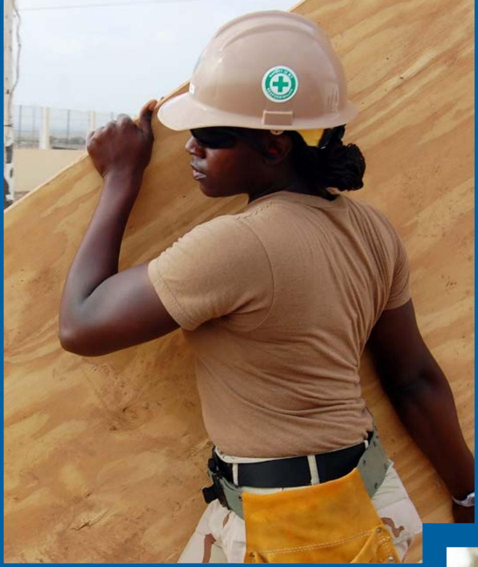

# Reporting diversity in employment and training programs

## Final report

November 2022

SRDC SINCE DEPUIS 1991 SRSA
INNOVATION • EXPERIMENTATION • EVALUATION

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**The Social Research and Demonstration Corporation (SRDC)** is a non-profit research organization, created specifically to develop, field test, and rigorously evaluate new programs. SRDC's two-part mission is to help policy-makers and practitioners identify policies and programs that improve the well-being of all Canadians, with a special concern for the effects on the disadvantaged, and to raise the standards of evidence that are used in assessing these policies.

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# BACKGROUND

Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC)'s skills development programs provide Canadians with an important gateway to the Canadian economy by equipping them with the skills they need to participate in a changing labour market. Programs offered by both governments and non-governmental organizations are designed to support people on the path to employment and career development success, and to develop skills that are increasingly in demand in the modern economy. For instance, skills development programs have begun to focus less on traditional technical skills and more on foundational and social-emotional learning (SEL) skills such as communication, collaboration, problem-solving, adaptability, and creativity and innovation, as described in ESDC's new Skills for Success framework (Bughin et al., 2018).

Canada needs a robust training system with policies and programs that anticipate skill needs, maintain the relevance of training, ensure accessibility for all residents of Canada, and continuously evaluate the social and economic outcomes of training (International Labour Office, 2011). With its mandate to promote skills development, labour market participation and inclusiveness, and labour market efficiency, ESDC's Skills and Employment Branch relies on research and analysis of the skills gaps, learning needs, and barriers faced by Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups in order to adapt and target its programs and services.

To support this objective, Budget 2019 provided ESDC with funding to develop a strategy to improve the Department's capacity to better measure, monitor, and address gender disparity and promote access of underrepresented groups across its skills programming, while also improving inclusivity and reducing employment disparities. The Branch's Strategic Integration and Corporate Affairs (SICA) Directorate has been tasked with developing this strategy, which calls for a comprehensive overview of the most up-to-date research and practice-based evidence.

SRDC was previously commissioned by ESDC to conduct a review of the systemic barriers, skills gaps, and learning needs of different equity deserving groups. These, together with observations and promising programming practices, are outlined in our final report (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). For this second phase of work, the focus is on data collection, analysis, and reporting – and the ways in which ESDC's skills and training programs can better measure and monitor the participation, experiences, and client outcomes.

# PROJECT DESCRIPTION

## OBJECTIVES

The Skills and Employment Branch (SEB) at Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC) engaged SRDC to undertake a case study analysis of best practices to provide concrete recommendations for how ESDC's skills and training programs can better measure, monitor and report client outcomes for Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups.

This research focused on the breadth and depth of reporting by recommending different interventions that could a) improve the frequency of voluntary client reporting and b) improve the ability of programs to better measure and monitor outcomes of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups. The recommendations will apply to programs where clients are directly served by ESDC, as well as programs delivered by third-party service providers through grants and contribution agreements (i.e., provincial and territorial governments, not-for-profit organizations). The findings can be used to inform the program and policy design of ESDC's skills and training programs.

Specifically, the project:

a) reviews measurement practices and reporting mechanisms in other jurisdictions — particularly those of large multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, World Health Organization, etc. — to identify those that can better measure and monitor client outcomes of skills development programs for the populations of particular interest to ESDC (i.e., Indigenous Peoples, women, racialized Canadians, persons with disabilities, newcomers, youth, and those who identify as 2S/LGBTQ+); and

b) outlines promising practices and considerations for data collection and reporting that could improve the frequency and quality of client reporting, and the ability of programs to better measure and monitor client outcomes.

Where possible, the findings are synthesized in such a way as to inform SEB's developing research strategy and support application of the findings to future work undertaken or supported by ESDC. The broader goal of this project is to generate program data collection and reporting practices that can inform the creation of programs that are more inclusive, accessible, and responsive to the needs and circumstances of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups, who tend to be under-represented in Canada's labour market.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

To achieve the objectives identified above, we have amalgamated information from the original Request for Proposal and discussions with the Project Authority to develop the following research questions:

1. Why is it important to collect a variety of data?
2. What data does ESDC currently collect on participants in its main skills development programs?
3. How are other jurisdictions approaching data collection and reporting for employment programs?
4. What are the key considerations (e.g., frameworks, principles) in collecting and reporting data about diverse groups served by ESDC?
5. What are the implications for ESDC? How could these promising practices be applied to improve ESDC's current data collection and reporting for its skills development programs, particularly to increase participant engagement, data quality, subgroup analyses, and appropriate program reporting?

## METHODS

This report builds on and draws from the previous 15 years of research and evaluation carried out by SRDC in the areas of employment supports and skills development, as well as by numerous other researchers and organizations. The following three data collection and analysis methods were employed: (i) document review, (ii) targeted literature review and environmental scan, and (iii) internal staff discussions.

**Document review:** Documents from four ESDC programs were reviewed and analyzed for this report: (1) Labour Market Development Agreements (LMDAs), (2) Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs), (3) the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (OF), and (4) Skills for Success. A synthesis of the results can be found in the section titled, "*What data does ESDC currently collect?*"

**Literature review and environmental scan:** We conducted the literature review in three phases, using search terms such as "data collection and reporting," "disaggregated data collection," "program evaluations," "data collection standards," and "diversity." First, guidelines, standards, and best practices from large international organizations were collected. These organizations included the UN Statistical Organization, UN committees, and the OECD. Secondly, we examined Canadian provincial and national policies and practices of organizations such as human rights councils and large research institutes (e.g., Center for the Study of Social Policy, BC Office of Human Rights). Finally, we reviewed the academic literature to gather additional information on data collection concerns for Indigenous Peoples and other specific equity deserving groups, prioritizing systematic reviews of existing best practices.

Our environmental scan of data collection practices in other jurisdictions focused on high-income jurisdictions with similar policy contexts to Canada: Australia, New Zealand, Scandinavia, and the United States. We reviewed webpages of government departments related to skills training, education, and employment (e.g., Australia's Department of Education, and Employment) for evaluations and reviews of employment and skills training programs. Ultimately, we selected programs similar to those administered by ESDC and reviewed for this report.

**Internal staff discussions:** In the final phase, we held a discussion group with senior SRDC research staff with academic, operational, and policy experience working with Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving populations with respect to employment, skills development and training programs. The purpose of the discussion group was to validate the findings of this review and provide additional details and examples to illustrate key points and findings.

# FINDINGS

## Q1: WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO COLLECT A VARIETY OF DATA?

### General

While employment support and training programs can lead to many positive labour market outcomes, there is mixed evidence on their success, and on the differential benefits for different population groups (Mawn et al., 2017; Travknia, 2013). In fact, those underrepresented in Canada's workforce – such as Indigenous Peoples, women, youth, newcomers, members of racialized groups, persons who identify as 2S/LGBTQ+[1], persons with disabilities, and others who are marginalized (hereafter, "Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups") – tend to be among the least well served by such programs.

Inequities in access and outcomes compound the ways in which such groups are disproportionately affected by shifts in the modern economy such as the economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, automation and workplace digitization, and the growing emphasis on social-emotional learning (SEL) skills[2] (Bughin et al., 2018). As noted in our previous report, these groups typically face multiple barriers to success in the labour market, including reduced access to programs, experiences, and resources that foster workplace-relevant experience and social capital, such as coaching from mentors and role models (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021).

To better understand the barriers, needs, and differential outcomes faced by Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups, the Government of Canada has mandated the use of Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+) for data collection and reporting related to its skills development and other programs. However, it can be difficult to find appropriate ways to ask program

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[1] Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, or Two-Spirit. Two-Spirit is an English umbrella term coined by Indigenous members of the LGBTQ+ community that transcends Western and colonial ideas of gender and sexuality. Often used to describe someone who possesses both masculine and feminine spirits, Two-Spirit is a cultural term reserved only for those who identify as Indigenous. Some Indigenous people identify as Two-Spirit rather than, or in addition to, identifying as lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, or queer. We have opted to use the acronym 2S/LGBTQ+ to indicate that Two-Spirit is not simply one of several different terms used to describe gender identity, gender expression, and sexual orientation, but rather, a distinct identity in and of itself for Indigenous Peoples.

[2] SEL skills are diverse set of non-technical skills needed to succeed in the modern economy, often referred to as soft skills, non-cognitive skills, or 21st century skills. These terms have been used over the past three decades to describe a wide range of skills related to emotional intelligence, inter- and intra-personal abilities, and personal traits or attributes favourably associated with career development.

participants for information – particularly about their identity characteristics – in ways that will help ESDC understand how people access, experience, and benefit from its programs (or not), or to make required adjustments; this often leads to low response rates. In addition, collecting meaningful, high-quality data from Indigenous participants in a way that is consistent with the First Nations principles of ownership, control, access, and possession (OCAP®) as well as Inuit and Metis data sovereignty principles is critical.

The multiplicity of skills development and employment support programs makes this more complicated, as responsibility for delivery of some programs – and data collection and reporting – rests with ESDC, while for others, with third-party organizations. In both cases, there is a pressing need to learn more about practical interventions that can be made to improve the breadth and depth of diversity and intersectionality with respect to collection and reporting of client and program data. One way to address these issues is to consider different categories of data, as described below.

## Categories of data

Whether in the context of program design, delivery, monitoring, quality improvement, evaluation, or research, there are four categories of information that form the basis of robust and comprehensive program information systems, which form the basis of program monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Done well, such frameworks can support goal setting and monitor progress and results, inform planning and decision-making, support accountability, and guide learning for program improvement (Markiewicz & Patrick, 2016). While many data collection and reporting activities focus on one or two of these categories of information, all four are essential to achieve a fulsome understanding of a program's real-life success:

1. Population – The *identity* characteristics of those who participate in the program (keeping in mind this may not be the same as those for whom the program is intended)
2. Program – The extent and characteristics of program *delivery* – what was delivered to whom, and to what degree
3. Outcomes – The *outcomes* experienced by those who participated, which cumulatively, shape broader program outcomes such as effectiveness and efficiency
4. Context – The characteristics of the *context* in which program delivery took place, that is, the social, economic, geographic, political, environmental, and other factors that may influence program delivery, experience, and outcomes.

Each of these data categories is described below.

### Participant characteristics

Identity characteristics include both individual and collective identities (OECD, 2018). Individual identities refer to an individual's characteristics (e.g., age, marital status), whereas collective identity refer to group membership and social categorization (e.g., by ethnicity or disability). Both individual and collective identities can evolve over time as individuals change their context and self-perception, and as the social understanding of categories and definitions change. It is important to note that the way in which individuals self-identify may change over time. For example, "ethnic mobility" is the process of change in ethnic or racial self-identification that may occur due to changing social contexts or understandings of ethnic groups (OECD, 2018).

In the context of program reporting for skill training and employment programs, collecting data on participants' identity characteristics creates an opportunity to (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009):

- identify the effectiveness of programs for specific sub-populations
- monitor or evaluate potential discrimination
- identify barriers
- lessen or prevent disadvantage
- evaluate program access, delivery, and outcomes
- improve decision-making and program delivery
- promote equity and equality

Identity-based data can also be leveraged to attract and retain participants and may enhance public perception of the organization collecting or reporting data. At an individual participant level, it can be affirming to have one's identities acknowledged in the process of providing information; this in turn can enhance relationships with staff and program engagement.

At the same time, collecting personal data, particularly on identity characteristics that are often associated with marginalization or discrimination,[3] can present ethical and procedural challenges (OECD, 2018; Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2009).

