July 28, 2026

NSCAD CRC EDI Action Plan

1. Institutional Context

NSCAD University is Canada's oldest independent university dedicated exclusively to art, craft, and design. Located in Halifax, Nova Scotia, NSCAD is a small, specialized institution with a strong reputation for studio-based learning, research-creation, interdisciplinary scholarship, and community-engaged practice. The University's academic and research environment is characterized by close collaboration among faculty, staff, students, and community partners, as well as a commitment to artistic freedom, critical inquiry, and social engagement.

At the time of this self-assessment, NSCAD University holds three (3) Tier 2 Canada Research Chairs (CRCs):

- Dr. Eddy Firmin, Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Transatlantic Black Diasporic Art and Community Engagement (appointed 2025);
- Dr. April Mandrona, Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Art Education, Belonging and Social Change (appointed 2024); and
- Dr. Leah Decter, outgoing Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Creative Technologies and Community Engagement (appointed 2020).
- In addition, Dr. Joshua Schwab-Cartas, incoming Tier 2 Canada Research Chair in Global Indigenous Cultural Practice (appointed 2026).

CRC appointments at NSCAD are governed by the Canada Research Chairs Program's Institutional Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Requirements, the NSCAD University Canada Research Chairs Policy, and the FUNSCAD Unit 1 Collective Agreement. CRC recruitment, nomination, appointment, and renewal processes are also informed by applicable institutional policies, collective agreement provisions, and federal requirements related to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and research excellence.

As a small institution with a limited CRC allocation, each recruitment cycle has a significant impact on institutional representation, transparency, and compliance. Unlike larger universities that may conduct multiple CRC searches simultaneously, individual appointments at NSCAD can substantially influence the demographic composition of the CRC complement and the institution's progress toward equity objectives. Consequently, ensuring equitable, transparent, and accessible recruitment and retention practices is critical to both meeting CRC Program expectations and advancing NSCAD's broader commitments to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and decolonization.

NSCAD's size presents both opportunities and challenges in this work. The University's scale enables strong interpersonal relationships, direct access to institutional leadership, and opportunities for responsive decision-making. At the same time, limited administrative capacity, reliance on specialized staff expertise, and the significant impact of individual

appointments require intentional and systematic approaches to identifying and addressing barriers affecting members of underrepresented, equity-deserving, and rights-seeking groups.

This Action Plan reflects NSCAD University's commitment to fostering an equitable research environment in which all current and prospective CRC holders can thrive. It is informed by a comprehensive self-assessment process that included a review of institutional policies and practices, workforce and census data, equity audits, literature related to systemic barriers in post-secondary research environments, and consultations with current CRC holders and other members of the University community.

2. Objectives

2.1. Overall Objectives

The objectives of this Equity, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) Action Plan are to:

1. Identify and address systemic barriers that may affect the participation of members of the Four Designated Groups (FDGs) in NSCAD's CRC Program through an intersectional lens.
2. Ensure equitable, transparent, and accessible recruitment, selection, and nomination processes.
3. Provide equitable support, resources, and retention mechanisms for chairholders.
4. Establish clear governance, monitoring, and public accountability structures in alignment with CRC requirements.

2.2 Self-Assessment Process

NSCAD University's self-assessment process is designed to identify and address systemic barriers affecting the recruitment, nomination, retention, and success of Canada Research Chair (CRC) nominees and chairholders from underrepresented groups. The process is informed by quantitative and qualitative data and is grounded in principles of transparency, accountability, confidentiality, and continuous improvement.

The self-assessment draws upon multiple sources of evidence, including institutional census and workforce data, equity audits, policy and procedure reviews, CRC program data, relevant institutional reports, and consultations with current CRC holders and members of equity-deserving communities. The use of multiple data sources enables the institution to identify both structural and cultural barriers affecting equity outcomes.

The development and implementation of the EDI Action Plan is a shared institutional responsibility. The Vice-President, Academic and Research provides executive oversight for CRC-related processes and is responsible for ensuring alignment with institutional and CRC Program requirements. The Director responsible for Equity and Community Supports leads the coordination of the self-assessment process, facilitates consultation activities, supports implementation planning, and monitors progress toward established goals. Additional

contributions are provided by Human Resources, Research Services, and other administrative units responsible for data collection, policy implementation, and operational support.

