

Organizational Culture Working Group Cover note

Although Queen's is a close-knit community with a common educational purpose, it is also a large, bureaucratic organization, with predictable issues of transparency, accountability and responsiveness to the students, faculty and staff who comprise its members. As an institution with a long history, Queen's also has traditions and practices that purport to engage and build a sense of belonging, but have, and often can, exclude and alienate.

Since before the Henry Report (2004) characterized the "culture of whiteness" at Queen's as a source of exclusion and marginalization affecting rates of retention among faculty women of color, the University has made efforts to improve the climate and promote inclusion of diverse groups in the campus community. However, too often these efforts, while significant and good-willed, have worked at the margins rather than as central elements of the University's mission, operations, decision-making and resource allocations.

Many policies and strategic plans have formulated ambitious aspirations and inspiring values and ideals for our university community. Nevertheless, there remain gaps in policies that can be redressed. One such is an explicit policy encouraging and promoting an inclusive organizational culture.

More importantly, there are evident gaps between values and goals expressed in policy documents and the actions that inform our experiences and daily operations. For example, in our working group meetings and public event soliciting feedback, it was noted that while the university has excellent accessibility policies, a number of elevators in teaching buildings remain inaccessible. Similarly, as our community has articulated ideals of wellness and inclusivity, the university continues to seek experts with lived experience to support the mental health needs of international and racialized members of the campus community. Clearly, there is much yet to do both in fulfilling past commitments and implementing new measures to improve the climate and organizational culture at Queen's. The challenges of the pandemic have exacerbated feelings of disconnection and isolation from community among many, emphasizing the need for decisive action and responsive communication.

This is why the process undertaken to convene working groups to follow up on The Conversation and the release of the new Strategic Framework presents such an important and encouraging opportunity. What our working group on organizational culture discovered in our meetings and especially in the public forum we held was a palpable enthusiasm for change. There is evident excitement about the outcomes of this process. Even more encouraging, many have expressed a determined interest to engage, support, and participate in the continuing work of making Queen's an inclusive institution. Beyond the specific suggestions our working group proposes, the organizational culture of Queen's will be most enhanced by harnessing this energy and involving our entire community in concrete contributions and transparent, participatory decision-making in the outcomes of the working groups. Many want to help and contribute to positive change.

Thank you for the opportunity to be part of this important initiative.

Organizational Culture Working Group Proposals for Operational Priorities, August 2021

Goal: Provide the Strategic Framework Steering Committee with an articulation of up to three high impact ideas, or operational priorities, which will help realize and bring to life key elements of the new Queen's Strategic Framework. Specifically, these operational priorities should aim to enhance the Queen's culture and community, "ensuring that in the workplace we live our values, and that our human resources, organizational structure, processes and culture are properly aligned to fulfil our mission." (Strategic Framework Goal #6)

Operational Priorities for an Inclusive Organizational Culture:

If "culture is how organizations do things", transforming the organizational culture of Queen's will encompass every aspect of the university and its operations. Our organizational culture embodies the totality of its members' relationships and expresses the values and expectations, practices, and processes, that guide and inform the actions, interactions, and experiences of students, staff, and faculty.

An inclusive organizational culture at Queen's should be based on:

- values of compassion, empathy, and caring to ensure psychological safety, as well as intellectual and social wellbeing;
- appreciation of, and learning from, individual and group differences;
- mutual respect for collegial governance and equality of diverse voices in decision-making;
- clear and consistent communications;
- promotion of autonomy, freedom and curiosity to learn;
- courage to challenge our presumptions and grow as individuals and as a community;
- honest, truthful recognition of failures and problems; and
- responsive, decisive leadership that is accountable and takes responsibility for actions.

Implementing all the measures proposed in working group plans will help to transform our organizational culture. To ensure an organizational culture that fosters inclusion, equity, and belonging, and embeds these centrally in its operations, this working group proposes:

- 1) creation of an Inclusive Culture policy
- 2) expansion of Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) as an *example* of a specific measure that can promote engagement and belonging, and
- 3) a staff and faculty climate and engagement survey as an *example* of continuing evaluative and consultative mechanisms to measure successes and failures, promote accountability, and solicit participation widely in decision-making in an ongoing effort.

