



Equity Reporting in Procurement

April 2025

Opportunities &
Impact for Consulting
Engineering Firms



ACEC
BRITISH COLUMBIA



EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Procurement in BC is evolving to incorporate social equity qualifications, aimed at fostering diversity and inclusion. This report examines current practices applied in procurement of consulting engineering services in BC, compares them to practices in other regions and industries, and offers perspective on effective practices supporting the shared social equity goals of consulting engineering companies, their clients, communities, and other partners.

Evident in the outcomes of this report is that the consulting engineering industry and their clients share common goals related to social equity. This alignment and the relative maturity of processes in BC led us to identify three key observations on the state of conditions in BC, and to offer four principles for consideration in building social equity qualifications into any procurement approach.

This report is intended to foster dialogue, helping to advance procurement practices that deliver equity and inclusion outcomes that advance our industry and help engage a more diverse workforce in the future.

Key observations:

Included in this report is information gathered through consultation with members, client organizations, and other industry organizations, as well as an environmental scan of existing practices and reports. The different perspectives and experiences from those working within consulting engineering in BC along with those from other industries and other regions provides opportunities to explore practices at different stages of maturity and with different influences (such as regulation), providing findings on current practices along with identification of considerations and opportunities for practices to evolve.

Three key observations were made:

Evolving Practice	Equity requirements in procurement are an evolving/emerging practice in BC, with many of the practices at early stages of use, implementation, and evaluation for impact. Requirements and application are not harmonized, resulting in a range of practices between procuring organizations.
Context	Context is important and must be understood by all participants. The procurement requirements must be relevant to the industry, services, project size, and the market where the work is being performed.
Shared Responsibility	Open dialogue and engagement are necessary to proceed towards shared goals of advancing diversity and equity. The approach should not be left to procuring organizations to determine on their own; dialogue with industry can help to identify effective practices. Transparency on the use and resulting outcomes is essential.

Guiding Principles:

The value of collaboration and sharing information cannot be overstated. As procuring organizations explore options it is important that they are open in sharing those that are effective. Achieving meaningful progress in equity, diversity, and inclusion within the consulting engineering industry requires an investment of time and resources. However, investment must align with impact and focus on practices and conditions that support the desired outcomes.

Looking ahead, the report offers four guiding principles to support procuring organizations to incorporate social equity elements in their procurement practices:

Clarity	Practices must include clear requirements, evaluation criteria, evaluation process, and weighting within the overall evaluation. Clear evaluation criteria include explanation of responses being assessed quantitatively (i.e., representation) and qualitatively (i.e., policies, programs, strategy).
Transparency	Procuring organizations must accept and support transparency of partnership arrangements – including the existence of financial agreements – and how these partners contribute to the decision-making process. Ideally, financial arrangements are best agreed by the procuring organization and clearly communicated to proponents.
Alignment	Alignment with other partner expectations and qualifications, industry practices, relevant regulations, and between approach and the desired outcomes is necessary. Where possible, aligning the practices and expectations for consultants and their clients is encouraged.
Impact Focused	Criteria for evaluation and the approach to evaluation should consider impact, seeking to identify requirements and practices that effect meaningful and lasting change within the industry and communities where the project is delivered. This includes consideration for both intended and unintended consequences when considering different approaches and criteria.

Shifting focus:

The recent introduction of equity related qualifications in procurement is advantageous in that organizations remain open to evolving their practices. The concept of equity-responsive organizations is offered as a potential consideration to guide equity-related procurement requirements for consulting engineering.

Equity responsive organizations demonstrate integration of equity, diversity, and inclusion principles into their policies, practices, and strategy, in alignment with recognized standards and recognized wise practices. Centring on equity responsive organizations focuses on effective practices and policies that drive changes to systems and structures, rather than focusing on ownership and representation.

It is evident that the continued shift towards more equitable and inclusive practices is necessary in consulting engineering companies, not only as a moral imperative but also as a strategic business advantage. The emphasis on equity-responsive organizations over equity-responsive procurement underscores the importance of focusing on meaningful impact. Measurement supports this shift by demonstrating progress but cannot in and of itself be a qualification for consulting engineering companies.

A note about Indigenous Inclusion:

The report also includes perspective on Indigenous inclusion in project procurement and delivery. Although this topic is referenced in feedback from consultation, it is misleading to equate Indigenous inclusion and a commitment to reconciliation solely with equity-related qualifications in procurement.

Indigenous inclusion is distinct from equity, diversity, and inclusion actions, and requires respectful collaboration with Indigenous peoples and communities as well as a commitment to learning and understanding about Indigenous culture, experience, and the impact our industry on Indigenous people in Canada.

ACEC-BC and our members strongly supports including Indigenous people and perspectives in all aspects of project delivery. Inclusion is an opportunity to advance projects as a collective; each project partner has a responsibility to form and foster relationships and understand how they contribute to meaningful inclusion of Indigenous people.