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[3] Under the Canadian Human Rights Act (1985), discrimination for the following identity characteristics is prohibited: "race, national or ethnic origin, color, religion, age, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity or expression, marital status, family status, genetic characteristics, disability and convince for an offense for which a pardon has been granted." Discrimination related to pregnancy is included on the grounds of sex.

### *Program delivery*

Program delivery metrics include measures such as program enrollment – who accessed the program, who completed the program, type and number of supports used, satisfaction with the program, etc. Including metrics that are sufficiently nuanced to capture aspects of program delivery to determine whether the program is culturally responsive and accessible is important to understand the experiences of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups. Culturally responsive and accessible data collection has been described by the Public Health Agency of Canada (PHAC) as:

> *"It is not just a matter of collecting more data but collecting high-quality data that reflects the needs and perspectives of affected communities, and ensuring the processes of data collection, analysis, reporting, and action on health inequities are in themselves inclusive, equity-promoting, and responsive to communities"* (Government of Canada, 2021, p. 9).

Collecting high-quality data that reflects the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups is a crucial step to identifying inequities and developing programs and policy that address them (Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019).

### *Participant outcomes*

In the context of skill training and employment programs, centering the perspectives and voices of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups in outcome measurement supports the development of tailored program enhancements and metrics. Given the typically long-standing, systemic, and specific barriers and challenges these groups face, tailored outcome measures are likely to be more effective than generic measures in tracking progress towards employment goals, identifying supports and challenges, and explaining program outcomes. A variety of data collection methods can be used to track participant outcomes, including objective evidence (e.g., finding employment), participants' self-report (e.g., increased confidence and skill gains), and feedback from program delivery staff and employers (e.g., demonstrated skills).

Increasingly, diverse forms of evidence — including lived experience, practice-based knowledge, and traditional or sacred knowledge — are recognized and valued alongside colonial "scientific" methods (BC Office of the Human Rights Commissioner, 2020). Attention must also be given to *variance* in program outcomes, recognizing that aggregated outcomes can obscure the challenges and/or successes of specific groups within the participant population (Center for Social Policy, 2019). In this respect, there is still much work to be done to determine how to integrate an intersectional approach to the analysis of participants' outcomes, one that goes beyond disaggregation based on single characteristics. Large sample sizes are required for the analysis of quantitative data along multiple characteristics, to avoid the possibility of inadvertently revealing the identities of small groups of participants. Qualitative exploration of the links between participants' different identities and lived experiences (e.g., in research or evaluation) hold promise and may provide guidance in this area.

### Spotlight on outcome data (Ready to Work Partnership Grant)

The American "Ready to Work Partnership Grant" funded employment and skill training programs for individuals with prolonged absences from the labour market and evaluated program outcome data to assess the eligibility requirements attached to the grant. Considering the results from several programs, the authors concluded that because the "economic conditions, potential employers, and participant characteristics all varied across the grantees," (p. 86) flexibility in how to spend funding was a key element of successful programming, as it allowed programs to address local needs (Copson et al., 2020).

In addition, the authors compared outcomes and feedback from grantees to generate recommendations for future programs. The participating service delivery organizations reported that their participants "faced more barriers to work than they had originally anticipated," which affected their ability to successfully find employment. Based on these outcomes, providers proposed a series of program modifications, including using program funding to invest time in developing relationships with local employers and modifying the training to add more activities to build job-readiness skills. Gathering evidence in partnership with the community of interest (e.g., participants and program delivery staff informs program improvements that are relevant and useful to the target community (Center for Social Policy, 2019).

### Context

While self-identification data focuses on individual characteristics, there are a variety of broader factors that can help explain and contextualize program outcomes, especially for Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups. Contextual factors may even have a bigger impact on participant outcomes than identity data. For example, participants who are responsible for the care of young children or elderly relatives may be affected by a lack of childcare or supports to care for dependents while seeking employment or training programs.

Other examples of contextual factors include availability of wrap-around social or community supports; conditions of the local labour market; housing affordability and security; and access to safe, reliable, accessible, and affordable transportation.

## Q2: WHAT DATA DOES ESDC CURRENTLY COLLECT?

Four existing ESDC programs were reviewed for this report – Labour Market Development Agreements (ESDC, 2017); Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs); the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (ESDC, 2018; ESDC, 2020); and Skills for Success (Government of

Canada, 2022). The following section provides a brief description of each program, followed by an overview of the data collected in these programs. It is important to note that these overviews are based on existing documents – some dating back several years – and do not reflect any recent program changes or current data collection practices.

## Labour market development agreements (LMDA)

The LMDAs are large, multi-year, multi-million-dollar funding mechanisms to provide core funding to the provinces and territories to deliver labour market programming. Programs and services offered through the LMDAs provide skills training and employment supports to eligible individuals, particularly those who are eligible for Employment Insurance (EI) benefits or have contributed to the EI program. These agreements largely devolve responsibility to provinces and territories. Provincial and territorial governments often provide LMDA-related services directly through government service centres, although third-party service providers are also typically permitted under the LMDA.

## Workforce development agreements

The Workforce Development Agreements (WDAs) consolidate and replace three smaller agreements, including the Canada Job Fund Agreements (which included the Canada Job Grant), the Labour Market Agreements for Persons with Disabilities, and the Targeted Initiative for Older Workers. These agreements support provinces and territories to develop and deliver programs and services that help Canadians get training, develop their skills and gain work experience to meet local labour markets' needs.

There is a particular focus in the WDAs on helping individuals who are further removed from the labour market, unemployed, underemployed, and seeking to upskill to either find and maintain good jobs or reorient their career, and includes specific funding targeted for persons with disabilities. The WDAs can also be used to provide supports to members of groups underrepresented in the labour market, such as Indigenous peoples, youth, older workers, and newcomers to Canada.

## Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities

To ensure that eligible persons with disabilities can access the assistance needed to integrate or re-integrate into the labour market, the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (OF) provides funding to support a range of projects. Most projects are designed and delivered by third-party organizations known as Community Coordinators (also referred to as funding or contribution recipients) that act as intermediaries between participants and employers. The OF includes the following interventions: Wage Subsidy, Self-employment, Enhanced Employment Assistance Services, Skills for Employment, and Work Experience.

The OF also funds Employer Awareness activities, which are intended to raise the profile of persons with disabilities within the employer community and to highlight the capabilities and skills of workers with disabilities. These activities can be delivered through standalone agreements or with other program activities.

## Skills for Success

Skills for Success is a new ESDC program that directly funds organizations to help Canadians at all skill levels improve their foundational and transferable skills in order to better prepare for, get and keep a job, and to adapt and succeed at work (Government of Canada, 2022).
Two funding streams opened in early 2022 through a call for proposals process:

- The Research and Innovation Stream, which supports research and innovative projects to identify better ways of helping persons prepare for, return to or keep employment and be productive participants in the labour force; and
- The Training and Tools Stream, which supports projects focused on the design and implementation of training, and the development of assessment tools and training resources. Eligibility for this stream includes consideration of project activities that target racialized groups or Official Language Minority Communities.

## Analysis of ESDC program data

### *Participant characteristics*

Programs such as the WDA, OF, and Skills for Success support employment programs that specifically target Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups. Our document review showed that some ESDC programs collect data on participant characteristics such as age, gender, and ethnicity. Existing ESDC reports also provide some disaggregated results for certain characteristics (e.g., age and gender). For example, existing LMDA agreements share findings disaggregated by age and stipulate that “where available” the provinces and territories provide ESDC with demographic information on a range of characteristics, including age, gender, marital status, disability status, Indigenous identity, newcomer status, immigration year, racial/visible minority status, highest level of education, language of choice, employment status, amongst other personal identifiers.

However, the collection of identity data is inconsistent, both in terms of the types of identity characteristics and the definitions and response options available. Table 1 below illustrates the measurement of identity characteristics of the populations of interest identified by ESDC.

Some identity data were used to conduct sub analyses. For example, the LMDA synthesis report provides information on EI claimants stratified by age group, and the OF Phase I and II evaluations[4] include breakdowns of enrolment level of respondents currently in school by gender and disability type (i.e., developmental, learning, mental, physical, unspecified). Subgroup analyses were not reported for key immediate outcomes (e.g., acquisition of labour market information, skills, and work experience) and there was limited subgroup analysis of key long-term outcomes.

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[4] Recent evaluations of the OF used a two-part structure. Phase I examined the design, implementation and delivery of the reformed program, as well as participant outcomes at six- and 12-month junctures post intervention. This first phase made use of four lines of evidence: data assessment; survey of participants in single year projects; document review; and key informant interviews. Building on preliminary results from Phase I, Phase II of the evaluation concentrated on participant outcomes over a longer period of time (that is, beyond the 12-month post-program period) and delved further into the employers' experience of the Program. Phase II included a net impact analysis using a constructed control group and cost benefit analysis to determine program effectiveness and efficiency.

## Table 1 Reporting of identity data by program

| Program | Measurement of identity characteristics | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sex and gender | Racialized group | Indigenous | People with disabilities | Newcomers | Age | 2S/LGBTQ+ |
| LMDA | Male<br>Female<br>Unspecified (including Other, as stated in the description of the field in the XML schema)<br>Prefer not to report | Yes<br>No<br>Unknown (bypass value, optional)<br>Prefer not to report | Yes<br>No<br>Prefer not to report | Yes<br>No<br>Prefer not to report | Yes<br>No<br>Unknown (bypass value, optional)<br>Prefer not to report | Date of birth is collected | None |
| Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities (Phase 2) | Gender options were "Male," "Female" or "Other." "Other" was not included in the evaluation report. | Member of Visible minority (Yes/No) | Indigenous group (Registered on-reserve, registered off-reserve, non-status, Metis, Inuit, NA) | Type of disability:<br>- Agility<br>- Hearing<br>- Mental Health<br>- Visual<br>- Intellectual<br>- Developmental<br>- Learning<br>- Motor Skills<br>- Speaking<br>- Other | New Immigrant (Yes/No) – definition was provided | None | None |
| Workforce Development Agreement | Gender options were “Male” or “Female” | Member of Visible minority (Yes/No) | Aboriginal identity | Disability status | Asked to provide year of arrival in Canada and immigration status | Date of birth | None |

| Program | Measurement of identity characteristics | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Sex and gender | Racialized group | Indigenous | People with disabilities | Newcomers | Age | 2S/LGBTQ+ |
| Skills for Success demographic data to be provided by organizations to ESDC | Gender options were “Male” or “Female” or “Other” | "Visible minority" self-identification:<br>- South Asian<br>- Chinese<br>- Black<br>- Filipino<br>- Latin American<br>- Arab<br>- Southeast Asian<br>- West Asian<br>- Korean<br>- Japanese<br>- Visible minorities, not included elsewhere<br>- Multiple visible minorities | Indigenous participants (First Nation, Métis, Inuit, Urban/Non-affiliated) | Persons with disabilities:<br>o Developmental/learning<br>o Motor skills<br>o Hearing<br>o Visual<br>o Speaking<br>o Mental health<br>o Other (please specify) | Newcomers (permanent resident, refugee) | None | None |

### Outcome measures

Existing outcome measures in the four programs we reviewed focus on program *effectiveness* and *efficiency,* such as the proportion of participants employed, their earnings or reliance on employment insurance (EI) and social assistance (SA), and cost of program delivery. Within LMDAs, econometric methodologies have been used to measure outcomes, namely, incremental impact analysis to measure effectiveness and cost-benefit analysis to measure efficiency. Evaluators have also conducted key informant interviews with service providers and program managers to help identify issues with the various program interventions and obtain information to further supplement the analysis.

The following table highlights the target outcomes of LMDA and OF evaluations and the indicators used to measure each outcome:

## Table 2 Outcomes and indicators for LMDA and OF

| Program | Outcome | Indicator / outcome measurement |
|---|---|---|
| LMDA* | Program effectiveness | ▪ Labour market attachment or incidence of employment/self-employment<br>▪ Employment/self-employment earnings<br>▪ Amount of EI benefits received<br>▪ Weeks in receipt of EI<br>▪ Social assistance benefits received<br>▪ Dependence on income support |
| LMDA* | Program efficiency | ▪ *Program cost:* includes program and administration costs paid by the government.<br>▪ *Marginal social costs of public funds*: represent the loss incurred by society when raising additional revenues such as taxes to fund government programs.<br>▪ *Employment earnings*: consists of incremental impacts on participants' earnings during and after participation. The calculation accounts for the participant's forgone earnings during participation (i.e., opportunity cost). Employment earnings were also increased by 15 per cent to account for fringe benefits such as the employer-paid health, life insurance and pensions contributions. |

| Program | Outcome | Indicator / outcome measurement |
|---|---|---|
| Opportunity Fund: Phase I** | Has progress been made towards achieving expected key outcomes of the Opportunities Fund program? | Key informants' perceptions and documented evidence on progress towards:<br>▪ Persons with disabilities acquired labour market information, skills, work experience and/or received workplace accommodations *(Immediate outcome)*<br>▪ Persons with disabilities are employed, self-employed or have returned to school *(Intermediate outcome)*<br>▪ Persons with disabilities are integrated into the labour market *(Ultimate outcome)* |
| Opportunity Fund: Phase II*** | Program effectiveness and efficiency | ▪ Average annual employment income<br>▪ Proportion of participants employed<br>▪ Average annual employment insurance benefit<br>▪ Average annual social assistance benefit<br>▪ Dependence on income support |

Sources:

* ESDC (2017). Evaluation of the Labour Market Development Agreements: Synthesis Report.