Accountability for implementation and monitoring is distributed across relevant units and leaders whose work contributes to the achievement of specific actions and outcomes identified in the Plan. Progress will be reviewed on a regular basis and used to inform future revisions and continuous improvement efforts.

Potential bias and conflicts of interest are mitigated through the use of multiple data sources, consultation with diverse stakeholders, and shared review processes. Whenever possible, findings are assessed using aggregate data and evidence-based approaches rather than individual perspectives alone. Individuals involved in CRC nomination, evaluation, or selection processes are expected to comply with institutional conflict of interest requirements and applicable CRC Program expectations.

2.3 Privacy and Confidentiality

NSCAD University recognizes that meaningful equity work depends on the responsible collection, analysis, and stewardship of personal information. The institution is committed to protecting the privacy and confidentiality of individuals who participate in self-identification processes, surveys, consultations, and other forms of data collection.

Quantitative data are collected through institutional census initiatives, workforce demographic surveys, CRC-related reporting processes, and other approved institutional mechanisms. Qualitative information is gathered through consultations and feedback opportunities. Data collection practices are guided by applicable privacy legislation, institutional policies, and ethical principles related to informed participation and confidentiality.

Personally identifiable information is separated from reporting wherever possible, and results are reported in aggregate form to reduce the risk of individual identification. Access to identifiable information is restricted to authorized personnel with legitimate operational responsibilities. Additional safeguards, including data suppression practices for small population groups, are employed where appropriate.

To support meaningful participation, NSCAD promotes self-identification as a voluntary process that helps the institution better understand community demographics, identify systemic barriers, allocate resources, and measure progress toward equity goals. Communications related to self-identification emphasize confidentiality, explain how information will be used, and articulate the benefits of participation for both individuals and the broader community.

A copy of the institution's self-identification form is included in Section 6.

2.4 Strategy for Managing Resistance

NSCAD University recognizes that efforts to advance equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility may encounter resistance, misunderstanding, or backlash. Such responses can create additional burdens for individuals from equity-deserving groups and those responsible

for implementing equity-related initiatives. The institution is committed to addressing resistance in ways that promote learning, accountability, and psychological safety while minimizing potential harms.

The institution's approach is grounded in clear communication, transparency, and education. The rationale for EDI initiatives, including the CRC EDI Action Plan, is communicated through evidence-based messaging that emphasizes institutional commitments, legal obligations, research excellence, and the benefits of equitable participation.

Where concerns or resistance arise, the institution sought to distinguish between good-faith questions and behaviours that undermine equity objectives or negatively affect members of the community. Opportunities for dialogue, education, and capacity-building are prioritized on an ongoing basis (e.g. we are currently organizing at least 3 training opportunities for staff and faculty related to EDIA); however, behaviours that conflict with institutional policies, human rights obligations, or respectful workplace expectations will be addressed through existing accountability mechanisms.

Recognizing that equity work can place disproportionate demands on EDI practitioners and members of equity-deserving communities, responsibility for implementation will be shared across institutional leadership and administrative units rather than relying solely on individuals with designated EDI roles. This approach helps distribute accountability, reduce burnout, and reinforce the understanding that advancing equity is a collective institutional responsibility.

2.5 Co-Creation

The CRC EDI Action Plan will be developed, implemented, and refined through ongoing collaboration with members of the NSCAD community, including individuals from equity-deserving groups whose experiences are most directly affected by institutional policies and practices.

The co-creation process includes engagement with current CRC holders, faculty, staff, students, administrators, and relevant governance bodies. Existing institutional consultations, equity audits, census data, and community engagement activities provide important sources of input regarding barriers, priorities, and opportunities for improvement.

The institution recognizes that meaningful participation extends beyond consultation alone. Community feedback will be incorporated into action planning, implementation priorities, and ongoing monitoring activities wherever feasible. NSCAD will continue to create opportunities for community members to contribute to the evaluation and refinement of the Action Plan throughout its lifecycle.

Through this collaborative approach, the institution seeks to ensure that actions are responsive to lived experiences, informed by diverse forms of knowledge, and aligned with community-identified priorities.

2.6 Intersectionality

NSCAD University recognizes that experiences of inequity are shaped by the interaction of multiple social identities and systems of power. Individuals may experience barriers differently based on the combined effects of racialized identity, Indigeneity, disability, gender identity, sexual orientation, socioeconomic status, age, religion, immigration status, caregiving responsibilities, and other aspects of identity.