Like the EDI actions discussed in this report, meaningful inclusion of Indigenous people requires investment over time and cannot be achieved solely through project procurement obligations. Similarly, it cannot be achieved through the download of the project owner's commitments and responsibilities to project engineering and construction partners. We all have a role to play in ensuring that Indigenous people have access and are included in all aspects of project delivery.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Member Firms

Associated Engineering, BGC Engineering, Binnie, EXP, Hedgehog Technologies, Klohn Crippen Berger, McElhanney, Northwest Hydraulic Consultants, PBX Engineering, RAM Consulting, Stantec, and WSP

Client Organizations

City of Vancouver, Infrastructure BC, and the Vancouver Fraser Port Authority

Other Organizations

BC Construction Association, BC Road Builders & Heavy Construction Association, Colliers Project Leaders, and Turner Construction

ACEC-BC Committees

Board of Directors, Business Practices Committee, and the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee

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1.0 BACKGROUND

Heightened awareness of social responsibility and a commitment to fostering diverse and inclusive workplaces has catalysed changes in how organizations operate and conduct business. The journey towards building more inclusive and equitable environments requires action and changes in a wide range of business practices and systems.

Procurement has long been used as a lever to accelerate adoption and delivery of social policies. Like qualification of a supplier's sustainable business practices, which is now commonplace, owners are looking to procurement to reinforce their commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI). The Association of Consulting Engineering Companies – British Columbia (ACEC-BC) undertook this project to examine procurement practices that aim to increase EDI. The project explored current procurement practices for the consulting engineering services in BC as well as in other regions and industries. This report summarizes the information gathered, presenting key findings and strategic recommendations aimed at fostering effective and transparent practices within procurement that support EDI within our industry and province. This includes consideration for not just the project teams delivering the work but also the communities that are impacted by and users of the project deliverables.

We invite our members, their clients, and other project partners to engage with the report findings, sparking dialogue around how procurement can help advance our industry toward a future where equity and inclusion are integral to both the ways in which they work and in the work they deliver.

ACEC-BC released an initial report on this topic in June 2023, which is [available here](#). The initial report serves as an introduction to this follow-on study.

2.0 PROJECT SCOPE AND LIMITATIONS

The consulting engineering industry perspective was informed through consultation with a representative group of member firms in consultation sessions, and by sharing procurement documents and other relevant information. Owner (client) consultation was limited; while many showed interest in participating, it was noted that often the interest was to receive results of the study or to better understand the experience of other organizations. This feedback informed the key observation of the report that equity requirements in procurement are an evolving/emerging practice in BC.

In addition to consultation with direct participants in consulting engineering procurement (client, consultant), the report was informed through consultation with related industry organizations, particularly those engaged in other construction services.

Engineering services are very different from product suppliers or construction services, particularly when viewed through an equity lens. Engineering services often require highly specialized expertise, which can pose barriers to entry for equity-deserving groups due to the time and resources needed to develop such skills. In contrast, products and construction services may offer more accessible pathways to building diverse teams, as the skill development and training periods can be shorter. This discrepancy in the time required to develop specialized expertise can exacerbate existing disparities in the engineering field and extend the timelines to shift the diversity of teams. Procurement practices that include equity-related requirements must consider these differences, recognizing that practices that may be effective for other types of procurement could need to be adjusted or modified to be suitable the consulting engineering industry.

Outside of Canada, equity-related procurement practices are more common, providing ample opportunity to explore effective practices and outcomes in those areas. When considering the practices in other areas, it is important to consider some of the differences in law between other countries compared to BC and Canada. For example, there are specific limitations and guidelines on the collection and use of personal information in BC, including both [Provincial](#) and [Federal](#) laws. These laws limit the ability for employers to ask for, collect, and share personal information, including information about gender identity, racialization, Indigeneity, and more.

In addition to the data privacy laws noted above, to ensure racialized people are not disproportionately targeted and to address barriers they face, BC has an [Anti-Racism Data Act](#) that covers the use, collection, and disclosure of data. Organizations collecting data related to racialization and organizations asking for reporting related to racialization should be aware of the act as well as the supporting [Guide on Using Categorical Race & Ethnicity Variables](#).

3.0 TERMS USED IN THIS REPORT

Throughout this report, common terms are used to describe procurement of consulting engineering services or other products or services, terms describing the procuring agency or ACEC-BC members may commonly use. For example,

Owner / Client: Owner and client are used somewhat synonymously in this report. While the consulting engineering industry's clients are often infrastructure owners, clients can also include construction companies, agencies, architects, and other organizations. Typically, the procurement practices and organizations referenced in this study are public sector infrastructure owners.

Procuring organization: Typically, procurement organization or agency would be the client (or owner). However, under some circumstances, procurement may be handled by another party.

Proponent / respondent: Consulting engineering companies will be referred to as proponents or respondents, when it is evident that the procurement conditions described are in relation to procurement of consulting engineering services.

Members: Consulting engineering companies that are members of ACEC-BC are referred to as members.

This document also includes common terms are used to describe aspects of equity, including:

Indigenous: The term 'Indigenous' encompasses First Nations, Métis and Inuit people, either collectively or separately, and is a preferred term in international usage, e.g., the 'U.N. Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.'

Equity deserving group: A group of people who, because of systemic discrimination, face barriers that prevent them from having the same access to the resources and opportunities that are available to other members of society, and that are necessary for them to attain just outcomes.

Underrepresented: Individuals or groups with insufficient or inadequate representation in various aspects of university life, often determined when compared to their proportional representation in Canadian society or Labour Market Availability per Statistics Canada demographic data.

Representation: Representation is about seeing people from a range of equity deserving groups making meaningful contributions throughout different levels and departments within an organization or group.

4.0 HOW WE APPROACHED THE RESEARCH

The research for the report included consultation and an environmental scan of practices in use outside of BC.