** ESDC (2018). Evaluation of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities – Phase I.

*** ESDC (2020). Evaluation of the Opportunities Fund for Persons with Disabilities – Phase II program delivery.

All the programs reviewed for this project report on the numbers of participants enrolled and how many completed their programs. In addition, the Skills for Success draft template collects data on the number of participants enrolled in training by subgroup (gender, age, Indigeneity, immigration status, visible minority, disability, and official language minority community).

## Context

Our document review found limited evidence of contextual data categories among the four ESDC programs, particularly in terms of social, economic, geographic, political, environmental, and other factors. The closest programs come to this category of information is to collect data on participants' identity characteristics that may influence experience and outcomes. For example, the WDA, LMDA, and OF collect data on the participant's highest level of education. In addition to this, the programs collect the following information:

- The WDA collects number of dependents

- The LMDA collects marital status, number of dependents, and family type
- The OF evaluations reference distance from the labour market, disability related barriers (e.g., health issues), and the impact of employment income on the potential loss of social assistance benefits.

The Skills for Success draft template[5] collects data from assessment tools used to gather results on improvement in wellness and wellbeing. However, actual wellness and wellbeing data are not currently reported, although this could change as the Skills for Success program continues to review its reporting process.

# Q3: HOW DO OTHER JURISDICTIONS APPROACH DATA COLLECTION AND REPORTING?

Four reports on program evaluations are described below to provide examples of the data collection and reporting practices used to evaluate and inform employment programming in other jurisdictions. Programs from Australia and the United States were selected due to similarities in population, social policy context, and the employment and skills training landscape. It is important to note that the observations in this section are based on a very limited number of reports and may not reflect the full extent of data being collected (e.g., not reported because of small sample sizes).

## Australia

### *Work-related Training and Adult Learning (2020-2021)*

The most recent Survey of Work-Related Training and Adult Learning (WRTAL) was conducted in Australia between 2020-2021. The Australia Bureau of Statistics regularly reports outcomes related to training and adult education, with key outcomes featured on the Department of Education, Skills, and Employment Website (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). Approximately 25,000 participants (aged 15-74) completed the survey.

**Identity Characteristics:** The WRTAL dataset contained information on gender, age, and newcomer status. Information on ethnicity, Indigeneity, sexual orientation and diverse gender identity, and disability status was not reported (see Appendix A).

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[5] We recognize that the data categories in the Skills for Success draft template may have changed by the time this report is completed.

**Outcome Measures:** Key outcome measures tracked in this database included participation in work-related training, training in current main job, the time and cost of training, the perceived usefulness of training, personal interest in training, and barriers to participating in formal and informal learning.

**Sub-group reporting and analysis:** There was a high level of disaggregation in data reporting. Many of the key tables highlighted on the website were disaggregated by gender, and some by age and remoteness (e.g., urban/rural). In the published datasets, information on key variables (i.e., participation in training, barriers to training) were disaggregated for each identity characteristic, and cross tabulated with gender. In addition, results were disaggregated based on region.

### *Employment Services Outcome reports (2020)*

Australia's Department of Education, Skills and Employment reports the outcomes of employment programs in the Employment Services Outcome reports, which include the post-program monitoring survey data for individuals that participated in employment services over the last 12-month period (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2022). The results are available in the form of data tables. In the most recent period (July 2020 – June 2021) results for three programs are available: Job Active Services, Online Employment Services, and the New Employment Services Trial.

**Identity characteristics:** The Employment Services Outcome Reports for the JobActive program provide data on a range of identity characteristics, including gender, age, disability status, Indigeneity, and individuals that are "culturally and linguistically diverse." Ethnicity, sexual orientation and gender options other than male and female are not reported. "Culturally and linguistically diverse" variable groups together individuals that are culturally or linguistically diverse from the English-speaking, Australian-born population (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022). The culturally and linguistically diverse category contains four key indicators: country of birth, main language other than English spoken at home, English proficiency, and Indigenous status. The Online Employment Services Outcome reports provide data disaggregated by gender, age, and Indigeneity. For the New Employment Service Trial, data on gender, age, and region were collected.

**Outcome measures:** Key outcome measures included participation in further education and training, employment, positive training outcomes and – for the Job Active program – job-seeker satisfaction with the program, their service provider, and the wraparound supports provided (see Appendix A).

**Context measures:** Sole parent status is also captured in the employment service outcome reports.

**Sub-group reporting:** For each of the programs, the dataset included disaggregated data for each identity group for all the reported outcome measures.

## Promising practice spotlight: Addressing challenges to data collection: VET Data Streamlining Program (Australia)

Australia's Department of Education, Skills and Employment recently conducted a discovery report on the Vocational Education and Training (VET) data collection and reporting process to better understand challenges in data collection, and to "build a better understanding of the current diversity of the VET sector and the different approaches that training providers use to manage student and training activity data collection, validation, and submission" (p. 4, Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2022b). The review is a part of the VET Data Streamlining program, which seeks to improve the collection and use of data reported by training providers. The initial report included consultation with training providers, vendors, and a reference group.

Challenges to data collection and reporting were identified and used to inform strategy proposals to improve data quality and the reporting process.

### Contextual factors

- **"Change fatigue":** Training providers are experiencing "change fatigue" due to on-going evolution and changing processes, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and related policy changes.
- **Diverse training approaches** make it difficult to standardize data collection and reporting.
- **Competing priorities:** As "training providers are focused on delivering training, supporting students, and running sustainable businesses," reporting burden is a challenge for many providers (p. 5).

### Data collection and reporting challenges

- Diverse data collection methods (e.g., phone, paper surveys, digital surveys) and data management systems
- Lack of clarity on "how governments define data elements" (p. 6)
- Diversity in individuals conducting data collection and data entry (e.g., students, trainers, admin staff)
- Inconsistent quality of data due to human error
- Reporting requirements poorly aligned with on-the-ground realities
- Reporting burden of translating data to report to multiple offices or funders

### Proposed strategies

- Create a data standard that is consistent for all reporting requirements
- Invest in automated "system-to-system" data tracking systems that report data in real time
- Increase communication between reporting organizations and government bodies; share timely feedback to improve reporting and data quality
- Create dedicated staff positions for trained individuals to collect and manage data
- Conduct regular data cleaning and use data entry systems that flag incorrect data entry

## United States

### Comparing state and national approaches to education and training program scorecards

The US Department of Labour produced a report that compares the data collection and outcome measures of employment programs across three states – Missouri, New Jersey, and Ohio – to assess the feasibility of using national employment databases to track program outcomes (Davis, 2017).

**Identity characteristics:** In each of the three states, the program outcome data included participants' age, gender, and race.

**Outcome measures:** This report reports outcomes for employment status and earnings.

**Sub-group analysis:** Identity data were used to compare program participants. In this report, program outcomes were not disaggregated by identity characteristics. Training programs in different states were directly compared, although participant demographics differed across programs.

### Providing employment services to the long-term unemployed: Implementation and sustainability of the programs in the Ready to Work Partnership Grant evaluation

This report was sponsored by the US Department of Labour, to evaluate the success and program outcomes of the "Ready to Work Partnership Grant Program," which provided funding for programs seeking to support individuals re-enter the labour market after extended periods of unemployment (Copson et al., 2020). Four employment programs were compared.

**Identity characteristics:** Each of the programs tracked participant data re: gender, age, and race. Indigenous identity, disability status, sexual orientation and a diversity of gender identity options were not reported.

**Outcome measures:** In this report, short- and long-term program outcomes were reported. In addition to employment and educational outcomes, these outcomes included skill gains, changes in attitudes, and changes in barriers. Short-term outcomes included skill gains, credentials, and a "decrease in factors that negatively affect ability to work." Long-term outcomes measured employment, earnings, the quality of employment (e.g., benefits, salary), and receipt of public benefits.

**Sub-group analysis:** The participant populations were reported based on program characteristics; program outcomes were not disaggregated by identity characteristics.

## British Columbia

### Promising practice spotlight: BC's *Anti-Racism Data Act*

In May 2022, the British Columbia provincial government introduced the *Anti-Racism Data Act* which aims to eliminate systemic racism in government services by collecting data necessary to identify and address inequities in access and outcomes (Government of British Columbia, 2022). The *Act* states, "systemic racism occurs through inequalities that are built into services, systems and structures, often caused by hidden biases that disadvantage people based on their race. For many Indigenous and racialized communities, this results in unequal access, poorer outcomes, and negative experiences with public services." To address systemic inequities, the *Act* establishes guidelines to data collection to inform program improvements to increase equity in relation to public programs. There are four key principles to implementation of the *Act*:

1. Collaboration with Indigenous Peoples
2. Working with racialized communities
3. Increasing transparency and accountability
4. Requiring annual data releases and periodic review of the *Act*

In addition, data privacy and preventing and/or minimizing harm of data collection and programming are emphasized throughout the *Act*. These principles emphasize the importance of participation, privacy, and transparency in research.

## New Zealand

This report serves as an example of the structure of a qualitative program evaluation (including a sample interview guide) and demonstrates the types of conclusions and depth of information that qualitative evaluations can provide.

### Promising practice spotlight: Qualitative data collection and reporting: Intensive Client Support (ICS) – 24-month case studies evaluation (New Zealand)

An evaluation report of a multi-site employment service pilot program reviewed the results from the two-year program. The evaluation was conducted using qualitative methods, with the purpose of gathering participant and service provider perspectives on the utility of the program and the program outcomes (Gravitas Research and Strategy Limited, 2017). Data collection included interviews with clients and program support managers and a review of participant client data.

The evaluation reported information about the barriers and support factors that impacted participant success; client needs; service gaps; participant-defined program outcomes; and perceptions of the program. Using participant quotes and case studies to illustrate major themes, the report investigated client experiences and the relationships between needs, barriers, and program outcomes. For example, service providers shared the adaptations that they had made throughout the program to better meet participant needs. Participants shared their personal barriers to engaging with services and described the pros and cons of different service delivery strategies (e.g., in-person visits, phone visits), and how the timeline of the program delivery impacted their engagement. Participants also reported on a wide range of program outcomes, including increased self-efficacy and reduction in mental health challenges, that are rarely captured in traditional quantitative outcome tracking.

# Q4: WHAT ARE KEY CONSIDERATIONS FOR COLLECTING DATA ON DIVERSITY?

Despite some promising practices from various jurisdictions, the previous section demonstrates that no single jurisdiction has mastered the art of collecting and reporting data on diversity, particularly in a skills development context. This section articulates some of the reasons why this may be the case, considerations for data collection, and key conceptual frameworks to help identify ways of thinking about or approaching data and its collection and reporting. The section ends with guidance for each of the four major categories of data: characteristics of identity, program delivery, context, and outcomes.

## Legacy of exploitative and harmful data collection

Before starting data collection, awareness and consideration of the legacy of research practices with the communities participating in the program is crucial. For example, research in Indigenous communities has been characterized by widespread exploitation and abuse of ethical research practice (Mosby, 2013; Olofsson et al., 2008; Schnarch, 2004; Smith, 2021; Wiwchar, 2013). There are many instances of researchers abusing their positions of trust by failing to work collaboratively with First Nations, Métis, and Inuit communities, resulting in research conducted ‘on’ Indigenous peoples instead of ‘with’ them (Smith, 2021). Research was almost always funded and carried out by non-Indigenous researchers, without informed consent about what data would be gathered or how it would be collected, used, and maintained, and without accurate information on benefits and harms of the research for individuals, families, and communities (Mosby, 2013; Olofsson et al., 2008; Schnarch, 2004).