The CRC EDI Action Plan adopts an intersectional approach that acknowledges that barriers rarely operate in isolation. Policies, practices, and institutional structures may have cumulative or compounding impacts on individuals who hold multiple marginalized identities. As a result, actions aimed at addressing a single dimension of identity may not fully eliminate inequities experienced by those facing overlapping forms of exclusion.

The self-assessment process incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data to better understand how different groups experience institutional systems and whether barriers are experienced differently across intersecting identities. Findings from consultations, census data, policy reviews, and equity audits are considered through an intersectional lens to identify patterns that may otherwise remain hidden within aggregate data.

Implementation and monitoring of the Action Plan will continue to apply an intersectional framework by assessing the differential impacts of initiatives, promoting inclusive participation in decision-making processes, and seeking to ensure that institutional responses address the complexity of lived experience rather than treating equity-deserving groups as homogeneous populations.

3. Analysis of Systemic Barriers

3.1 Employment Systems Review

An employment systems review identifies the extent to which the institution's current recruitment and nomination practices, policies, procedures, systems and structures:

3.1.1. Overview and Methodology

NSCAD University conducted an employment systems review to assess the extent to which its current Canada Research Chairs Program (CRCP) allocation, recruitment, and nomination practices align with the program's requirements and support equitable access for candidates from underrepresented groups. The review examined the full lifecycle of CRC positions, from allocation and position development through recruitment, selection, nomination, appointment, and renewal.

The review was led by the Director of Equity and Community supports in collaboration with the Office of the Vice-President, Academic and Research Affairs and Human Resources. The review included a detailed analysis of relevant institutional policies, specifically the NSCAD University

Faculty Collective Agreement (Article 16.11: Canada Research Chair Positions), CRC Program requirements, institutional hiring procedures, and EDIA-related policies and commitments.

3.1.2. Assessment of Transparency and Alignment with CRC Requirements

The review confirmed that NSCAD's Canada Research Chair recruitment and nomination processes are conducted in accordance with the Faculty Collective Agreement and the requirements of the Canada Research Chairs Program. Article 16.11 affirms that CRC appointees are members of the bargaining unit and that selection processes must follow established faculty hiring procedures, ensuring defined standards, documentation, and oversight.

CRC allocations are filled through open and transparent recruitment processes that comply with CRC Secretariat requirements, including eligibility verification, broad advertising, and equitable recruitment practices. The Office of the Vice-President, Academic and Research oversees these processes to ensure adherence to program guidelines and institutional equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility commitments.

Appointment letters specify workload expectations, and the Faculty Association is notified in accordance with the collective agreement. Collectively, these measures ensure that CRC recruitment and nomination processes are transparent, equitable, and compliant with both institutional and federal requirements.

3.1.3. Identification of Potential Barriers

While NSCAD's formal policies provide a transparent and procedurally sound foundation, the employment systems review identified several areas where systemic or structural barriers may arise, particularly given NSCAD's small institutional size and specialized disciplinary focus.

1. Limited Candidate Pools in Specialized Fields: As a specialized art and design university, NSCAD recruits within highly specific disciplinary areas, which may result in smaller applicant pools. Without proactive outreach, this may unintentionally limit the diversity of candidates and reduce representation from equity-deserving groups.

2. Reliance on Traditional Academic Recruitment Networks: Recruitment processes have historically relied on conventional academic advertising channels and professional networks. These networks may not consistently reach equity-deserving scholars, including Indigenous scholars, racialized as BIPOC scholars, persons with disabilities, women in underrepresented disciplines, and members of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

3. Variability in Search Committee Training and EDIA Awareness: Although institutional hiring processes follow established procedures, there has historically been variability in the level of EDIA-specific training and guidance provided to CRC search committees. This may increase the risk of unconscious bias influencing recruitment, evaluation, and decision-making.

4. Informal Practices in Candidate Identification and Encouragement: Informal practices such as encouraging specific candidates to apply, or reliance on existing professional networks for candidate identification, may unintentionally privilege candidates with greater access to established academic networks and disadvantage those from underrepresented groups.