Consultation with Member Firms

Structured consultation sessions with representatives from member firms were conducted to gather insights and firsthand perspectives on opportunities, challenges, and successes with equity-related procurement practices. Representatives were primarily based in BC, with some participants with experience from outside of Canada.

Consultation with Client and Other Industry Representatives

Interviews were conducted with representatives from three client organizations and three construction-industry organizations, offering perspective from the organizations that are setting equity-related procurement requirements as well as from organizations in adjacent industries that are also observing changes in equity-related procurement requirements.

Environmental Scan of Existing Practices and Reports

A review of existing practices, reports, and case studies on equity-related procurement was conducted. This scan aimed to identify trends, best practices, challenges, and innovations in procurement on a broader scale. Content was provided by member firms with exposure to various national and international practices.

By combining insights gathered from member, industry, and client perspectives, supplemented by an environmental scan, the research methodology aimed to provide a balanced overview of equity-related procurement practices.

4.1 CONSULTATION WITH MEMBER FIRMS

Representatives from 12 firms participated by providing input through different consultation mechanisms. The following methods were used to gather input from member firm representatives:

- Group consultation sessions where participants were invited to share input through guided discussion and use of an online collaboration tool.
- Group consultation with the ACEC-BC Small Firms Council and the EDI Committee, both of which represent a cross section of consulting engineering company representatives.
- Individual discussions with firm representatives who were unable to participate in the group consultation sessions.
- Responses provided by email.

The same focus topics and questions were used for all groups.

The focus of consultation sessions was to gather insights and experiences related to EDI reporting requirements within the context of procurement of consulting engineering services. Participants were encouraged to reflect on their firm's experiences through the following focus areas:

Effective Practices

Equity-related procurement requirements that were perceived as effective. This included requirements that firms could efficiently respond to as well as requirements that resulted in a positive impact on people and communities. The discussion examined specific approaches or aspects of the requirements that had proven successful.

Challenges

Equity-related procurement requirements that were difficult to meet or did not make sense for the role of the consulting engineer. Consultation addressed situations where firms had decided not to submit a proposal due to equity reporting requirements and the reasons behind such decisions.

Changes Made by Firms

Changes, if any, that firms had to make in practices, policies, programs, etc., to meet equity reporting requirements, including whether firms had to implement new systems to comply with any requirements that were part of the procurement or project delivery requirements.

Impact of Requirements

Reflection on the overall impact of equity reporting requirements on participating firms, exploring whether communities or certain groups of people, within or external to the firms, had been positively, negatively, or neutrally impacted by procurement requirements.

Certification Programs

Inquiry into awareness and usage of certification programs related to EDI requirements for procurement. This also included discussion of the benefits and challenges associated with these types of certification programs and identification of specific programs that participants found noteworthy.

4.2 CONSULTATION WITH CLIENT AND INDUSTRY REPRESENTATIVES

Representatives from client and construction-industry organizations were interviewed individually or participated in a panel discussion on this topic¹ explored the same themes as those for member firms from the position of the client or construction-industry organization.

4.3 ENVIRONMENTAL SCAN OF EXISTING PRACTICES AND REPORTS

An environmental scan was conducted to gather insights and lessons learned from procurement practices used in regions outside of BC, certification programs, and to gather guidance on effective practices. The scan included resources and programs shared by individuals during the consultation phase and searched for publicly available information and resources and references included within those reports.

¹ The 2023 ACEC-BC Annual General Meeting included a panel discussion on the topic "EDI in Procurement".

5.0 WHAT WE LEARNED

There are shared objectives between ACEC-BC member firms and client organizations. That is, a commitment to increasing participation and inclusion of people from equity-deserving groups, and improved delivery of projects that meet the needs and interests of communities. Advancing these goals requires a collective effort.

While many actions have been taken by member firms and client organizations, the inclusion of equity qualifications in procurement has increased recently in BC, with differing levels of application and approach across sectors and procuring organizations. Requirements exhibit variability in their criteria, encompassing a range of data requests and evaluation methodologies.

Current approaches sometimes draw inspiration from practices observed in construction and product procurement, as well as insights gleaned from both national and international contexts, only some of which are reasonably applied in the consulting engineering context. As practice evolves, there remains ample opportunity for learning, collaboration, and refinement to identify practices that effectively support the envisioned outcomes of equity and inclusion.

5.1 EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

Consultation identified practices that can be applied at different phases of the procurement and contract administration that have the potential to support stated objectives. Context is necessary for any practice to be effective, and the practices identified are not always appropriate. For example, scope and scale of the project, timing, and services are all relevant when considering adoption of any practice.

Clear Evaluation Criteria

Evaluation criteria that are clearly described ensures that proponents can include appropriate information in their procurement response. This principle applies to any criteria including those related to equity and inclusion.

Understanding how equity-related requirements are evaluated and factor into selection of the preferred proponent was emphasized in consultation by members, highlighting the desire for respondents to understand how they will be evaluated. Examples include allocating points for EDI or equity-related qualifications as well as outlining what would achieve full, partial, or no points within a category.

Criteria that asked about EDI practices and programs, not representation (i.e., proportion of people who identify with a certain group), were considered by members to be more effective. Being able to explain how the organization supports EDI was reported to feel more meaningful and provides opportunity to demonstrate the range of efforts a firm may take at a scale that aligns with the size of their organization, which can be more difficult to illustrate through use of representation metrics. Members shared instances

where they were able to demonstrate effective practices through relationships with local businesses and sub-contractors/consultants, which provided an opportunity to contribute to community benefit and impact as well as decisions that were within the control of consulting engineering companies.