Such abuses in Indigenous communities, in conjunction with other factors, have led to a deeply embedded mistrust of research that is not led by Indigenous researchers and communities (Aspin et al., 2018). Many other communities – including racialized, disabled, and 2S/LGBTQ+ communities – have experienced similarly exploitative or at best, inappropriate approaches to data collection and reporting, which has led to a growing demand for community-based research and culturally responsive and equitable research and evaluation (e.g., see Damon et al, 2017).

As a result, there is both a need and responsibility for organizations collecting information to work collaboratively, safely, and respectfully, building relationships with Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving communities to conduct ethical, relevant, and purposeful data collection and research for mutual benefit, and to advance communities’ right to self-determination.

## Guiding considerations

Data collection involving Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups requires careful consideration of its purpose, context, and process (including by/with whom data collection is conducted and for whose benefit) to ensure it is ethical, respectful, and pays attention to power imbalances and current and historical discrimination. In particular, it can be helpful to consider how collecting these data can support groups' goals and priorities, such as improving individual and community self-determination, health, and economic and social wellbeing (e.g., through better service delivery, access to supports).

Taking these steps can help develop protocols that are likely to result in useable, high-quality data. For example, consideration of participants' privacy or safety concerns related to reporting identity characteristics is useful in deciding the level of anonymity required in reporting; addressing participants' concerns may promote higher response rates. Key considerations to guide planning are listed below (Bobadilla et al., 2022):

- **Why** are data being collected? What decisions will data collection inform? Why has this group been selected for data collection?
- **Who** is collecting the data? How does the identity, role and history of the organization(s) collecting data affect the comfort level of participants, the assumptions made, the level of background knowledge and experience with the population of interest, and other related topics? Who will be making decisions about data collection, ownership, stewardship, publication? Who is involved in these decisions? Understanding this context, what considerations need to be made? Who are the people collecting the data, and what training have they received to do so in a culturally sensitive manner?
- **Which** participant populations are included in data collection? Whose voices are being included or excluded in this group? Which social identities are represented in the sample? Understanding this, what considerations need to be taken when collecting, interpreting, and reporting data?
- **Where** will the data be published and distributed? Understanding this context, what considerations need to be made for participants' privacy, security, and comfort?

Discussion of these considerations can inform the specific planning stages of data collection. For example, if the purpose of data collection is to measure the employment outcomes of a program intended to increase attachment to the labour market among newcomer populations, identifying relevant identity characteristics (e.g., language ability, age, newcomer status, ethnicity) and group-specific concerns (e.g., potential need for culturally appropriate protocols, reluctance to disclose information that may be perceived to affect immigration status) can guide decisions around data collection. These decisions may ultimately generate information that can result in actionable recommendations for program improvement. Responses to these considerations above can also guide the response to the following question:

- **What** identity characteristics, outcome measures, and contextual variables need to be collected? Which response options should be used? Which data collection methods will be most appropriate, relevant, and useful?

### Promising practice spotlight: The Five Safes framework

The Five Safes framework is a model of data privacy that is internationally used by statistical bodies, researchers, and government offices including the Australian Bureau of Statistics, the United Kingdoms Office for National Statistics, and British Columbia's Anti-Racism Data Act (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2021) The framework seeks to balance the usefulness of data (e.g., detailed information, data sharing) and the risk of disclosure (e.g., data leaks). The Five Safes model mitigates risk through the following five elements:

- Safe People – "Is the research appropriately authorized to access and use the data?" Researchers accessing data should have authorization and be trained in confidentiality and data security practices.
- Safe Projects – "Is the data to be used for an appropriate purpose?" Data collection should be conducted for public benefit, with valid aims, and no capacity to be used in a regulatory capacity.
- Safe Settings – "Does the access environment prevent unauthorized use?" Environmental protection involves both the physical environment (e.g., locked doors), the digital environment (e.g., firewalls, IT monitoring), and proper supervision (e.g., auditing).
- Safe Data – "Has appropriate and sufficient protection been applied to the data?" Factors to consider in relation to protecting data include identifying information, the sensitivity of data, and the aggregation of data.
- Safe Outputs – "Are the statistical results non-disclosive?" As final check, data reported outside of the approved research environment should be double-checked to ensure it does not disclose the identity of participants.

## Guiding frameworks

Beyond considering the purpose, mechanisms, and participant groups from whom data are sought, it is important to consider what such data mean. Data collection is about social categorization, which is ultimately based on a set of values and assumptions about what information is important, what constitutes 'evidence,' 'knowledge,' and 'truth' (Smith, 2021). In other words, it is important to consider different perspectives on and ways of thinking about identity, outcome, program delivery and context in order to determine focus and priority.

Given that program participants – like all people – have intersecting identities that shape their experiences, applying lenses that take this complexity into consideration can inform the choice of variables, and the design of tools and methods for program data collection and reporting, even what information to *not* collect. Five conceptual frameworks that provide a broader perspective on these issues are briefly described below. Each of these frameworks is explained in detail in Appendix B.

### *Life course approach*

The life course approach acknowledges that events at each stage of life influence subsequent stages and recognizes that experiences are shaped by one's age cohort and historical context (Marshall & McMullin, 2010). This approach also emphasizes that both past and present experiences are shaped by the wider social, economic, and cultural contexts (World Health Organization, 2000; World Health Organization, 2018). Through this approach, identifying key life stages for participant populations and collecting data related to these stages and life experiences are important to contextualize program outcomes and optimize service provision.

### *Social-ecological approach*

A socio-ecological approach recognizes the multiple levels or systems in which we all live (Bronfenbrenner, 1993). It articulates the dynamic interactions among various personal and environmental factors that can influence outcomes in any given sphere of human activity, including health and wellbeing, social development, and employment. Inter-relationships among multi-level factors serve to influence individual outcomes.

*Macro-level* factors refer to societal or industry-level structures, systems, and cultural norms (e.g., gendered roles and expectations). *Organizational* factors refer to organizational practices, policies, norms, and standards (e.g., discriminatory hiring and advancement practices). *Interpersonal* factors include attitudes and behaviours of one's social network, such as employers, co-workers, peers, family, and service providers (e.g., bullying and harassment, informal peer networks, or cultural competence and communication). Finally, *individual-level* factors refer to an individual's knowledge, skills, resources, beliefs, and attitudes (e.g., self-confidence, personal capital). One's individual-level factors are both limited and shaped by factors within broader systems, such as the availability of community-level infrastructure, supports, and resources, or organizational policies and practices related to advancement (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021).

### *Intersectional approach*

Building on the socio-ecological approach, an intersectional approach recognizes the ways in which different social locations can confer advantage or disadvantage through processes of entitlement or conversely, marginalization, exclusion, and oppression (Collins, 2015; Crenshaw, 1989). All of us have more than one identity (e.g., Indigenous or racialized youth, older newcomer woman, lesbian woman with a disability). Subject to the interaction of one's multiple social locations, these identities can become forms of exclusion and marginalization with respect to a range of employment and training outcomes (Collins, 2015, Crenshaw, 1989).

This intersectionality underscores the importance of recognizing and engaging with people's identities and social locations beyond single groupings (e.g., women, people who identify as LGBTQ2S+), and highlighting the ways in which individuals' lives are further shaped by race, income/class, ability, age, ethnicity, religion, geography, and other factors (Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021).

Collecting and disaggregating data on relevant identity dimensions can be a useful strategy to reveal differential program impacts. Understanding the social identity of both the researchers and the participants can inform data collection methods; for example, there may be additional safety and privacy concerns when working with marginalized populations, which may guide whether or not data should be collected by members of the same community.

### Human rights-based approach

A human rights-based approach (HRBA) places human rights at the center of policy and programming, considering the fulfilment of stakeholders' rights as the ultimate goal of programs (United Nations Sustainable Development Group, 2022; United Nations Population Fund, 2021). The HRBA applies human rights legislation as a guiding framework, with the central tenet that all individuals have fundamental, unalienable rights – such as the rights to equal treatment, education, and employment. It is the responsibility of governmental organizations, either directly or through funding, to create an environment in which individuals are able to realize and exercise their rights; moreover, governments have a legislated obligation to protect citizens' rights to privacy, confidentiality, and the security of their personal information. A HRBA views social supports, programs, and accommodations as the government fulfilling its duty and responsibility to protect and promote the rights of its citizens – inclusive social programming is a mandatory element of an equitable society, and citizens have rights both to program access and to self-determination of their personal data.

While human rights are universal, meaning that all individuals have the same basic rights, Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups continue to face systemic barriers and challenges to realizing their rights. There are specific human rights documents that provide additional guidance on the rights of specific populations, including women, Indigenous Peoples, racialized persons, persons with disabilities, and youth. For example, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) recognizes Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination; to support this right, programs working with Indigenous stakeholders should include community leaders and incorporate Indigenous knowledge in all stages of program planning, delivery, and assessment.

### *Anti-oppressive & decolonizing approaches*

Anti-oppressive approaches combat the factors that create social injustice and are described in the literature as a prerequisite for equity and culturally safe programming (Baines & Edwards, 2015; Baines, 2007; Adams, Dominelli, & Payne, 2002). Applying these approaches enables understanding of how a person's race, gender, sexual orientation, identity, age, class, and ability can result in systematic inequality and inequity. Systems of oppression such as colonialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and ableism often result in individual discriminatory actions as well as structural/systemic inequalities for certain groups in society (Nixon, S.A., 2019). As a result of these systems of oppression, certain societal groups are privileged over others through unearned advantage.

Indigenous Peoples, for example, continue to suffer from systems of oppression. Colonization continues to have an impact, contributing to inequities experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015), despite centuries of resistance and resilience. Decolonization is an anti-oppressive approach that specifically seeks to dismantle the systematic oppression of Indigenous peoples, Indigenous culture, and the sites of oppression from colonization (Jakubec & Bourke Bearskin, 2020). This approach centres the world views of Indigenous and other colonized peoples, respectfully knowing and understanding theory and research from previously "Other(ed)" perspectives (Battiste, 2000; Datta, 2018; Aspin et al., 2018, Smith, 2012). It also requires requires a commitment to truth and reconciliation and particular attention paid to relationships, justice, truth, and power (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; Jakubec & Bourque Bearskin, 2020).

Applying an anti-oppressive lens or practice to the data collection cycle values the teachings and overall worldviews of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups (Aspin et al., 2018; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2013; Thomas & Green, 2019), and provides opportunities for researchers to examine their procedures and motivations and increase the likelihood their studies will yield ethical and accurate results (Baines & Edwards, 2015). This requires individuals, teams and organizations to think critically and reflect on every step in the data collection process to answer questions and to create a space for anti-oppressive practice.

## Opportunities for high-quality data collection

### *Identity characteristics*

- Since standards for inclusive language are fluid and evolving, and appropriate data collection differs depending on data collection context, methods, and purpose, there is no one-size-fits-all guideline to data collection that can be applied in every circumstance.

Some general recommended guidelines for collecting identity characteristics include:

- include options to self describe, using language such as “prefer to self describe” rather than “other”
- allow participants the option to “select all that apply,” recognizing that participants may have multiple relevant identities and experiences
- include a “prefer not to answer” question to track intentional non-responses; and perhaps most importantly
- generate response options in consultation with relevant communities, whenever possible.

In addition, it is necessary to pay attention to the wording of questions and ordering of response options to assess for potential bias (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2020; Charles and Lynn Schusterman Family Foundation, 2021; OECD, 2018). This can mean, for example, that identity characteristics of non-dominant groups are listed before those traditionally seen as the norm.

When collecting data about the priority populations identified by ESDC, there are some group-specific lessons learned from prior research. We list these key insights below, along with examples of existing questions and resources related to each identity characteristic.

- **Sex and gender:** It is now recommended that data related to sex (assigned at birth) and gender are collected in separate questions (Statistics Canada, 2020b). Response options for sex can include female, male, and intersex options; however, there are many response options to capture data on gender identity. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine (2022) published a consensus report with the most recent evidence on the measurement of sex, gender identity and sexual orientation, as well as their complexities.
- **2S/LGBTQ+:** 2S/LGBTQ+ is a broad term that encompasses many gender identities and sexual orientations, including culturally specific identities (i.e., Two-spirit Indigenous people). Often, sexual orientation data are collected through questions about same-sex relationships, which capture only a subset of the 2S/LGBTQ+ population and systematically exclude those such as bisexual individuals in opposite-sex relationships (OECD, 2018; Pakula & Smith Fowler, 2021). While questions on gender identity, sexual orientation, and culturally specific identities are necessary to accurately capture identity data for this community, the ways in which sexual orientation is measured can influence outcomes attributed to sexual minorities (Brennan et al., 2021). It is also important to note that terminology for this set of identity characteristics is evolving, making it even more important to seek and follow up-to-date guidance from community representatives in specific contexts.