5. Structural Barriers Related to Institutional Scale and Resources: As a small institution, NSCAD has limited administrative capacity and fewer CRC allocations compared to larger research-intensive universities. This can create fewer opportunities to correct representation gaps quickly and may increase the importance of ensuring equitable practices in each individual recruitment process.

3.1.4. Corrective Measures and Proactive Strategies

The review identified several areas where proactive measures can strengthen equity, transparency, and inclusion in CRC recruitment and nomination processes.

Strengthening Equity-Focused Recruitment Practices: NSCAD will continue to ensure that CRC positions are advertised broadly using diverse recruitment channels, including platforms and organizations that serve equity-deserving communities. This will include targeted outreach to relevant scholarly associations, affinity groups, and equity-focused academic networks.

Enhancing EDIA Training and Guidance for Search Committees: NSCAD will provide structured EDIA guidance and training to all CRC search committee members, including training on unconscious or implicit bias, equitable assessment practices, and inclusive recruitment strategies. This will help ensure that evaluation processes are fair, consistent, and inclusive. We are currently working with a local Indigenous human rights lawyer to roll out training related to anti-discrimination specifically. Our Director of Human Resources has also allotted time to two yearly unconscious bias training programs for hiring managers and committees.

Formalizing Equity Considerations in Recruitment Planning: Equity considerations will be integrated at the earliest stages of CRC allocation and recruitment planning, including consideration of how CRC positions can support institutional equity goals and improve representation of underrepresented groups.

Strengthening Institutional Oversight and Accountability: The Office of the Vice-President, Academic and Research, in collaboration with the Directors of Equity and Community Supports and Human Resources, will provide support during CRC recruitment processes to ensure alignment with CRC requirements and institutional equity commitments.

Improving Transparency and Documentation: NSCAD will continue to strengthen documentation practices related to recruitment and nomination processes, ensuring clear records of recruitment strategies, evaluation criteria, and selection decisions.

3.2 Comparative Analysis

This section assesses whether Canada Research Chair (CRC) holders at NSCAD University, including members of underrepresented and equity-deserving groups, receive equitable institutional support and compensation, while recognizing legitimate disciplinary differences and the externally governed nature of CRC funding.

Based on the EDIAP Guidance Document, our methods primarily center around document analysis of policies related to compensation packages and compensation negotiation, namely the Faculty Union of NSCAD (FUNSCAD) Unit I (Full-time and part-time faculty) Collective Agreement. The review was conducted by the Director, Equity and Community supports with involvement of Co-ordinator, Research and Academic Affairs, Senior Research Advisor, and Research Grants Officer.

The analysis compares institutional practices across CRC appointments in relation to salary placement, stipend allocation, workload assignment, rank equivalency, and access to institutional research supports. It also considers how these practices are applied across disciplines with differing teaching, studio, scholarly, and material resource requirements.

3.2.1. Compensation and Salary Framework for CRC Appointments

Under the FUNSCAD Unit 1 Collective Agreement (Section 16.11), CRC positions are recognized as externally funded appointments that remain within the bargaining unit. The Agreement establishes differentiated salary and stipend provisions based on CRC tier. For Tier I appointments, initial salary placement is not required to conform to the standard salary grid, and institutional supplementation is constrained such that the Employer may not add a stipend exceeding the value of funds provided by the CRC Program. For Tier II appointments, salary placement must conform to the Agreement, and the Employer may provide an additional stipend of up to 15% of salary to secure a candidate. Currently, NSCAD has only Tier 2 appointments.

These provisions create a hybrid compensation structure in which base salary is partially externally determined, while institutional discretion is primarily exercised through Tier II stipends and appointment negotiation processes. While this structure ensures compliance with program funding rules and the collective agreement, it also introduces variability in compensation outcomes that must be assessed for consistency and equity across appointments.

The Agreement further specifies that internal candidates appointed to a CRC retain their seniority and rights related to tenure, promotion, and sabbatical eligibility, thereby preserving continuity within the bargaining unit. Workload expectations are set at the time of appointment by the Vice-President, Academic and Research and must be documented in the appointment letter and shared with the Union, establishing a procedural requirement for transparency in workload allocation.