Clearly outlined criteria related to equity-related performance during project delivery were also viewed favourably. Consultation provided examples of criteria for aspects such as local community inclusion during that project that were tied to a pass/fail bonus structure, noting that these instances were clearly understood, and the impact of the requirement was clear to all parties.

Clients shared a position that clear evaluation criteria were beneficial. When client organizations were able to clearly articulate the evaluation criteria, the proponent responses were more likely to provide the information that the client was looking for, resulting in a higher level of confidence in the evaluation.

Inclusive Design Practices

Members shared instances where they were asked to describe how their design would assure inclusion or to explain how inclusion would be achieved within the design. These types of procurement requirements not only lead to the delivery of projects that better consider the needs and uses of a more diverse set of the population but also drive EDI within the project teams by embedding practices like Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus) into their project design and delivery processes.

Certifications

Certification programs can be effective in setting clear, consistent requirements for the evaluation of all proponents because any subjective evaluation is removed or delegated to the certifying agency. However, some participants noted that the effort to obtain certifications can be time consuming and expensive, which can be a barrier for small and medium sized firms. Certifications can also be challenging for large organizations and/or public organizations, for example, if they rely on factors like firm ownership or leadership, or when certification is not possible for a local team or region.

Client organizations expressed interest in certification programs, recognizing that such programs could make the evaluation process easier for the client, removing the need to review information such as EDI related policies and practices, and ensuring consistent assessment of those elements. Although these programs could benefit client organizations, they raised similar concerns to consultant participants regarding barriers to achieving certifications, which could limit which firms can respond.

Looking to practices in other regions, one participant shared that they have experience with certification programs where client organizations will recognize certain certification programs, but not make them a mandatory requirement. Those firms with the certification only need to submit that information, whereas firms without the certification can provide other information in response to the requested EDI-related criteria.

Some certification programs aimed at evaluating a company's performance include aspects related to EDI, and some EDI-specific certification programs are being offered. However, these lack consistency, and different clients utilise different criteria, posing a challenge for firms in determining which certification(s) to pursue. Firms that may be involved in certification programs for other requirements, such as ESG reporting, may have aspects of EDI within those, but again, there is a lack of consistency across the industry in terms of client requirements.

A summary of different certification programs that were identified during the consultations and environmental scan is available in the Appendix.

5.1.1 Caution: Adopting (effective) global practices

Several case studies and reports detailing the approaches and outcomes of equity-related requirements within procurement were reviewed. However, available reports and case studies, such as the City Accelerator Leveraging Procurement for Economic Equity report, were from the United States where legislation require employees to disclose demographic data to their employers. This significant legal and cultural difference creates opportunity within the procurement process for procuring organizations to ask about and set criteria related to representation and allows proponents to efficiently respond. These practices include procurement from minority-owned businesses, procurement from businesses that meet certain representation criteria, such as a set percentage of employees identifying as women and supplier diversity plans. Reports demonstrate measurable impact from these types of practices but provide limited opportunity for implementation of similar practices in BC, where there are substantially different laws around asking, collecting, and reporting personal information.

The Social Value Act in the UK facilitates the application of equity requirements in procurement for public sector organizations. Requirements comply with the Act and include a range of both qualitative and quantitative data. For example, reporting on representation of different equity deserving groups within organizations and project teams as well as sharing information on EDI-related strategy, practices, policies, and actions. Members familiar with these requirements explained how this approach has driven change within their organization ranging from recruitment practices to policies and programs to supporting retention and advancement, as well as changes to systems and processes for tracking and reporting this information. It was noted that dedicated resources were necessary to meet the UK requirements, which can be a barrier for small and medium sized firms. This feedback highlights the importance of considering requirements in the context of the project and the capacity of the likely or desired proponents to respond.

5.2 CHALLENGES FACED IN IMPLEMENTATION

Members and construction-industry organizations identified several challenges they had encountered or identified in responding to equity-related requirements in procurement. Typically: data collection, disclosure and privacy.

Other feedback noted qualitative criteria that are unclear, uncertainty of how the equity-related aspects of the submission were evaluated and factored into selection, lack of capacity to meet certain requirements, and the desire to approach EDI in a way that did not feel or appear performative.

Collecting personal information

Instances where the procurement requirements focused on representation and reporting of data on project teams or employee populations created challenges around data collection, privacy, and disclosure, as well as disadvantages depending on the types of representation being evaluated. Most firms explained that they do not collect demographic information about their staff, with some exception regarding gender, which is often the only data that firms may have. Even if the data is collected, firms must adhere to data protection and privacy standards in BC, which limit the use and disclosure of data without consent. Sharing personal data in a bid response or project performance report requires consent from individual team members. Several participants explained that their firms were looking to gather more demographic data from staff, noting that the data was planned for internal use, which would still limit the ability to use it in bid responses or project reporting.