Proposed Operational Priority 1: Develop an official Inclusive Culture policy with commitments to continuing actions.

Background: Previous reports from the PAC-Berri (1991) to PICRDI (2018) have identified the culture of Queen's as a major barrier to inclusion and a sense of belonging among faculty, students, and staff. Attempts have been made to address exclusion and marginalization, particularly through the TRC Task Force mandate (2015) and PICRDI process (2018) that sought to implement particular recommendations from the Henry Report (2004), DARE Panel Report (2009), and Diversity and Equity Taskforce agenda (2011). In Summer 2020, the university's senior leaders issued the Declaration of Commitment to Address Systemic Racism. Most recently, data from the [Student Experiences Survey](#) suggests there remains more work to be done to achieve a dynamically inclusive community that lives its values and accomplishes the educational vision articulated in the new [Strategic Framework](#). Queen's identity as a close-knit community with a strong sense of belonging can be challenged by the reality that it is also a large complex organization that can struggle with ensuring its decisions and actions are transparent, responsive, and accountable. A holistic, integrated and systematic approach, working with all stakeholders, at all levels, can guide and evaluate our next steps.

Proposal: It is recommended that the University develop an officially sanctioned, strength-based policy that articulates a community-wide commitment to inclusion and belonging, as well as a positive climate. It should align the principles and values of the University with expectations for administrative leadership, faculty, staff and students, to foster an inclusive culture that emphasizes and balances a community of learning, safety, respect, and accountability.

This policy should:

- articulate roles, responsibilities and accountability of leaders, as well as our community as a whole, in order to ensure adherence to the university's values and the creation of a strong and positive organizational culture;
- acknowledge the central role of senior leadership in role-modelling and implementing the university's values in their everyday work and interactions;
- include active commitments to a culture of inclusion and belonging as norms and expectations (e.g. transparent decision-making, ongoing timely communication);
- identify specific actions to be taken, by senior administration, leaders, faculty, staff, and students, to demonstrate its implementation; and
- outline how policy impacts would be assessed and implementation gaps would be addressed.

This policy would also reinforce Queen's commitments to advancing the UN's Sustainable Development Goals; concrete steps in important areas of social impact - including sustainability, accessibility, wellbeing, community engagement, equity, diversity, inclusivity and Indigeneity - all contribute to a strong and positive organizational culture in which every individual can feel the university community is living its values.

Rationale: An inclusive culture is a goal that will be achieved with the implementation of both proactive and responsive strategies. Designing a policy that articulates norms and emphasizes expectations will help reinforce positive action and give guidance, rather than only articulating reactions to proscribed behavior.

Accountability remains a vital and crucial component of organizational culture, and should be framed through what the university encourages and expects, as well as what behaviors are disallowed and unacceptable to the community. A healthy organizational culture depends on accountable leadership that assumes responsibility to exemplify and implement institutional values and expectations.

Such a policy would align with the university's [Campus Wellbeing Framework](#) (2020), that represents the shared well-being vision of more than 1,800 Queen's community members who expressed campus well-being as rooted in a culture of care, inclusion and respect, social connectedness, the places and spaces in which we learn and work, and in the multiple dimensions of personal health. The development of the Campus Wellbeing Framework was guided by the [Okanagan Charter](#), adopted by Queen's in 2019, that calls on post-secondary institutions to embed health and well-being in all aspects of campus culture.