Even within these groupings, attention must be given to variance in program outcomes, recognizing that aggregated outcomes can obscure the challenges and/or successes of groups within the participant population (Brennan et al., 2021; Center for the Study of Social Policy, 2019). However, as members of the 2S/LGBTQ+ community remain marginalized and at a greater risk of violence, identity data related to gender and sexual orientation can be highly sensitive information and should be collected, stored, and reported with appropriate safeguards (e.g., minimum cell counts or sample sizes).

- **Ethnicity/Race:** Ethnicity is a multi-dimensional concept that refers to a cultural group and may be related to language, religion, nationality, and other characteristics (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2020). Race refers to the social construct of categorizing people based on physical differences such as skin color, hair, or facial features (Canadian Institute for Health Information, 2020). Accurately collecting data on ethnicity and race is difficult, as individuals may hold multiple identities, may "pass" and/or identify with different ethnic or racial definitions at different points in time, and the terminology used to describe race and ethnicity (e.g., visible minority, racialized, BIPOC) have evolving and inconsistently applied definitions.

It is therefore particularly important to determine what kind of information is needed, the purpose to which it will be applied, and the context in which it is collected. Detailed information about ethnicity, for example, may not be required, particularly if the information is not going to be used to explore variance in delivery or outcomes, or to inform program improvement.

## A note on the term "visible minority"

The use of the term "visible minority" in Canada has been discouraged by various international groups, including the United Nations Committee on the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (Canadian Race Relations Foundation, 2015). In addition to the debate around the social appropriateness of the term, there is some evidence that the term "visible minority" is confusing to participants in research contexts. For example, a 2020 study found in a sample of Canadians, some perceived the term "visible minority" as potentially referring to "disability, poverty, religion, gender (both cisgender women and transgender persons), and sexual orientation" in addition to ethnicity/racial identity (Bauer et al., 2020). A proportion of Indigenous participants, transgender participants, and participants with a disability/disabilities self-identified as a "visible minority" as they felt this term reflected their lived experience. Conversely, some participants technically included in the Employment Act's definition of visible minority (i.e., "persons, other than Aboriginal peoples, who are non-Caucasian in race or non-white in color") did not self-identify as visible minorities as they felt they were perceived as white some or most of the time or did not experience social disadvantage or discrimination that they felt was associated with the term (Bauer et al., 2020; Government of Canada, 1986).

- **Indigenous Peoples:** In Canada, the term Indigenous refers to First Nations, Metis, and Inuit Peoples. However, there are a broad variety of experiences and identities within these affiliations that can be difficult to capture, including legal status (e.g., status vs non-status under the *Indian Act*; treaty rights holder or beneficiary), location (e.g., on-reserve, off-reserve, urban), and ancestral knowledge (e.g., individuals who did not discover or learn about their Indigenous heritage until later in life, often due to forced family separation). Collecting binary information on Indigeneity (i.e., Indigenous/not Indigenous) obscures the diverse experiences of this population. Moreover, many people have shared ancestry across different Indigenous Peoples, so this option needs to be considered as well.

In addition, Indigenous Peoples in Canada and around the world have unique rights – including the right to self-determination – that are not held by other equity deserving groups, and differential access to policies and services based on legal status (e.g., registered or non-registered). It is therefore often useful or necessary to disaggregate data from Indigenous populations from other equity deserving groups and conduct further disaggregation (e.g., First Nation, Metis, and/or Inuit, location, registration status) when relevant to the program.

- **Persons with disabilities:** Disability is a socially defined[6] label that refers to the interaction of an individual's ability and their environment (Patton et al., 2010). Collecting consistent and accurate data related to disability can be limited by barriers to receiving medical diagnosis, evolving diagnostic criteria and definitions of disability, and social stigma. In addition, disability is increasingly viewed in more holistic and non-binary ways, to include mental health and learning challenges as well as episodic disabilities. As with other identity characteristics, it can often be more relevant and appropriate to frame questions about disability in terms of self-identification and lived experience than by formal diagnosis.

- **Newcomers:** Newcomers are individuals who have moved to Canada from another country, either as immigrants or refugees. These distinctions can be important, although terminology is often used inconsistently. For example, the term "immigrant" is used to describe all individuals born outside of Canada; individuals that arrived under an immigration category (i.e., not refugees or asylum-seekers); and the children of individuals who moved to Canada (e.g., second generation immigrants). Conflation between different newcomer populations can result in challenges interpreting data and generating appropriate conclusions and recommendations.

- **Youth:** The definition of "youth" is variable, evolving, and culturally specific, resulting in difficulties comparing datasets. Consider collecting discrete data on age (e.g., year of birth)

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[6] According to Patton and colleagues (2010), it is recommended that disability is defined in a way that
(a) recognizes individual experiences of disability, including severity and types of disability;
(b) understands disability as the interaction between impairments and social barriers (e.g., individuals may be limited by a combination of their physical limitations and lack of accommodations in the workplace); and (c) reduces the medicalization of disability (e.g., requiring formal diagnoses or history of medication).

or aligning response options with the age brackets (e.g., 18-25) used in datasets that are likely to be useful for comparison (e.g., census data).

Table 3 below includes variables related to ESDC's populations of interest, examples of considerations and approaches to collecting data on these variables, and resources for further information. While key variables have been included in this table, they are not comprehensive; certain programs may wish to collect more detailed information related to their program participants and mandate.

### Table 3 Identity characteristics: Variables and examples of data collection

| Population of interest | Variables | Example | Resources |
|---|---|---|---|
| Women | ▪ Gender identity<br>▪ Sex | In the 2021 Census, Statistics Canada started using two questions to capture sex and gender data: (1) "What was this person's **sex at birth** (sex refers to sex assigned at birth)?" and (2) "What is this person's **gender** (refers to current gender which may be different from sex assigned at birth and may be different from what is indicated on legal documents)?" These questions resulted in a low (0.10%) non-response rate in the 2019 census test. | Sex at birth and gender: Technical report on changes for the 2021 Census |
| 2S/LGBTQ2+ | ▪ Gender identity<br>▪ Sexual Orientation | TransPULSE, an Ontario organization working with youth in the queer community, includes a wide range of response options for questions related to gender identity and sexual orientation. | TransPULSE Survey |
| Racialized Canadians | ▪ Ethnicity<br>▪ Race<br>▪ Religion<br>▪ Visibility (e.g., are you perceived by others as a racialized person?) | The Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism suggests using a preamble that recognizes race and ethnicity as social constructs, including open-response options, and allowing participants to select multiple options to reflect mixed background. Information on religion and ethnicity are considered to be "race-related." | Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism – Collection of Personal Information about Race |

| Population of interest | Variables | Example | Resources |
|---|---|---|---|
| Indigenous Peoples | ▪ Self-described Indigeneity<br>▪ Residence (e.g., on- or off- reserve)<br>▪ Legal status with respect to the *Indian Act* (i.e., Treaty Indian) | The Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism suggest collecting information on First Nations, Metis, and Inuit status. Separate questions can be used to collect additional information (e.g., First Nations band or community). | Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of Systemic Racism – Collection of Personal Information about Indigenous Identity |
| Persons with Disabilities | ▪ Type of disability<br>▪ Severity of disability<br>▪ Legal disability status | The Canadian Survey on Disability collects data on a variety of disability- and employment- related characteristics, including disability status, disability type, potential to work, barriers to employment, and modifications required to the work environment. | Canadian Survey on Disability – Variables (2017)<br>Canadian Survey on Disability – Question wording (2017) |
| Newcomers | ▪ Immigration status<br>▪ Year of immigration/ time in Canada<br>▪ Country of origin<br>▪ Language(s) of origin/language ability<br>▪ Generation (e.g., 1st, 2nd) | The Longitudinal Immigration Database (IMBD) collects information on a wide variety of variables related to immigration status, including language ability, citizenship status, admission category, and application type (e.g., principal applicant, secondary applicant) in addition to information on education, income, and employment. | Longitudinal Immigration Database – Variables (2020) |
| Youth | ▪ Age | The age range used by Statistics Canada and other federal data collection activities (including EI information) use consistent classifications of age group. | Statistics Canada: Classification of age group |

## Q5: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS FOR ESDC?

This research set out to provide SEB with recommendations on different interventions that could a) improve the frequency of voluntary client reporting and b) improve the ability of programs to better measure and monitor outcomes experienced by clients with intersecting identities. Our findings suggest that rather than a one-size-fits-all approach to data collection, a reflective process is needed to determine the context in which the data will be used, the ways in which Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups contribute to the design of data collection and reporting protocols, and the appropriateness of what will be collected and how it will be used and communicated.

This process is not a value free exercise – centering the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups in data collection and reporting is challenging, complex work – in part because it is not the norm – and takes time. Other jurisdictions are grappling with similar issues regarding data collection, analysis, and reporting. However, there are lessons learned that can guide further work in this area, as outlined in the subsequent sections.

## Rethink ways to obtain data on diverse identities from program participants

**Centre equity deserving groups in data collection.** Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups with lived experience are key partners in determining what, how, and when to collect data that are appropriate acceptable, and reflective of their experience in employment programs. Ensuring that their perspectives are meaningfully integrated into the data collection, analysis, and reporting cycle is critical to achieving success in training and employment programming. Without their direct involvement, one does not have adequate perspective and guiding inputs to successfully understand and address program objectives. Centering these groups in data collection is an ongoing process, with each stage of the data collection cycle presenting opportunities to apply equity frameworks and considerations (see Appendix B).

We recognize that engaging people affected by a program in its design, delivery and determination of outcomes is not new to ESDC, including in employment and skills training. Programs such as Indigenous Skills and Employment Program (ISET) and the Opportunities Fund have engaged community members and even employers to ensure that appropriate indicators are identified and implemented to track participant and employer outcomes.

### Promising practice spotlight: The Indigenous Skills and Employment Training program

Much can be learned from the development and implementation of the Indigenous Skills and Employment (ISET) program, which is designed to support Indigenous people to improve their skills and find employment (Government of Canada, 2022). Building on the Aboriginal Skills and Employment Training Strategy (ASETS), ESDC engaged with Indigenous partners across the country to review the ASETS and hear directly from them about their perspectives. The ISET program was co-developed with Indigenous partners, as a result of these consultations. Organizations that deliver the ISET program have a greater flexibility to design programs according to their community needs. While recognizing that Indigenous Peoples in Canada have unique rights and recognitions with the government of Canada, learning from the ISET experience can benefit other equity deserving groups. Engaging with organizations that provide employment and training to equity deserving groups, utilizing anti-oppressive and rights-based approaches can ensure that programming responds to their needs, and defines and measures success accordingly.

**Expand definitions of success; use a broader range of measures and a milestone approach to outcome measurement.** While employment and training programs may have specific long-term outcomes (e.g., attachment to the labour market), such generalized group-level outcomes do not typically represent the full picture, especially the individual, community, and societal influences and barriers faced by Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups. They also do not take into consideration participants' distance from the labour market, or outcomes along the pathway to employment that are appropriate and meaningful to different groups.

The findings from the LDMA and OF evaluations speak to the need to expand definitions of success and include intermediary outcomes in evaluation and outcome reporting. Focusing overly on a handful or high-level, quantitative outcomes ignores those that are more experiential – often subjective or qualitative in nature – that may be particularly important to program participants and their communities; it also ignores the intermediary steps that are essential to reaching longer-term or ultimate outcomes such as sustained employment. Applying a milestone approach means measuring intermediary outcomes a participant can achieve while working toward a longer-term outcome; these can include foundational skills, time management, career preparation or employment readiness. It can be helpful to include milestones that are more wholistic and in line with participants' needs and priorities (e.g., wellness measures, cultural safety) as well as data points that better reflect participants' distance from the labour market (e.g., improved essential skills as a stepping-stone to meaningful employment). Employment and training programs that do not already have milestone outcomes may benefit from defining such outcomes as part of their work with Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups.

**Support providers'/programs' data collection capacity.** Capacity building at the program service delivery level is important to ensuring high quality data collection. Whether service delivery is done by government or externally through third party providers, high quality data collection and reporting requires an investment in staff training as well as supporting infrastructure. Examples of training and supports for capacity building include:

- **Anti-oppression, trauma-informed training for program delivery staff.** Setting the stage for high-quality, appropriate, relevant, and meaningful data collection includes awareness that a participant's program experience is influenced by their diverse characteristics and contexts, and that Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups are affected by structures set up to enforce inequitable outcomes and defend systems of power and privilege. Training in anti-oppressive approaches may help staff build trust with participants who are Indigenous or from other equity deserving groups, especially groups that have been subject to misuse of data in the past.