A focus on reporting personal information can also create instances where diversity and representation are missed. For example, a small firm team may not be very gender diverse but might have a high proportion of newcomers to Canada (immigrants, refugees). This team may not meet a requirement to have a certain percentage of women-identifying team members, missing the opportunity to demonstrate the ways they are supporting diversity and inclusion within their organization. In addition, collecting identity data from a small number of people risks safety and privacy for those being asked to disclose elements of their identity they consider private, such as Indigeneity. These requirements may be intended to support certain equity-deserving groups, but the specificity can result in other groups being overlooked in EDI initiatives. For example, if firms realize they will be asked about gender representation, they may focus their efforts on increasing representation of women in the organization, but not focus on other groups, such as the inclusion of people from the 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

One client organization representative explained that they do ask for representation data for construction, but they have not asked for this data for design services, recognizing that construction and design have different opportunities or limitations to change the composition of a team within a fixed period. The client organization noted that unlike construction where they do have overall numbers related to participation of women, Indigenous people, and other equity deserving groups, the same data is not available for engineering engaged in their work or available more broadly through industry-wide reporting.

Organizational policies

In cases where qualitative aspects are requested, such as asking about policy statements or commitments to equity and inclusion, members expressed uncertainty in understanding what information was being sought, how to effectively respond, and the qualifications of the procuring agency to assess the effectiveness of organizational policy. There was little understanding of whether the responses were being evaluated quantitatively (has/does not have), or whether there were specific elements within the policies or commitments that the client was seeking.

Client organizations reported a range of approaches to evaluation of organizational policies, ranging from binary (has/does not have) assessment, to evaluation by a designated individual, to evaluation by an advisory committee.

Clear evaluation criteria

Members expressed uncertainty about how the equity-related aspects of a bid were evaluated or how assessment was done to compare policies between different proponents. In some cases, they were not clear how or if the equity-related aspects were factored into the overall evaluation. Members shared that understanding if equity-related aspects were being evaluated as a pass/fail or as a weighted score or by some other measure should be clear. The lack of clarity can be detrimental to the intended effort to advance EDI, sending a message that although change is desired, the aspects of technical and price performance outweigh and diminish anything substantive with respect to EDI.

It was found that client organizations had a variety of approaches to evaluation and that their approach was not always described in procurement documents. This variation between client organizations along with lack of clarity can, as explained by members, make it difficult to respond and understand how response factors into the overall evaluation.

Onerous administration

Members shared experiences where equity-related requirements were significant, asking for policies and approaches to a range of equity and inclusion factors such as training, harassment and discrimination policies, support of equity-deserving groups, community outreach and more. For larger firms, these types of responses were often developed based on existing materials related to ESG reporting or through their robust marketing materials. However, it was noted that for small and medium sized firms, these types of requests generate a significant effort to respond, creating an unintended barrier to their participation in a procurement process.

Equity-related requirements that are articulated in the procurement stage with requirements for tracking or reporting during the project delivery stage can also generate administrative burdens for both the consultant firm and the owner. One client organization explained that they have mostly kept equity requirements within the procurement phase to avoid or minimize administrative for contract administration.

5.2.1 Caution: Authenticity and Partnership

Members do not want to be performative in their representation, sharing that they hold a high level of respect for relationships and partnerships they have developed, including those with Indigenous communities. Some firms have strong relationships with Indigenous communities or community partners but have limited marketing collateral or information about those relationships as an intentional choice. Forming and fostering authentic relationships and demonstrating a genuine commitment to reconciliation can at times be harmed by creating marketing content or issuing public statements. Unfortunately, equity-related procurement requirements may obligate this type of content. Members also noted that having marketing content or public statements does not always reveal the strength or value of the relationships, or the impact of partnering with a consulting engineering company on the Indigenous group.

5.2.2 Caution: Expectations versus reality

Although some members identified that including EDI elements in procurement was like the introduction of (climate) sustainability qualifications in the past, they noted an important difference: sustainability practices can be learned and applied over a relatively short period of time, while increasing team diversity can take a substantial amount of time. This highlights the importance of considering what equity-related requirements in procurement can create a tangible, positive impact within a timeframe that is appropriate for the project.

Perspectives shared from the construction industry included the importance of considering competing interests and understanding the sophistication of the market where the work is being performed. At times when there is demand for labour, there may be objectives to increase the overall number of people, which can positively, or negatively, affect goals related to increasing representation of specific groups. Awareness of market sophistication is critical because equity related requirements that have worked in one region may not work for more other regions, for example urban versus rural or smaller cities. This consideration may lead to different use of equity requirements for different projects and regions.

5.3 IMPACT OF EQUITY-RELATED PROCUREMENT ON CONSULTING ENGINEERING COMPANIES

Consulting engineering companies are taking action to advance EDI. For example, changing practices, introducing or modifying internal programs, or working to increase awareness and understanding how underrepresented groups may experience their company. Consulting engineering companies are also working collaboratively to share actions each of us can take to contribute to more inclusive and diverse organizations. In most cases, actions are not being driven by procurement requirements. Rather, they are happening because organizations recognize it is a business imperative, and it is the right thing to do.

Investment in EDI

Some members explained that certain procurement requirements had catalysed internal discussions about practices and policies, but procurement requirements did not appear to drive specific and immediate action. For example, if external factors had influenced a financial investment by the organization to support increased engagement of equity-deserving groups in engineering, it was just as likely (or more likely) to have been a result of investor expectations than any procurement requirement.

Influencing culture

Members reflected on the effect health and safety related procurement requirements resulted in obviously beneficial change for the consulting engineering industry and their clients. However, members agree that in their experience, this was not the case for equity-related procurement requirements. This was not to say that equity-related requirements may not provide benefit in the future, but that currently – and specifically the approaches currently observed in BC – did not appear to lead to significant or lasting impact within their firm.