3.2.2. Rank Structure and Equivalency Considerations

Equity in academic appointments is further informed by NSCAD's established rank structures for faculty and librarians (Section 15.02). Faculty ranks progress through Lecturer, Assistant Professor, Associate Professor, and Professor, with clearly defined expectations related to qualifications, teaching experience, scholarly or professional activity, and service contributions. These rank frameworks establish institutional benchmarks for evaluating experience, contribution, and professional standing. For CRC holders, these criteria provide an important comparator for assessing equity in initial appointment level, recognition of prior experience, and alignment with disciplinary norms.

Notably, Associate Professor and Assistant Professor ranks emphasize sustained high-quality teaching, scholarly or professional activity, and service contributions, with Professor reserved for individuals demonstrating exceptional achievement and external recognition. These definitions provide an internal standard against which CRC appointments can be compared to ensure that research leadership roles are appropriately recognized within institutional hierarchies.

3.2.3 Equity Implications of Discretionary Structure

When read together, the Collective Agreement and rank structures establish a framework that is procedurally consistent but allows for meaningful institutional discretion in CRC appointments. While salary placement rules and external funding constraints provide boundaries, decisions related to workload allocation, supplemental support (such as research resources, course releases, administrative assistance, and space allocation), and appointment level remain partially variable.

This variability introduces a need for further assessment over time to determine whether CRC holders receive equivalent enabling conditions relative to their rank, disciplinary context, and contribution profile. In particular, the existence of discretionary Tier II stipends, combined with non-standardized institutional support allocations, may produce differences in total compensation and research capacity that are not solely attributable to discipline or external funding structures.

The rank system further underscores the importance of consistent and equitable recognition of prior experience and achievement, particularly for CRC holders recruited from outside NSCAD. Ensuring alignment between CRC appointment levels and established faculty/librarian rank expectations is critical to maintaining internal equity and avoiding disparities in recognition or institutional support.

3.2.4 Summary

Overall, NSCAD's governing policies provide a structured foundation for equitable appointment, compensation, and rank assignment practices. The Collective Agreement ensures baseline procedural fairness and bargaining unit inclusion for CRC holders, while rank frameworks establish clear institutional standards for academic and professional achievement. However, the presence of externally constrained salary structures and institutionally discretionary support creates space for variability in practice. This makes ongoing comparative analysis essential to ensure that CRC holders—regardless of disciplinary background or equity-deserving identity—receive consistent, transparent, and equitable access to institutional support mechanisms aligned with their rank, responsibilities, and research mandate.

3.3 Environmental Review

This section reviews the institutional environment and workplace culture at NSCAD University, drawing on insights from current Canada Research Chair (CRC) holders alongside findings from existing literature, institutional policies, equity audits, and census data. The focus is on identifying cultural and structural conditions that may positively or negatively influence the experience of CRC nominees and current chairholders.

3.3.1. Review of existing institutional documents

As part of this environmental review, NSCAD University examined existing institutional reports and demographic data, including the 2024 Equity Audit and the 2024 Staff and Faculty Census, to better understand factors that may support or hinder the recruitment, retention, advancement, and success of Canada Research Chair nominees and chairholders.

Institutional Strengths

The review identified several strengths that contribute positively to NSCAD's workplace environment and culture. The Equity Audit found evidence of growing institutional commitment to equity, diversity, inclusion, accessibility, and anti-racism, including the development of new policies, the implementation of EDI-related training opportunities, and increased organizational attention to issues of belonging and representation.

Participants identified recent investments in equity-focused supports and resources as positive developments, including the establishment of dedicated equity-related positions and enhanced mechanisms for addressing concerns and supporting community members. The audit also recognized NSCAD's willingness to engage in self-assessment and undertake institution-wide reviews to identify opportunities for improvement.

The Staff and Faculty Census provides an important foundation for evidence-informed decision-making by establishing baseline demographic data related to ethnicity, gender, disability, sexual orientation, age, and citizenship status among employees.

Areas for Improvement

The environmental review also identified several challenges that may impact the attraction, recruitment, retention, and success of equity-deserving researchers and potential CRC nominees.

Interview participants in the Equity Audit reported inconsistent onboarding experiences, limited awareness of reporting mechanisms related to discrimination and harassment, and varying levels of participation in EDI-related training among faculty and staff. Some participants described experiences of discrimination, bias, and exclusion, while others expressed concerns regarding institutional accountability and confidence in organizational responses to equity-related issues.

