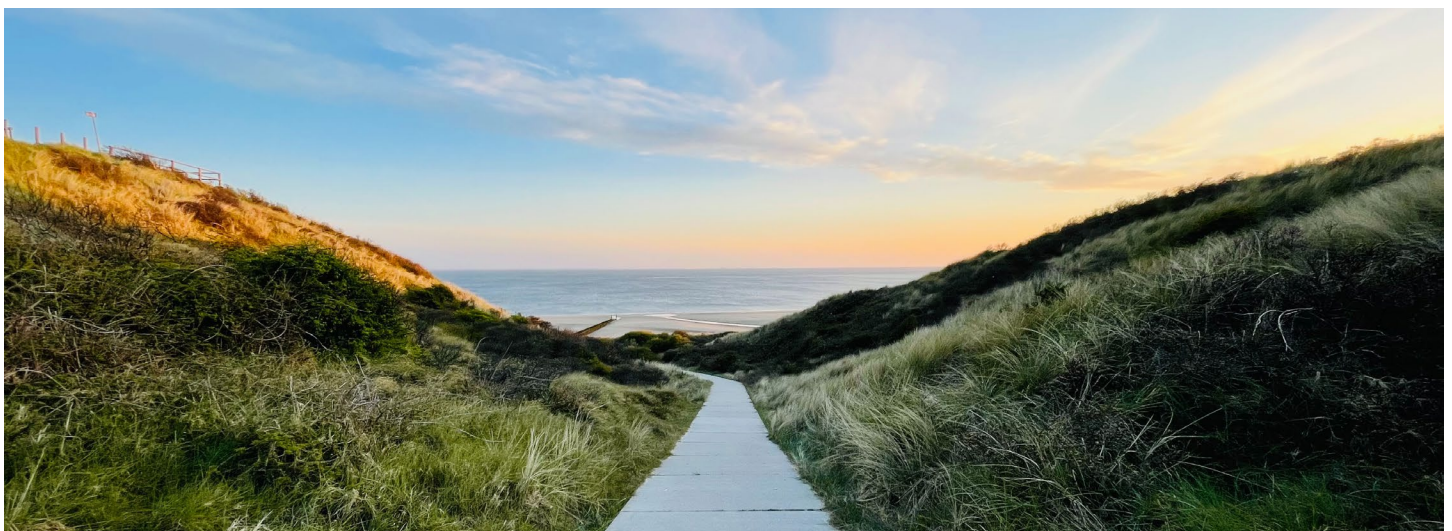
When underrepresented people are hired, promoted, or named to project teams, the opportunity can be undermined by feelings of tokenization when there are stated representation targets. Tokenization does result in harm, placing individuals in the position of feeling they are not respected for their ability which diminishes feelings of inclusion.

Open and honest dialogue about representation in the industry is encouraged; visionary targets of aligning industry population demographics with those of the public help to avoid unintentionally promoting tokenization.

Excluding firms:

The consulting engineering industry and their clients benefits from firm diversity, for example with respect to firm practice, ownership structure, and location. High quality service can be provided regardless of the number of people employed by the firm. When considering scale, large firms may have access to shared organizational resources that better support EDI initiatives as well as the collection and reporting of organizational data.

Responding to EDI metrics in procurement should not result in exclusion of small or specialty firms who may be actively engaged in advancing EDI but whose capacity may not support sophisticated programs or data collection.





With a common goal of advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in the consulting engineering industry and more broadly in design and construction, EDI in procurement is an exceptional tool to achieve this goal. However, it is not sufficient to focus on reporting metrics related to underrepresented groups.

Instead, prioritising actions that drive meaningful and sustained culture change toward more inclusive working conditions is needed and is an approach better aligned with qualification-based selection of consulting

engineers. Representation is important and tracking representation is a means of demonstrating progress but does not drive change in an of itself⁴.

In considering wise practices that support EDI in consulting engineering, ACEC-BC consulted with member firms to generate actions that support a firm's qualifications (organizational practice) and actions that can be taken by the client and their partners in project delivery to advance inclusion (project delivery strategies).

Organizational Practices

In assessing a consulting engineering company's qualification, assessment of the organization's practices is encouraged. Examples include –



Organization values and equity statement

Published statements on the organization's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion. The firm may also be requested to explain how they are measuring success.



Systematic barriers to participation

Review of operating practices or investment (e.g., allowance for attendance flexibility, investment in technology to support differing physical abilities) help demonstrate a commitment to including different groups of people.



Pay equity

Organizational approach to measuring and eliminating pay inequity including transparent reporting aligned with the organization's governance and size.



Investment in new practitioners

Programs to hire and train interns or co-op students, participation in accredited credentialing programs to support professional licensing, or support for newcomer practitioners who need local experience to qualify for a professional license.



Internal engagement / resource groups

Creating space for underrepresented team members and their allies to meet, exchange ideas, and provide advice to the organization.



Community engagement

Support for team members to participate in their community (professional service, community service, cultural learning); company participation in Associations or advocacy that focuses on equity, diversity, and inclusion.

Project Delivery Strategies

Advancing the common goal of equity, diversity, and inclusion in design and construction requires commitment from all project partners (owners, consulting engineering companies, contractors). Examples that help ensure the goal is reflect in project delivery include –



Project values and equity statement

Integrating principles of EDI in the project charter, public signage at the project site, proponent agreements, and site safety orientation. Project meetings may integrate review of delivery on values and equity similar to a safety review (e.g., incident, near-miss).



Systematic barriers to participation

Understand, identify, and remove systemic barriers like subtle forms of discrimination (e.g., safety equipment available in all sizes), access to safe and private spaces (e.g., prayer space, health), and requiring sufficient safe and clean hygiene facilities for all genders.



Investment in new practitioners

Requiring allocation of project hours for in-training practitioners (e.g., EIT, GIT, Intern Architect, apprentices).



Design tools and training

Incorporate design tools (e.g., GBA Plus analysis) that support inclusion and engagement of different perspectives. Engage in shared learning that builds awareness, fosters respect, and supports safe access for people from underrepresented groups.



Community engagement

Utilizing the project team environment to develop or deliver tools and opportunities that educate, inspire, and mentor the next generation and their educators in the community.

Moving Forward

Many of the observations and example actions addressed are already happening in the consulting engineering industry. Utilizing qualification-based selection, procurement of design services has the potential to better support outcomes for all partners provided qualification aligns with actions that advance inclusion and do not solely focus on representation.

ACEC-BC's Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion committee will continue to advance this dialogue through planned projects that delve into specific procurement practices. The objective of these actions is to identify effective approaches, encourage sharing of wise practice, and to support alignment of approach where practical.

Interested in learning more?

Explore ACEC-BC's selection of resources designed to support the Consulting Engineering Industry.