Some of client organizations shared that they viewed equity requirements in procurement as a tool that they can use, from their position, to educate the market and to push for advancement. One client organization explained that this mindset means that when evaluating proposals, they are looking for approaches and actions that will drive change, rather than expecting the proponents to have mature programs and practices. Interestingly, this position does not appear to be obvious to consulting engineering companies that are responding to procurements.

Construction industry representatives shared some of the practices that they have observed to have been effective. Examples included employee site surveys to uncover issues which are addressable by all project partners, and the use of programs such as the [Builders Code](#) to ensure common understanding and expectations for conduct. These success examples provide ideas for approaches that could be considered and adapted to apply to consulting engineering and design services.

Community Engagement

Some members noted that they have expanded their engagement with local communities as a result of procurement requirements, particularly with Indigenous communities. Procurement requirements connected to community benefit and Indigenous inclusion were noted, with members sharing that being able to meaningfully deliver on these requirements often means developing relationships that exist over a long period of time and extend beyond the delivery of a given project.

While procurement requirements have catalysed discussion and action, very few changes appear to be directly attributable to procurement. However, discussion leads to action, and including social factors in procurement may encourage practices and programs that benefit firms, the communities they work in, and their project partners over the longer term.

5.3.1 Caution: Employee data collection

Reporting personal data is often requested in equity-related procurement. However, collection can pose challenges and is typically related to a genuine interest in understanding how internal practices influence team demographics and experience.

One member shared that a voluntary demographics disclosure questionnaire was issued to employees in response to a specific procurement request. This was not viewed as particularly effective because it was specific to the project, thus limiting its use to the organization, and was only issued to comply with project requirements.

However, some firms shared that they are working to develop systems to appropriately ask for and track representation data, but procurement requirements are not driving that work. Instead, the action has been taken so that the organization can better understand their own employee population and can assess the impact of internal practices on key performance indicators like recruitment, retention, and advancement. Similarly, firms shared that they are working on ways to better track Indigenous engagement, but, again, this is not being driven by procurement requirements but by other factors such as organizational values, investor reporting, and reputation.

5.3.2 Unintended Consequences: Tokenization, career growth, and opting out

In contrast to positive impacts, tokenization and diminished career growth opportunities when individuals were included and required to remain on projects to meet representation targets were highlighted. These unintended consequences, which were discussed in the [Equity Reporting in Procurement report](#), was emphasized by several members, underscoring the impact of requirements that focused on reporting team composition and representation of different equity-deserving groups. Members explained that this type of requirement has the potential to create a situation where team members from identified groups felt that they were included on the team for their identity and not because of the skill and experience (tokenization).

Members were asked whether they ever made a choice not to submit a response because of equity-related procurement requirements. In most cases, members explained that they would still submit a response, doing the best they could to respond to the requirements, but felt unsure of how their response to these requirements affected the evaluation of their submission. In one case, a member firm did not proceed with submitting a response, noting that they could not provide the detailed demographic data about staff that was being requested. In this case, the firm did not collect the range of data requested and recognized that even if they did have it, they did not have the necessary permission to disclose data within a procurement process.

6.0 WISE PRACTICES: ADVICE FOR PROCURING ORGANIZATIONS

The [June 2023 report Equity Reporting in Procurement](#) included *wise practices* that remain relevant and applicable and are reinforced by the additional information gathered in this research. These wise practices include both organizational practices and project delivery strategies, such as aligned equity policies and statements, community engagement, investment in new practitioners, pay equity, and removal of systemic barriers to participation.

6.1 GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR EFFECTIVE PRACTICES

As consultants, clients, communities and other interest holders continue to develop and evolve procurement practices to include EDI-related qualifications, the following guiding principles are provided to assist in the collaborative development and implementation of effective practices. The guiding principles have been identified based on the report findings and analysis of information gathered from all participants and other information reviewed.

Clarity	Practices must include clear requirements, evaluation criteria, evaluation process, and weighting within the overall evaluation. Clear evaluation criteria include explanation of responses being assessed quantitatively (i.e., representation) and qualitatively (i.e., policies, programs, strategy).
Transparency	Procuring organizations must accept and support transparency of partnership arrangements – including the existence of financial agreements – and how these partners contribute to the decision-making process. Ideally, financial arrangements are best agreed by the procuring organization and clearly communicated to proponents.
Alignment	Alignment with other partner expectations and qualifications, industry practices, relevant regulations, and between approach and the desired outcomes is necessary. Where possible, aligning the practices and expectations for consultants and their clients is encouraged.
Impact Focused	Criteria for evaluation and the approach to evaluation should consider impact, seeking to identify requirements and practices that effect meaningful and lasting change within the industry and communities where the project is delivered. This includes consideration for both intended and unintended consequences when considering different approaches and criteria.

6.2 EQUITY RESPONSIVE ORGANIZATIONS

Although these wise practices remain relevant as potential factors for evaluation, effective equity-related procurement practices require clarity around the expectations for demonstrating these elements as well as the approach used to evaluate these factors. This is where tools such as the [WEP Gender Gap Analysis Tool](#) can be referenced as an effective framework for evaluation, benefitting both those responding to the procurement request and those involved in the evaluation of the procurement responses.