Implementation/Actions:

- Initiate a process to develop a clear organizational culture policy for the university;
- Ensure a breadth of stakeholder perspectives and voices, reflecting equity and diversity, are solicited and reflected through the embedded opportunities for community feedback in the policy's development, implementation and assessment;
- Whether passed as a Senate policy, like the Academic Integrity policy (a good model for an Inclusive Culture policy), or affirmed by university leadership, the draft policy should include active steps (suggestions include operational priorities #2 and #3, below);
- Once finalized, the policy should be widely communicated and promoted to the Queen's community to ensure ongoing awareness and recognition of the shared expectation that every individual can and must contribute to a positive and respectful culture and climate;
- Ongoing timely communication from leadership is critical to promoting a strong and inclusive community and responsive and transparent decision-making
- The [Inclusive Queen's website](#) is a comprehensive hub that should continue to be widely referenced to help raise awareness of the initiatives, resources, and supports in place across our campuses that foster a sense of belonging, learning, and wellbeing.
- Policy implementation and outcomes should be regularly assessed through iterative evaluation mechanisms (including #3 below) to ensure changes are having their intended effects on organizational culture over time;
- If progress gaps are identified, timely action should be taken to address issues.

Engagement opportunities among all community members should be considered in parallel to the policy development and implementation process. Regular opportunities for the community to gather, learn, converse, and share experiences can support individual accountability and commitment and responsibility for living our institutional values on a daily basis.

Proposed Operational Priority 2: Expand structures and operations to support the growth and recognize the value of Employee Resource Groups

Background: Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) aim to build community among equity-deserving employees, fostering a sense of belonging through opportunities for development and networking. They are reported to have a myriad of benefits for their members and for the organization, including assisting with recruitment and retention. ERGs should also be consulted, as part of the university's policy development processes, to reduce barriers and promote the full participation in employment among equity-deserving employees.

Various ERGs have been operating somewhat informally at Queen's for the past several years, with support from the Human Rights and Equity Office, the Office of Indigenous Initiatives and Human Resources. They were created at a "grass roots level", by and for equity-deserving individuals and groups. Much of the work of members and leaders is currently done "off the side of their desks", including over lunch hours and outside of paid work time, particularly among Queen's staff.

The Provost's Office provides some annual funding to groups sponsored by a faculty or administrative unit. See: www.queensu.ca/inclusive/initiatives/employee-resource-groups

ERGs with formal status within the university include:

- Queen's Womens' Network
- Women in Science at Queen's
- Queen's Association for Queer Employees
- Indigenous Staff and Faculty Network

Other groups have expressed interest in evolving into an ERG, most notably, the Queen's Black Faculty and Staff Caucus, as well as an emerging Queen's University Muslim Inclusion Network (QUMIN). These and other initiatives should be encouraged.

Proposal: It is recommended the university formalize structures and resources for existing and additional ERGs to promote sustainable, systemic support.

Implementation/Actions:

- developing an ERG guideline that would articulate the ability to use paid time - e.g., 3 hours per week, consistent with the policy on pursuing education – subject to operational requirements, to support consistency across units;
- facilitating access to, and the creation and sustainability of ERGs;
- increasing awareness of, and communications about ERGs, including in recruitment, and new faculty and staff onboarding and orientation initiatives and programs;

- integrating ERG engagement and leadership opportunities into professional development and HR offerings;
- articulating participation and leadership roles in ERGs as a valued and supported option for university service, including the potential for release time (per current QUFA Collective Agreement and potential inclusion in staff Collective Agreements), and for HR's performance development goals and processes;
- ensuring endorsement of time spent on ERG activities during regular work hours, subject to operational requirements;
- allocating ongoing budgets, and expanding support to resource ERGs appropriately;
- explicitly linking ERGs to the university's mission, vision, and values;
- recognizing leader and member contributions;
- creating a network of ERG leaders to promote collaborations, information-sharing and support;
- coordinating existing mentorship programs within ERGs (as appropriate) to reflect the power of one-on-one connections and support (e.g. QWN Mentor program);
- coordinating with relevant student organizations to integrate communities and communication across faculty, staff, and students.