- **Common but flexible outcome measurement systems.** As described earlier in this report, there is a lack of consistency in data collection across the programs reviewed for this report. The data variables are different, and sometimes response categories for the same variable are different across programs. One way of addressing this is by implementing a user-friendly database to collect and store data, such as ESDC's IFFS system. Other government departments and agencies also use a common database for their programs across the country. For example, Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship Canada administers an online data collection tool – Immigration Contribution Agreement Management Environment (iCARE) – that service delivery partners use to enter settlement data for eligible newcomer program participants. While not perfect, the use of platforms such as IFFS and iCARE helps ensure providers have uniform data entry, which can be used for measuring client outcomes from across providers of the Settlement Program.

That said, common measurement systems invariably sacrifice specificity for comparability. Particularly when it comes to programs serving Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups, there are many important considerations for common reporting systems, including the relevance and cultural appropriateness of data categories, and the capacity of service providers to use the system. In these cases, it is important to consider how to adequately capture programs' unique circumstances and contributions, whether in terms of participants' characteristics and outcomes, or program context and delivery. Understanding and implementing what works best – and for whom – with tools like these, and how to adapt them, can inform common measurement systems across training and employment programs that are more effective at handling diverse data.

## Balance detail, reporting burden, and privacy concerns

More extensive data collection (e.g., on diverse identity characteristics) can result in both participants and service delivery providers spending more time on data collection and reporting activities, as well as privacy concerns. As noted previously, engaging Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups in the data collection and reporting cycle, as well as careful consideration of the purpose, context and use of the data are essential to ensuring appropriate and high-quality data collection. Limiting data collection to what is necessary reduces the reporting burden on respondents and reporting organizations, reduces the harmful impacts of potential data leaks, and protects respondents' privacy. Key principles worthy of emphasis that can ease data collection and reporting burden include:

- **Confidentiality and informed consent.** Prior to any data collection, it is important to discuss participant's rights regarding data collection, including its purpose, what is being collected, how data will be shared, and with whom. Addressing these issues, alongside confidentiality and privacy, can enable each program participant to make an informed decision regarding participating in data collection. Data collection methods that protect participants' anonymity and do not link identifiable data back to their outcomes may encourage greater participation in data collection activities. For example, including an anonymous survey alongside existing data collection sources may enable ESDC to conduct more reliable subgroup analyses, particularly if existing program administrative data have limitations regarding data quality and privacy.

- **Transparent decision-making.** Program participants are more likely to respond and provide information if there is clear communication on why data are being collected and how they will be used to benefit the community. It is also important to share results back with participants – either directly or through service providers – as well as any reports on how the data are being used to influence changes in policy, practice, and programming for the benefit of the community. Sharing data with the community aligns with Indigenous principles of self determination and data sovereignty such as OCAP®[7] (First Nations Information Governance Centre, n.d.) and the National Inuit Strategy on Research (Inuit Tapiriit Kanatami, 2018).

### Promising practice spotlight: Ontario Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of System Racism

Ontario introduced the Anti-Racism Data Standards (2018) as an implementation guide for the *Anti-Racism Act* (2017), which required public sector organizations to collect race-based data (Government of Ontario, 2018). The standards include a set of six principles – privacy, confidentiality, and dignity; commitment and accountability; impartiality and integrity; quality assurance; organizational resources; transparency, timeliness, and accessibility – that overlap with rights-based data collection principles, but are aligned more closely to public service organizations.

These standards aim to set requirements and provide guidance "at every stage, from planning and preparation to analysis and reporting." Seven stages of research have been established, each with related standards (see Ontario Data Standards for the Identification and Monitoring of System Racism for more information).

1. Assess, plan, and prepare
2. Collect personal information
3. Manage and protect personal information
4. Analyze the information collected
5. Release of data and results of analysis to the public
6. Support and promote anti-racism organizational change
7. Participant observer information.

## Enhance response rates

Note that while improved response rates are important for understanding data and the broad application of the results, principles of informed consent respect the option for participants to refuse to answer any questions that they wish. In other words, in certain circumstances, low

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[7] OCAP® is a registered trademark of the First Nations Information Governance Centre (FNIGC).

response rates may be a positive sign, in that they signal participants' understanding of their rights and exercising them. More generally, however, the following steps may be helpful at increasing program participants' engagement in data collection, and subsequently, higher response rates:

- **Use inclusive language in surveys**. Using inclusive language can help participants feel safe disclosing their personal information, as can transparency as to why data are being collected and how they will be used. Wherever possible, the use of inclusive language should be guided by response categories developed through consultation and participatory research with participants and communities, especially those from Indigenous Peoples or other equity deserving groups. Including open-response options so participants can self-identify can also make participants feel more comfortable disclosing information.

- **Provide incentives for participation in data collection activities.** Offering monetary incentives to participants to complete surveys has been shown to be an effective approach for enhancing survey response rates (Hardy et al., 2016; Yu et al., 2017). Individual-level monetary incentives have been found to be more effective than "lottery" type incentives (e.g., a prize draw) in enhancing participant response rates (Ulrich et al., 2005).

- **Implement flexible data collection methods.** Having a variety of options to collect program data may increase the likelihood of acceptability, and thus participation for Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups. For example, depending on the context and purpose of data being collected, different methods could include surveys (oral/phone/paper/online surveys) and non-survey data collection methods (e.g., individual or group interviews, Photovoice).

- **Communicate benefits.** Providing Indigenous program participants and those from other equity deserving groups with a clear message about how data collection will result in concrete actions and improvements in policies, services, and training as a result of participation; this in turn may help enhance response rates.

# CONCLUSIONS AND NEXT STEPS

## Stakeholder consultation

This report identified four key data categories that can help ESDC and service delivery providers understand the perspectives and experiences of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups in employment and training programs: identity characteristics, outcomes, program delivery, and context. However, even before working through the specifics for each of these data categories, it is important to consider some fundamental questions with stakeholders pertinent to data collection and how it will be used and shared. Given that ESDC intends to conduct consultation with communities about its new strategy, some draft questions for consideration are provided here:

- In your experience, what programs and services could benefit from better identity-based data collection and reporting?
- What guiding principles should service providers apply to ensure identity and outcome data are collected and used in a way that is culturally appropriate, does not create additional harms, and contributes to equitable program delivery?
- How can identity-based data be used in employment and training programs to advance equity for different groups?
- What would anti-racist, anti-oppressive data reporting look like to you?
- What kinds of safeguards and explanations would enhance participants' confidence in the use and protection of their identity and outcome data?
- If you had access to diversity data across the different programs, how would you use it? How could it be used to influence policy and programming for Indigenous peoples and other equity deserving groups, moving forward?

## Establish mechanisms for input

Increasing awareness of the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups and ensuring these perspectives are integrated throughout the data collection cycle is the first step to high quality data collection. In BC, the provincial government is in the process of forming an anti-racism committee to support the recently enacted Anti-Racism Data Act. Formed by diverse representation from across the province, this committee will collaborate with the BC government to ensure the voices of Indigenous Peoples and other racialized people are centred throughout implementation of the Act.

Similarly, ESDC could consider engaging representatives from Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups in a committee or working group, whose mandate would be to support multiple ESDC programs from different directorates and branches in their efforts to improve data collection for their programs. The committee could collaborate with different departments to ensure an equity and diversity lens is applied to the data collection and reporting cycle, particularly with a view to centering the perspectives of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups and addressing systemic barriers. Promising practices could be shared across ESDC using existing mechanisms such as ESDC's SEB Talks to share lessons learned regarding data collection and reporting with participants in ESDC's skills training and employment programs.

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# APPENDIX A: SUMMARY TABLES

The identity characteristics in the table below were selected to reflect ESDC's stated populations of interest in relation to employment and skill training programs. The table is not inclusive of other identity characteristics tracked by some of the programs, including socio-economic status, educational attainment, and household composition.

Table 4 Comparison: Identity characteristics across jurisdictions

| | PROGRAM | OTHER JURISDICTIONS: MEASUREMENT OF IDENTITY CHARACTERISTICS | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Gender | Racialized group | Indigenous | People with Disabilities | Newcomers | Age | 2S/LGBTQ+ |
| AUSTRALIA | Work-related Training and Adult Learning, Australia Bureau of Statistics (2020-2021)[8] | Female/Male | None | None | None | Country of birth (Australia/ Other) | Age groups: 15-19, 20-24, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55-64, 65-74 | None |
| | Employment Service Outcome reports: Job Active[9] | Female/Male | None | Yes/No | None | "Culturally and Linguistically Diverse" Yes/No | Age groups: 15-20, 21-24, 25-34, 35-49, 50+ | None |
| | Employment Service Outcome reports: Online employment services[2] | Female/Male | None | Yes/No | None | None | None | None |
| | Employment Service Outcome reports: New Employment Services Trial[2] | Female/Male | None | None | None | None | None | None |

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[8] Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2022 d.

[9] Department of Education, Skills and Employment, 2022.

| PROGRAM | | OTHER JURISDICTIONS: MEASUREMENT OF IDENTITY CHARACTERISTICS | | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | Gender | Racialized group | Indigenous | People with Disabilities | Newcomers | Age | 2S/LGBTQ+ |
| UNITED STATES | Comparing State and National Approaches to Education and Training Program Scorecards[10] | Female/Male/Not reported or missing | Race: White, Black, Other, Not Reported or missing | None | None | None | Age groups: 24 or younger, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55+ | None |
| | Implementation/Sustainability Report of Programs of "Ready to Work" Partnership Grant Evaluation[11] | Female/Male | Race: Asian, Black or African American, White, Hispanic ethnicity | None | None | None | Age groups: 24 or younger, 25-34, 35-44, 45-54, 55+ | None |

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[10] Davis et al., 2017.

[11] Copson et al., 2020.

# APPENDIX B: GUIDING FRAMEWORKS

In addition to the general considerations, the five conceptual frameworks provided below can be used to clarify the purpose and process of data collection and can be applied to inform the design of tools and methods for program data collection, analysis, and reporting. Each is explained in more detail below, with high-level implications for this project outlined.