Through the collection and analysis of data for this report, it was emphasized that equity-related procurement practices cannot be applied universally: practices that are effective for some industries or types of procurement are not well suited to other industries or types of procurement. This is highlighted when comparing the procurement of construction services to engineering services. Although the industries are adjacent and overlap in the delivery of projects, the procurement tactics used to drive inclusion and representation in construction do not translate effectively to engineering services.

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) has developed [guidance on gender-responsive procurement](#). This procurement approach is the selection of services, goods and civil works that consider impact on gender equality and women's empowerment. Although the UN Women guidance is gender specific, the approach can easily be viewed through an equity lens to consider other equity-deserving groups. The framework aligns well with the procurement of construction services and goods but fails to address the challenges that have been outlined in this report with respect to consulting engineering services.

However, UN Women released an [Issue Brief](#) to explore the topic through a re-framed lens of *gender-responsive enterprises*, rather than *gender-responsive procurement*.

Gender responsive enterprises are defined as organizations that meet the criteria for integrating gender equality and women's empowerment principles in its policies and practices in alignment with recognized norms and standards, including reference to the WEPs.

This shift in assessment was focused on ownership and representation to one that assesses practices and policies aligns with the findings in this report – effective organizational actions to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion are driven by changes to systems and structures that contribute to culture, employee development, and removal of systemic barriers. *Reporting representation is a means of evaluating outcomes but is not the mechanism for driving change.*

The concept of equity-responsive organizations can provide a strong foundation for equity-related procurement of consulting engineering services. Looking at procurement requirements with the lens of equity-responsive organizations can identify criteria that support the shared goal of advancing practices that benefit those working in the industry and the people and communities that are impacted by projects delivered by consulting engineering companies.

Equity Responsive Organizations demonstrate integration of equity, diversity, and inclusion principles into their policies, practices, and strategy, in alignment with recognized standards and wise practices. The focus is on effective practices and policies that drive changes to systems and structures, rather than a focus on ownership and representation.

6.3 ALIGNMENT WITH OTHER OBLIGATIONS

Looking at the broader ecosystem of actions being taken to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion, organizations procuring engineering services should consider how other actions and requirements can be reinforced or connected to procurement requirements. For example, the [Pay Transparency Act](#) passed in 2023 sets out requirements for including pay ranges within job postings as well as pay transparency reporting. Procurement requirements could align with this regulation, for example, asking consulting engineering companies to whom the legislation applies to share their process for managing pay equity within their organization, or to include their pay transparency reports. This type of approach reveals tangible actions that are being taken and does not create a significant burden of effort to provide additional information because the information is required as part of the Act.

7.0 INDIGENOUS INCLUSION

While Indigenous inclusion and community engagement have been discussed in the context of EDI in procurement within this report, it would be disingenuous to equate Indigenous inclusion and a commitment to reconciliation solely with equity-related requirements in procurement.

Indigenous inclusion is distinct from EDI and considers the respectful engagement and collaboration of Indigenous people and communities both within the delivery of specific projects and in a broader, societal context.

ACEC-BC and our members strongly support including Indigenous people and perspectives in all aspects of project delivery. Inclusion is an opportunity to advance projects as a collective; each project partner has a responsibility and understand how they contribute to meaningful inclusion of Indigenous people and to act.

Note: The discussion included here is not intended to be comprehensive or representative of the complexity, importance, and impact of the subject. Instead, the section is included to support awareness and as a foundation for future discussion.

Many consulting engineering companies seek to build connection and relationships with Indigenous groups outside specific projects as part of their commitment to community and reconciliation. Consulting engineering companies who make this commitment can take internal organizational actions like offering cultural awareness training and other learning opportunities for their team, identifying Indigenous inclusion within their own procurement strategies for engagement of sub-consultants, contractors, and suppliers, and allocating resources to form and foster relationships with Indigenous communities. These actions and others align with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Call to Action #92², which is directed to the business community. Action 92 goes further, calling on corporate Canada to ensure that Indigenous communities gain long-term sustainable benefits from economic development projects.

Indigenous inclusion on projects is facilitated by several factors, including infringement of rights, project impacts, and levels of engagement determined by each Nation, positioning them as clients, partners, and rights holders to projects. The relationship between the project owner, community, and the consultant or proponent can differ, but principles of respect, fairness and transparency should be applied. Relationships are critical to working with Indigenous communities, and these principles support the development and maintenance of meaningful and enduring relationships to collaboratively deliver projects that benefit communities both during and after completion.

² Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada: Calls to Action. Business and Reconciliation (Action 92). 2015. https://ehprnh2mwo3.exactdn.com/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/Calls_to_Action_English2.pdf

Effective practices supporting Indigenous inclusion should centre around creating sustainable benefit for the impacted Nation(s). Early engagement with appropriate representatives to determine how best to advance the Nation through project delivery is key. Reconciliation through project execution can come in many forms; however, strengthening capacity through revenue sharing to support their own health and wellness or economic initiatives, and/or employment and training are often deemed important components to advance Indigenous communities.

Consulting engineering firms can also seek opportunities to partner with Indigenous communities for project delivery or hire and train community members as part of the project delivery. This can be particularly effective by empowering communities and individuals, providing skills training to maintain and operate infrastructure like energy systems and water treatment facilities, after the completion of the project. Other opportunities for strengthening Indigenous communities through projects include project teams spending time in community, for example to teach youth about engineering careers and opportunities.