The audit further identified opportunities to strengthen institutional policies and procedures by incorporating clearer equity considerations into recruitment, hiring, promotion, accommodation, accessibility, workplace conduct, leadership development, and professional development processes. Recommendations included mandatory EDI and cultural competency training for hiring and promotion committees, enhanced mentorship opportunities, improved recruitment and retention strategies, and greater accountability mechanisms related to equity outcomes.

The review also highlighted the importance of addressing systemic barriers rather than relying solely on individual accommodations or voluntary initiatives. Several recommendations emphasized the need for intentional action to remove barriers affecting racialized, Indigenous, disabled, and other equity-deserving community members.

Representation and Workforce Demographics

The 2024 Staff and Faculty Census demonstrated diversity across several identity dimensions while also highlighting opportunities to improve representation among equity-deserving groups.

Among respondents, the majority identified as being of European descent, while smaller proportions identified as Indigenous, African Nova Scotian, African Diaspora, South Asian, East or Southeast Asian, Middle Eastern, Latinx, or other racialized backgrounds. The census also identified employees living with disabilities, employees identifying as transgender, non-binary, gender-fluid, Two-Spirit, and employees identifying across diverse sexual orientations.

These findings suggest opportunities to continue strengthening representation within faculty, research, leadership, and senior academic positions, while ensuring that workplace culture, policies, and support systems foster belonging and success for individuals from historically underrepresented groups.

Implications for the Canada Research Chairs Program

The findings suggest that while NSCAD has established a foundation for advancing equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility, continued efforts are required to address systemic barriers that may affect the recruitment and retention of CRC nominees and chairholders from equity-deserving groups.

Particular areas of relevance to the CRC Program include equitable recruitment and nomination processes, mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, workplace culture (especially onboarding and ongoing learning opportunities to learn institutional systems), accessibility and accommodation practices, accountability mechanisms, and the ongoing development of inclusive leadership practices. These findings will inform future CRC equity objectives and action items aimed at fostering an equitable and supportive research environment for all researchers.

3.3.2 Qualitative data from 2 CRCs

Positive Environmental Conditions and Enablers

CRC holders consistently describe NSCAD as an institution characterized by relatively high levels of accessibility between academic leadership, administrative units, and faculty. The organizational scale enables direct communication with senior leadership, including informal and timely access to decision-makers. This proximity is perceived as an enabling condition that supports responsiveness and reduces bureaucratic delay compared to larger institutions.

A strong culture of trust and autonomy was also identified as key strengths. CRC holders reported that they are generally granted meaningful decision-making authority over their research programs, which supports academic independence and allows for flexibility in shaping research directions. This autonomy is particularly valued in contexts where research approaches may challenge conventional institutional norms or introduce non-traditional worldviews.

Within the Faculty environment, respondents highlighted a collegial and supportive culture, with strong collaboration among peers. This collegiality contributes positively to the day-to-day experience of chairholders and supports informal knowledge-sharing and mutual assistance.

In addition, NSCAD is perceived as providing a high degree of artistic and academic freedom. This is a significant enabling factor for CRC holders engaged in research-creation, interdisciplinary practice, or experimental methodologies. Institutional support for research initiatives and events further strengthens this environment by facilitating public engagement and scholarly dissemination.

Institutional and Cultural Challenges

Despite these strengths, CRC holders identified several structural and cultural challenges that may affect the consistency and equity of the institutional environment.

A key concern relates to the concentration of administrative knowledge and support within specialized units, which can result in limited accessibility for faculty requiring significant

administrative assistance. In some cases, administrative processes were described as being closely guarded or not readily transparent, particularly in areas such as finance and research administration (in part due to understaffing in these areas). This can create barriers for CRC holders navigating institutional systems, especially when processes are not clearly communicated or when assumptions are made about prior knowledge.

Related to this, respondents highlighted a lack of standardized procedural documentation and the absence of comprehensive standard operating procedures (SOPs) to guide institutional processes. As a result, institutional operations are often experienced as fragmented or "piecemeal," with limited dedicated staffing in some administrative areas. This contributes to variability in how processes are understood and executed.

A further concern identified was the reactive rather than the proactive nature of institutional planning. CRC holders noted limited forward-looking systems to anticipate research infrastructure, space, or administrative needs, resulting in delayed responses to emerging requirements. This can impact the timely delivery of institutional commitments, including access to studio space and other research resources.