## LIFE COURSE APPROACH

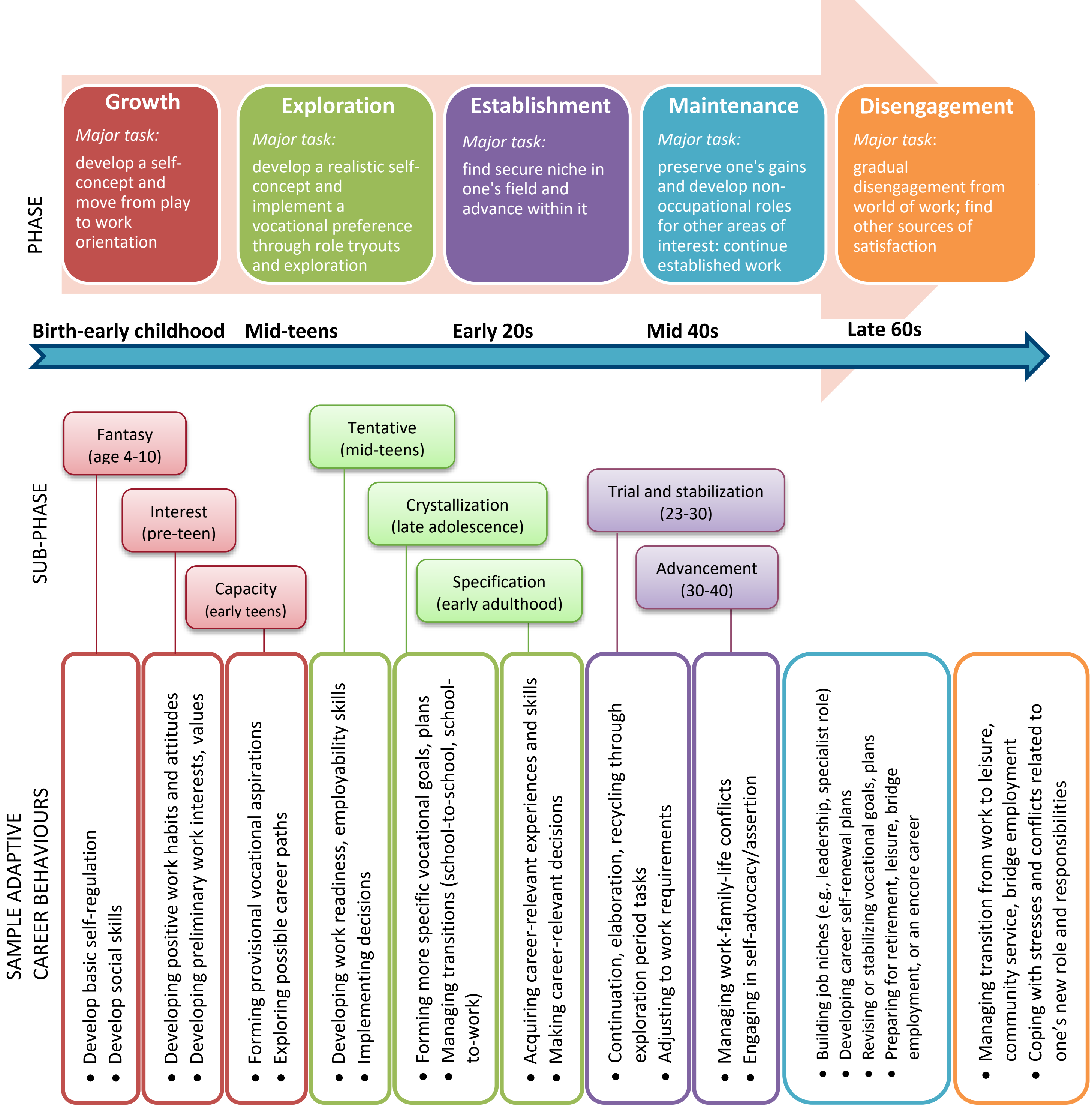
The life course approach, also known as the life course perspective or life course theory, analyzes people's lives within structural, social, and cultural contexts, "*see[ing] our daily experiences as part of a greater process that begins at birth and stretches to death.*"[22] This perspective acknowledges that events at each stage of life influence subsequent stages, and recognizes that experiences are shaped by one's age cohort and historical context.[23] It takes a temporal and societal perspective on the well-being of individuals and generations, recognizing that all stages of a person's life are intricately intertwined with each other, with the lives of others born in the same period, and with the lives of past and future generations. Notably, a life course approach emphasizes that both past and present experiences are shaped by the wider social, economic, and cultural contexts.[24,25] Figure 1 below, which shows stages of career development organized by life stage, should be interpreted in this context.

Thinking of labour market outcomes, a life course perspective challenges the limitations of individual or human capital approaches, focusing instead on the effects of "*path dependency, gravity, and shocks,*" and bringing together individual agency and choice as well as systemic and structural factors.[23] This perspective focuses less on individual trajectories and more on the ongoing interactions of individuals with social structures, particularly structures of inequality and life-course "scripts." Challenges to the acquisition of human capital thus cannot be examined without reference to where this fits in the life course of individuals, linked lives, and the intersections of life courses with social structures.[22] For instance, Brückner's research on gender wage gaps in Germany draws from life course models to highlight the cumulative effects of earnings gaps over time.[26] McDonald, studying housing evictions from a life course perspective, points to the accumulation of transitions that ultimately lead to homelessness at different stages of individuals' lives.[27]

Contextualization of the life course differs for individuals from historically marginalized communities, who may experience unique as well as common life events as a result of different forms of disadvantage, yet who might also develop distinct resources and resilience in response this adversity.[28] For example, people who identify as LGBTQ2S+ have been found to report distinct life events related to sexual and gender identity development, as well as historical marginalization and discrimination in work and other settings, experiences of prejudice and violence, and unique family and peer relations.[28,29]

Research also suggests that the life course trajectories of people who identify as 2S/LGBTQ+ may be characterized by higher levels of volatility, including risk of financial hardship,[30] though these trajectories may not be shared by everyone within this broader population.[31] Through this approach, identifying key life stages for participant populations and collecting data related to these stages and life experiences are important areas of research necessary to contextualize program outcomes and optimize service provision.

Figure 1 Stages of career development, organized by life stage[12]



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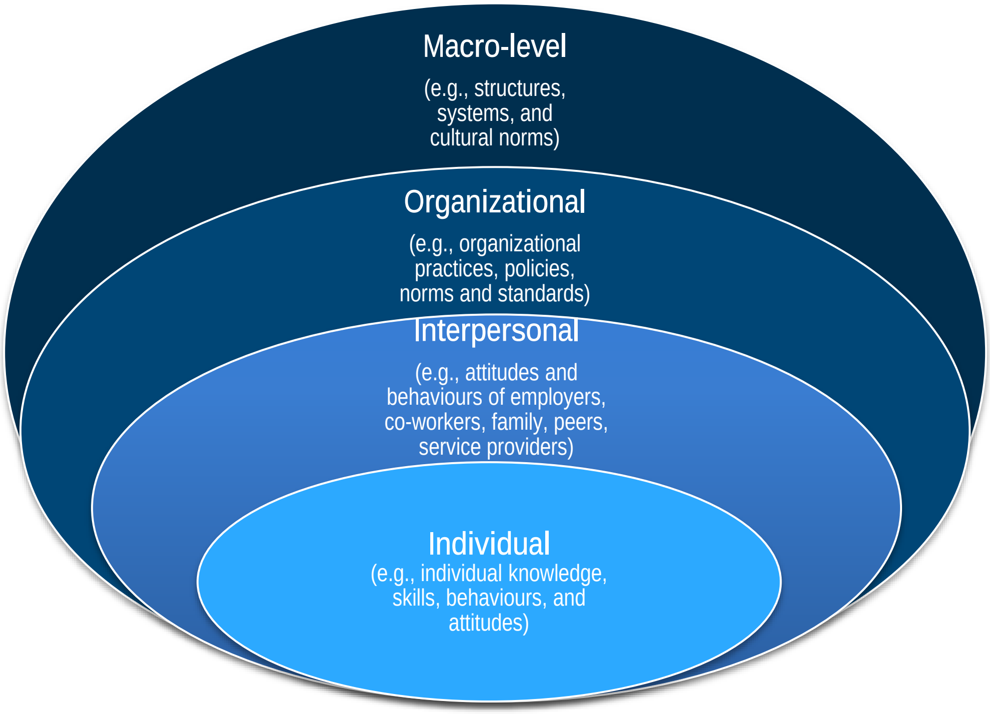
[12] Phases and sample adaptive career behaviours have been adapted from Lent and Brown (2013, p. 560). Sub-phases have been adapted from Super (1980, p. 289).

## SOCIAL-ECOLOGICAL APPROACH

A socio-ecological approach[15] recognizes the multiple levels or systems in which we all live. It articulates the dynamic interactions among various personal and environmental factors that can influence outcomes in any given sphere of human activity, including health and wellbeing, social development, and employment. In this complex system, a person's social location may confer advantage or disadvantage across systems as processes operate in different ways and at different levels. Identities, circumstances, and contexts can also be sources of strength and facilitate achievement of goals.

As seen in Figure 2, the socio-ecological model emphasizes the inter-relationships among multi-level factors that serve to influence individual outcomes, in this case, employment and training. *Macro-level* factors refer to societal or industry-level structures, systems, and cultural norms (e.g., gendered roles and expectations). *Organizational* factors refer to organizational practices, policies, norms, and standards (e.g., discriminatory hiring and advancement practices). *Interpersonal* factors include attitudes and behaviours of one's social network, such as employers, co-workers, peers, family, and service providers (e.g., bullying and harassment, informal peer networks, or cultural competence and communication). Finally, *individual-level* factors refer to an individual's knowledge, skills, resources, beliefs, and attitudes (e.g., self-confidence, personal capital).

Figure 2 Socio-ecological model



In the socio-ecological model, barriers are generally conceptualized to “flow” from larger systems to individuals, especially as they accumulate over the life course to form patterns of disadvantage. These patterns are important considerations for employment and training because one’s individual agency (e.g., to acquire skills) is both limited and shaped by factors within broader systems, such as the availability of community-level infrastructure, supports, and resources, or organizational policies and practices related to advancement.

## INTERSECTIONAL APPROACH

An intersectional approach[16,17] to this project’s analysis builds on the socio-ecological approach, by recognizing the ways in which different social locations can confer advantage or disadvantage through processes of entitlement or conversely, marginalization, exclusion, and oppression. While there has been considerable analysis to date of the challenges faced by distinct groups under-represented in the labour market, much less has been written about those who belong to more than one group (e.g., Indigenous or racialized youth, newcomer women, women with disabilities), and the implications these multiple identities have for employment and training supports. This approach supports and extends the Government of Canada’s adoption of Gender-Based Analysis Plus (GBA+), which challenges the notion that any policy, program, or initiative applies to everyone equally.[18]

An intersectional approach suggests that a person’s multiple social locations can interact, creating forms of exclusion and marginalization with respect to a range of employment and training outcomes.[16,17] Therefore, multiple instances of marginalization cannot be adequately understood or ameliorated by unitary approaches that treat elements of one’s identity as distinct or independent subjects of inquiry. This underscores the importance of recognizing and engaging with people’s identities and social locations beyond single groupings (e.g., women, people who identify as LGBTQ2S+), and highlighting the ways in which individuals’ lives are further shaped by race, income/ class, ability, age, ethnicity, religion, geography, and other factors.

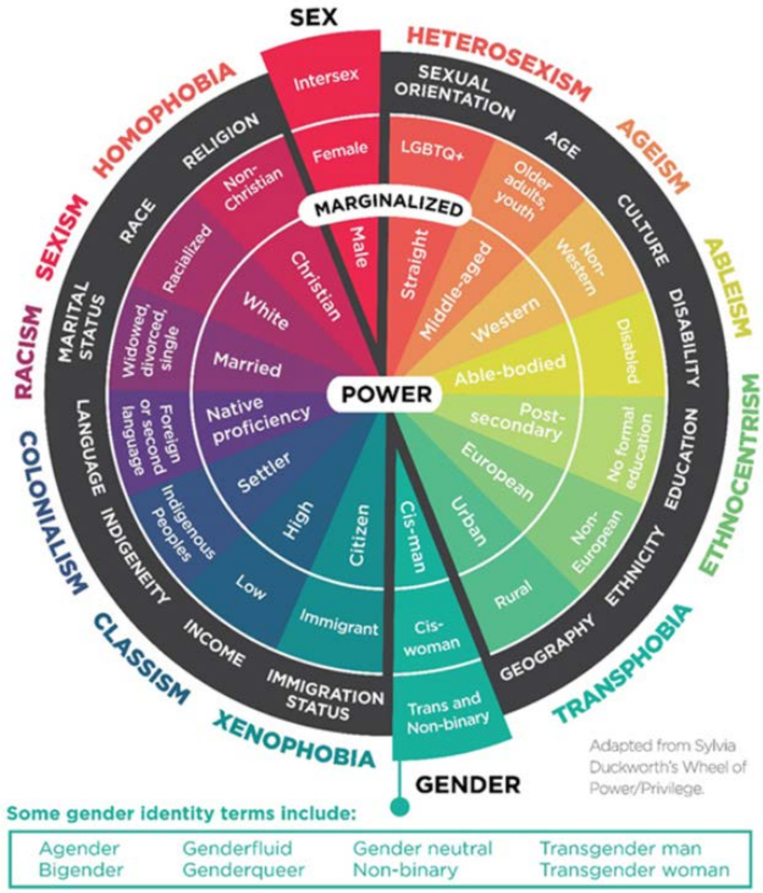
### INTERSECTIONALITY

Grounded in Black feminist thought, intersectionality proposes that *“race, class, gender, sexuality, ethnicity, nation, ability, and age operate not as unitary, mutually exclusive characteristics, but as reciprocally constructing phenomena that in turn shape complex social inequalities”* (Collins, 2015). Intersectionality rejects the notion that axes of oppression, from racism to sexism to ableism and so on, are merely additive. Writing of the experience of Black women, Kimberlé Crenshaw, who coined the term intersectionality, noted that *“the intersectional experience is greater than the sum of racism and sexism”* (Crenshaw, 1989). Rather, racism and sexism interact to create particular forms of exclusion and marginalization. While often used incorrectly – taken out of its initial context or thought of as synonymous with diversity – intersectionality is, at its core, about power structures.