Meaningful inclusion of Indigenous people requires investment over time and cannot be achieved solely through project procurement obligations. Similarly, it cannot be achieved through the download of the project owner's commitments and responsibilities to project engineering and construction partners. We all have a role to play in ensuring that Indigenous people have access and are included in all aspects of project delivery.

8.0 CLOSING COMMENTS

The journey towards more inclusive and equitable workplaces and industries requires commitment and collaboration. Through the consultation and research supporting this report, we shed light on current procurement practices, identifying those considered effective practices and openly discussing where outcomes may not align with intentions. The report supports improvement, and proposes strategies aimed at driving meaningful change.

The analysis of available information specific to procurement of consulting engineering services in BC, supported identification of three themes:

Evolving Practice	Equity requirements in procurement are an evolving/emerging practice in BC, with many of the practices at early stages of use, implementation, and evaluation for impact. Requirements and application are not harmonized, resulting in a range of practices between procuring organizations.
Context	Context is important and must be understood by all participants. The procurement requirements must be relevant to the industry, services, project size, and the market where the work is being performed.
Shared Responsibility	Open dialogue and engagement are necessary to proceed towards shared goals of advancing diversity and equity. The approach should not be left to procuring organizations to determine on their own; dialogue with industry can help to identify effective practices. Transparency on the use and resulting outcomes is essential.

It is evident that a continued shift towards more equitable and inclusive practices is necessary in consulting engineering companies, not only as a moral imperative but also as a strategic business advantage. The emphasis on equity-responsive organizations over equity-responsive procurement underscores the importance of focusing on meaningful impact. Measurement supports this shift by demonstrating progress but cannot in and of itself be a qualification for consulting engineering companies.

Moving forward, ACEC-BC, our members, and other industry stakeholders are positioned to consider how we may work together toward our shared objectives. The value of collaboration and sharing information cannot be overstated. As procuring organizations explore options it is important that they are open in sharing those that are effective. Change requires investment of time and resources to effect meaningful change with respect to equity, diversity, and inclusion in the consulting engineering industry. However, investment must align with impact and focus on practices and conditions that support the desired outcomes.

APPENDIX: CERTIFICATION PROGRAMS

Through consultation with firm representatives, several certification programs were identified, highlighting the range of programs available. Some programs are focused on verification of ownership representation, while others are more comprehensive programs that look at commitments and actions. Others are related to the competencies of the project team members.

ISO 30415:2021 Certification (Human Resource Management – Diversity and Inclusion)

The [ISO 30415:2021 Certification](#) (Human Resource Management – Diversity and Inclusion) is a comprehensive standard that some firm representatives were aware of. The standard itself, similar to other ISO certifications, is comprehensive and requires considerable effort to have the necessary components in place and to complete the application and certification process. This certification would be prohibitive or impossible to achieve for many smaller firms. Although the complete certification may create barriers for firms to participate in procurement, the standard can be considered as a valued resource to guide organizations that are setting procurement requirements, identifying aspects of the standard that could be guide equity-related requirements.

Global Reporting Initiative

The [Global Reporting Initiative](#) (GRI) is comprised of a comprehensive set of standards for global best practices for reporting on a range of economic, environmental, and social impacts. Within the collection of standards, there are several that relate to EDI. This type of certification, like other programs, provides consistent assessment but also requires significant resources to obtain. Similar to the ISO certification, it may be prohibitive for smaller firms. The GRI differs from the ISO certification in that it is comprised of a series of standards, allowing organizations to focus on the specific standards that are relevant to their position. In this way, organizations could consider specific sections of the GRI program that focus on aspects of EDI.

Gender Based Analysis Plus

[Gender Based Analysis Plus](#) (GBA Plus) was highlighted by several firm representatives who explained that some clients ask for or encourage all project team members to have this certification. This certification, which is training accessible to anyone, aligns with the effective practice highlighted earlier in the report where equity-related requirements focus on equity and inclusion in the design process itself, rather than in the composition of a project team. This is a widely recognized program that can be effectively applied to all types of projects to identify and assess the impacts and outcomes of projects on different groups of people. This process can be used as input to inform decisions and design approaches through all stages of a project.

Partnership Accreditation in Indigenous Relations

The Canadian Council for Indigenous Business (CCIB) has a [Partnership Accreditation in Indigenous Relations program](#) (PAIR) that confirms corporate performance in Indigenous relations, assessing areas of leadership actions, employment, business development, and community relationships. The program offers certifications at different levels, allowing organizations to move through different levels as their commitments and sustained efforts are demonstrated. This program is well recognized in Canada, structured to support meaningful Indigenous relations, and can be worked on by firms of all sizes.

Women's Empowerment Principles

Through the environmental scan, the [Women's Empowerment Principles \(WEP\) Gender Gap Analysis Tool](#) was identified as a framework that may be of interest to member firms and organizations. Although the tool is focused specifically on gender equity, the principles could be considered through an equity lens to consider other equity-deserving groups as well. The principles cover a range of topics, including policies and practices, and in support of evaluation, there are assessment criteria related to commitment, implementation, measurement, and transparency.

Other certifications

Ownership representation certifications include programs where an organization can obtain verification as an Indigenous-owned, women-owned, or another equity-deserving group owned business. Third-party programs exist to validate these types of ownership structures. This type of practice has limitations, especially when companies are not privately held.