Progress could be measured through the following:

- Number of ERGs
- Membership and engagement reach
- Breadth of activities
- Personal and community impacts of activities/events
- Member satisfaction/trust
- A comparative analysis of retention (i.e., does Queen's retain equity-deserving employees associated with ERGs at a rate higher than those not associated, and compared to non-equity-deserving employees)

Note: "employee" should be broadly defined to include all staff, including casual staff, student staff, and all faculty, including post-doctoral fellows, adjuncts etc.

Proposed Operational Priority 3: Develop and implement a Faculty and Staff Climate and Engagement survey

Background: The university has recently completed a campus climate student survey, sponsored by the implementation team for the university's Declaration of Commitment to address systemic racism. The survey reflects student experiences of racism, exclusionary and discriminatory behaviours, and sexual violence on campus and insights will be used to inform the university's continued efforts to foster greater inclusivity and equity, and ensure Queen's is a safer and more welcoming place for everyone. It will be repeated every two years.

There has not been any similar survey of faculty and staff.

Proposal: It is recommended the university develop and regularly implement a Staff and Faculty Climate and Engagement Survey, consistent with the Student Experiences Survey, to:

- confirm an evidence-informed baseline for understanding the current climate among faculty and staff;
- help inform planning to support a diverse, inclusive, health-promoting, and vibrant campus community;
- identify areas of focus for action and next steps, and
- provide a benchmark against which to measure change over time.

Domains of assessment should be identified that reflect priorities that promote wellbeing and inclusion and meet the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace. These domains may include:

- Employee connectedness
- Employee wellbeing (including mental health)
- Employee capacity
- Employee safety
- Purpose and Belonging
- Mission and Vision
- Recognition and support
- Leadership
- Internal communications
- Inclusive culture
- Work trust culture

A repeated survey would allow the university to measure, over time, the extent to which we are living our values, where further focus and effort may be needed, as well as the outcomes of operational priorities 1 and 2, above. It could also measure how actions taken have resulted in the proper alignment of human resources, organizational structure, processes and culture to ensure the university is fulfilling its mission.

A survey could also be used as a foundation for other faculty and staff engagement opportunities (e.g. focus groups) to further explore elements of the campus climate and culture and identify change-promoting initiatives.

Consideration should be made to use Queen's expertise and resources in the design and implementation of the survey, including in marketing, promotion and communication planning to drive survey participation.

The university should also continue regular and consistent climate and engagement survey of students, as it develops faculty and staff surveys.

Concluding Notes

Thank you to all working group members for their active participation and valued perspectives in developing these proposals.

Thank you to all Queen's community members who took the time to provide written input and who attended an open online session to discuss organizational culture as part of this process. There is great support and momentum for change, and for ongoing positive, collegial and respectful discussion that is also frank and candid, aimed at enhancing the environment in which our community works, learns, grows and connects.

Throughout the discussions held by the Organizational Culture working group, other specific suggestions were raised for consideration as tangible reflections of the new mission, vision and values. These ideas include:

- A core learning objective for all Queen's students to understand social identities and social justice and core course(s) developed to fulfill this learning objective
- A green audit to advance sustainability efforts
- Continued accessibility enhancements (e.g., accessible elevators)
- Policies and processes to ensure ongoing care for heritage assets
- Expansion of expertise in cross-cultural counseling and wellbeing supports for QTBIPOC students, staff, and faculty.
- Expansion of pay/compensation for EDII-related work for students, aligned with ERG proposal above
- Supplier diversity

References:

Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion, [Employee Resource Groups: Toolkit for Diversity and Inclusion Practitioners](#), 2015

Dobbin, F. and Kalev, A., [Why Diversity Programs Fail](#), Harvard Business Review, July-August 2016

[National Standard for Mental Health and Well-Being for Post-Secondary Students](#)

[National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace](#)

Queen's Campus Wellbeing Framework, 2020

[Queen's Student Experiences Survey](#), 2021

University of Michigan, [Climate Survey Reports](#), 2016

Watkins, Michael D., [What Is Organizational Culture? And Why Should We Care?](#), Harvard Business Review, May 13, 2015.