Furthermore, the fact that all persons have multiple or intersecting identities is often overlooked or ignored at the expense of the perceived dominant identity (e.g., a person with a disability). This in turn may result in a lack of resources needed to contest the disadvantage conferred by that identity in certain contexts, such as access to group level-coping and resilience resources, and opportunities for social support through cultural connections.[19,20]

Figure 3 below provides a few examples of variables and dimensions of identity and social position, as well as processes of oppression, discrimination, privilege, and power that can be included in intersectional analyses (sourced from Bauer, 2021). What constitutes a position of power may play out differently at different intersections and in different contexts, as will the variables and dimensions that are the focus of research.[21] Collecting and disaggregating data on relevant identity dimensions can be a useful strategy to reveal differential program impacts. Understanding the social identity of both the researchers and the participants can inform data collection methods; for example, there may be additional safety and privacy concerns when working with marginalized populations.

Figure 3 Identity and social position variables and dimensions, as well as processes, that can be included in intersectional analyses[21]



## HUMAN RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH

A human rights-based approach (HRBA) places human rights at the center of policy and programming, considering the fulfilment of stakeholders' rights as the ultimate goal of programs.[13,14] The HRBA applies human rights legislation as a guiding framework, with the central tenet that all individuals have fundamental, unalienable rights – such as the rights to equal treatment, education, and employment. It is the responsibility of governmental organizations, either directly or through funding, to create an environment where individuals are able to realize their rights. Social supports, programs, and accommodations are understood as the government fulfilling its duty and responsibility to protect the rights of its citizens; inclusive social programming is a mandatory element of an equitable society.

Within the HRBA, the purpose of programs is to empower individuals to claim their rights and to build organizational capacity to create an environment in which rights are respected, protected, and promoted. Rights are considered indivisible and inter-related, meaning that it is usually necessary to take a holistic approach. For example, employment programs seeking to increase participation in employment may need to support individuals in attaining an adequate standard of living (e.g., stable housing, basic financial security) before gains in employment can be made.

While human rights are universal, meaning that all individuals have the same rights, there are many groups that continue to face systemic barriers and challenges to realizing their rights. Particular attention should be paid to respect, protect, and promote the rights of these groups. There are specific human rights documents that provide additional guidance on the rights of specific populations, including women, Indigenous Peoples, racialized persons, persons with disabilities, and youth.[15] These documents can be used to inform programming considerations when working with these populations. For example, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) recognizes Indigenous Peoples' right to self-determination; to support this right, programs working with Indigenous stakeholders can include community leaders and incorporate Indigenous knowledge in all stages of program planning, delivery, and assessment.

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[13] United Nations Sustainable Development Group. (2022). Human Rights-Based Approach. https://unsdg.un.org/2030-agenda/universal-values/human-rights-based-approach

[14] United Nations Population Fund. (2021). The Human Rights-Based Approach. https://www.unfpa.org/human-rights-based-approach

[15] For more information, please refer to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), the Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), the Convention on Ending Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC).

Practical application of the HRBA is guided by the five "PANEL" principles: participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment, and legality (see left panel, Figure 4):[16]

- **Participation**: Stakeholders should be meaningfully involved in all relevant decisions. In the context of employment and skill training programs, this can involve community consultations and consistent collection of stakeholder feedback.
- **Accountability:** There is a need for close monitoring of intended and unintended program results. Actions should be taken to address and mitigate any negative impacts of programs.
- **Non-discrimination**: Programs should be accessible to relevant stakeholder groups. Not only should programs be non-discriminatory, but attention should also be given to ensure the inclusion of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups, and equity of program quality and outcomes. For example, if programs are usually held in metropolitan areas and are not accessible to individuals living in rural, remote, or reserve communities, alternative programming should be provided to ensure access for these individuals (e.g., virtual programs, in-community programs).
- **Empowerment:** Stakeholders and program staff should be supported and empowered to claim their rights. In the employment and skill training context, this may include building awareness on workers' rights, supporting the development of stakeholders' self-efficacy, and providing skills needed to succeed in employment and/or education.
- **Legality:** Programs should comply with local regulations and human rights legislation.

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[16] Scottish Human Rights Commission. (ND). A human rights-based approach: A solution. https://www.humanrightscareers.com/issues/what-is-a-human-rights-based-approach/

Figure 4 Human Rights-Based Approach

In addition to the PANEL principles, the HRBA provides guidelines for rights-based data collection that can be used to inform research and program evaluation (see right panel, Figure 4).[17] As with the PANEL principles, participation and accountability are important elements of rights-based data collection. Stakeholders/rights holders should be involved in decisions made around why, how, and for whom data should be collected and program staff should be accountable for the impacts of data collection and publication. When collecting identity data (e.g., gender, ethnicity) research and program evaluation should allow participants to self-identify and response options should be developed in partnership with community. These data should be used to conduct disaggregated data analysis, so that that inequities and differential program impacts among participant groups can be identified. Finally, the purpose and results of research should be shared with participants, and research should be conducted in a way that protects participants' privacy and confidentiality.

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[17] United Nations. (2018). A human rights-based approach to data: Leaving no-one behind in the 2030 agenda for sustainable development. *Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights.* https://www.ohchr.org/Documents/Issues/HRIndicators/GuidanceNoteonApproachtoData.pdf

Through the PANEL and data-collection principles, the HRBA framework seeks to promote an environment wherein individuals can fulfil their rights by empowering individuals and strengthening organizational capacity. In the context of employment and skill training programs, characteristics of rights-based programs include those that aim to increase fulfilment of rights to work, education, and non-discrimination; empower stakeholders through participant-directed learning; and closely monitor outcomes and program impacts. In practice, this may include incorporating information about workers' rights into training programs; providing resources and connections to labour groups or associations to support participants in fulfilling their rights; tailoring training to meet the needs of groups that continue to face barriers in fulfilling their rights; providing wraparound supports (e.g., stipends, housing support); providing tools and training for further independent learning; and sharing data and program results with rights advocates and community groups where appropriate.

### ANTI-OPPRESSIVE PRACTICE

Anti-oppressive practice involves "the act of challenging inequalities" (Adams et al., 2002, p. 135). These inequalities and inequities are experienced at both the micro and macro levels and must be led based *on the needs of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups, rather than the resources available*. It is important to understand the unique needs of these groups to avoid creating unintended harm.

"Achieving one's full potential is difficult when basic needs are not satisfied, resources are inadequate and do not promote sustainable wellness, and chronic life stressors persist" (Benoit, Cotnam, O'Brien-Teengs et al., 2019, p. 1).

## ANTI-OPPRESSIVE AND DECOLONIZING APPROACHES

Anti-oppressive practice has its roots in education and social work and is frequently discussed in reference to social justice. However, its focus on social, economic, and political oppression are also applicable to other areas of human service and public policy, including employment services.

Anti-oppressive approaches explicitly recognize the forms of oppression prevalent in society and seek to help alleviate the factors that create social injustice (Aquil et al., 2021). Applying these methods enables an understanding of how a person's identity characteristics such as race, gender, sexual orientation, identity, age, class, and ability can result in systematic inequality and inequity. Systems of oppression such as colonialism, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, classism, and ableism often result in discriminatory actions at the individual level, and structural and/or systemic inequalities for marginalized groups. The intersectionality around oppression also requires acknowledgement that forms of oppression manifest differently among and across Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups, as illustrated in the power/privilege wheel on page 52.

An anti-oppressive approach is described in the literature as a prerequisite for equity and for culturally safe programming (Baines & Edwards, 2015; Baines, 2007; Adams, Dominelli, and Payne, 2002). Its practices and goals seek to recognize and dismantle discriminatory actions and power imbalances.

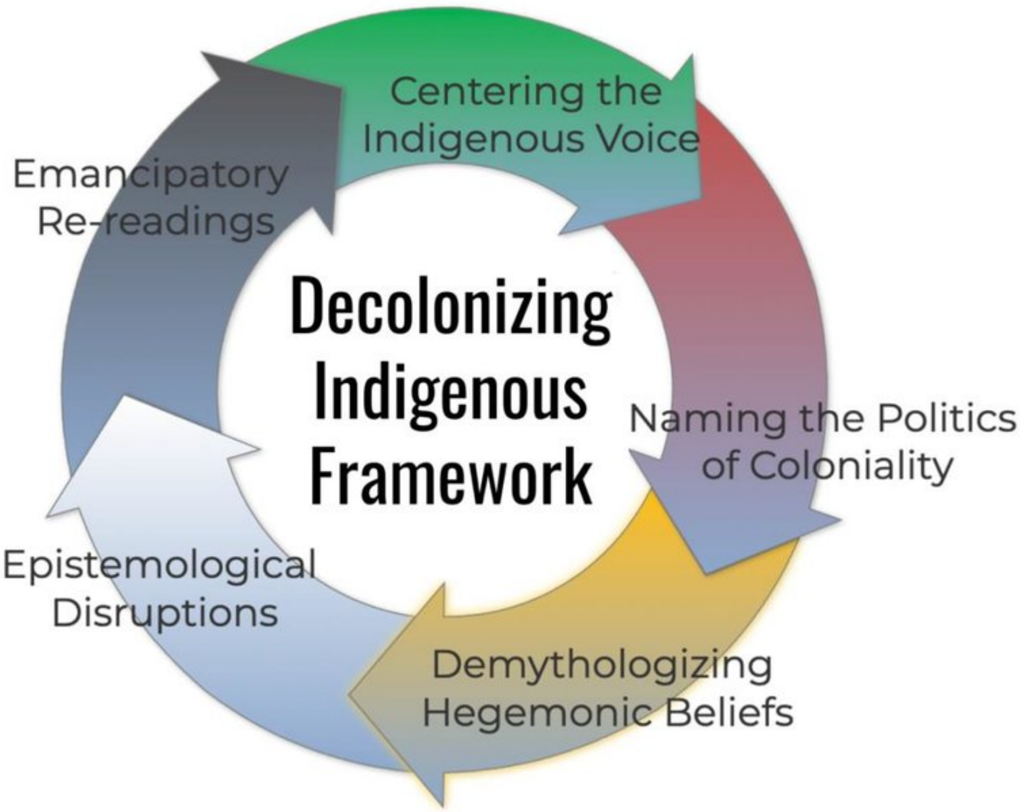
Although they go hand in hand, note that anti-oppression is not the same as diversity and inclusion. While diversity and inclusion principles involve the acknowledging, valuing, and celebrating difference, anti-oppression practice challenges the systemic biases that devalue and marginalize difference.

The impacts of colonization continue to have an impact, contributing to inequities experienced by Indigenous peoples in Canada (Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015). Decolonization is an anti-oppressive approach that specifically seeks to dismantle the systematic oppression of Indigenous Peoples, Indigenous culture, and the sites of oppression from colonization (Jakubec & Bourque Bearskin, 2020). This approach centres the world views of Indigenous and other colonized peoples, respectfully knowing and understanding theory and research from previously "Other(ed)" perspectives (Battiste, 2000; Datta, 2018; Aspin et al., 2018; Smith, 2012). According to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada (2015), The use of Eurocentric paradigms in research created by Western scholars is itself a form of oppression (Battiste, 2001; Kovach, 2010; Lavallée, 2009; Smith, 1999; Wilson, 2008). Without the acknowledgement of decolonization as scientific and essential, Indigenous scholars argue that repercussions may include further socio-economic and political inequalities, displacement, loss of traditional lifestyles, and damage to Indigenous communities. Implementing decolonizing practices is hard work, requires a commitment to truth and reconciliation and particular attention paid to relationships, justice, truth, and power (Tuck & Yang, 2012; Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada, 2015; National Inquiry into Missing and Murdered Indigenous Women and Girls, 2019; Jakubec & Bourque Bearskin, 2020).

In short, anti-oppressive lenses or practices value the teachings and overall worldviews of Indigenous Peoples and other equity deserving groups (Aspin et al., 2018; National Collaborating Centre for Aboriginal Health, 2013; Thomas & Green, 2019). Applying this approach to the data collection cycle allows those involved to examine their procedures and motivations and increase the likelihood that their studies will yield both ethical and accurate results (Baines & Edwards, 2015). This requires individuals, teams, and organizations to think critically and reflect on every step in the data collection process to answer questions and to create a space for anti-oppressive practice at every stage of research and evaluation. Torres (2019) describes a set of guiding principles for a decolonizing framework which can be applied to rethink currently held values, beliefs and assumptions, in such a way to centre Indigenous perspectives (see Figure 5 below).

> *"Awareness, allyship, and anti-oppressive practice involve not just accepting and valuing people of different cultures, ages, genders, sexual orientation, abilities, and all lifestyles, beliefs, and practices, but seeking to dismantle the forces and contexts of oppression and colonization"* (Gray, 2018)

Figure 5 The principles of the decolonizing Indigenous framework (adapted from Darder, 2019)



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