Staff turnover was also identified as a contributing factor to inconsistency in institutional knowledge and service delivery. High turnover can disrupt continuity, increase reliance on informal knowledge networks, and place additional burdens on both faculty and remaining staff.

At a structural level, respondents noted a lack of clearly articulated institutional vision, particularly in relation to equity. While equity work is present within the institution, responsibility for EDI is perceived as diffuse rather than clearly assigned, with questions raised about accountability structures beyond individual leadership roles. This diffusion of responsibility can limit the effectiveness and coherence of equity-related initiatives.

Additionally, limited EDI-specific training was identified for front-line administrative staff who interact with CRC holders on matters related to finance, research support, and institutional processes. This may contribute to uneven experiences in service delivery and reduce the consistency of support available to chairholders.

Finally, delays in fulfilling institutional commitments, particularly related to physical space allocation and research infrastructure, were identified as a practical barrier that can affect research continuity and planning.

Summary Assessment

Overall, NSCAD's institutional environment is characterized by strong relational accessibility, collegiality, and a high degree of academic and artistic autonomy, all of which serve as significant enabling factors for CRC holders. However, these strengths are accompanied by structural and procedural limitations, including limited standardization of processes, reactive planning systems, and diffuse accountability structures for equity and administrative coordination.

These findings suggest that while the institutional culture is supportive at the interpersonal level, there are systemic constraints that may create uneven experiences for CRC holders depending on their administrative needs, disciplinary context, or familiarity with institutional processes. Addressing these gaps would strengthen both the consistency and equity of the CRC experience at NSCAD University.

3.3.3 Literature and Sectoral Review

As part of the environmental review, NSCAD conducted a review of sector literature, Canada Research Chairs equity guidance, and equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility action plans from Canadian post-secondary institutions. The review examined common barriers and promising practices related to the recruitment, retention, advancement, and success of researchers from equity-deserving groups.

The review identified several recurring barriers experienced by women, Indigenous Peoples, racialized persons, persons with disabilities, and individuals with intersecting identities within the Canadian research ecosystem.

Common barriers identified across the sector in Canada and internationally include:

- Underrepresentation of equity-deserving groups in research leadership positions and nomination pools (Henry et al., 2017; Moe, 2026; Shankar & Mason, 2025);
- Limited access to mentorship, sponsorship, and professional networks that support career advancement (Dixon, 2026; Henry et al., 2017; Aggarwall, 2026);
- Bias, both conscious and unconscious, within recruitment, evaluation, promotion, and recognition processes (Faber et al., 2025; Schlueter, 2026);
- Disproportionate service, mentoring, and equity-related responsibilities placed on members of equity-deserving groups, sometimes referred to as the ‘equity tax’ (Henry et al., 2017; Joao, 2025);
- Challenges balancing caregiving responsibilities and research productivity expectations (Wijesingha, 2021);
- Experiences of discrimination, microaggressions, exclusion, and lack of belonging within academic and research settings (Arora et al., 2022; Beagan et al., 2021);
- Limited recognition of Indigenous, community-engaged, interdisciplinary, and non-traditional forms of scholarship within conventional measures of academic excellence (Agbo, 2025; Poitras Pratt & Gladue, 2022; Posca, 2023; Riley, 2023).

The review also identified several promising practices that support equitable participation and success within research environments. These include transparent and inclusive recruitment processes, mandatory equity training for search and selection committees, mentorship and sponsorship opportunities, regular collection and review of demographic data, accessible accommodation processes, accountability measures tied to equity objectives, and ongoing engagement with equity-deserving communities.

Findings from the literature and sector review are consistent with themes identified through NSCAD's Equity Audit and Staff and Faculty Census. Together, these findings suggest that fostering an inclusive research environment requires both the removal of systemic barriers and the implementation of proactive measures that support the recruitment, retention, advancement, and success of researchers from equity-deserving groups.

The findings of this review will inform NSCAD's CRC Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan and contribute to the development of strategies that support equitable access to research opportunities, leadership roles, and Canada Research Chair nominations.

4. Action Items

Table 1. CRC EDI Action Items (VPAR = Vice President, Academic and Research Affairs, DECS = Director, Equity and Community Supports, HR = Human Resources)

Actions to be Taken	Systemic Barrier the Action is Meant to Address	Lead	Due Date	Performance Indicators
Develop and implement an Equity-Informed CRC Recruitment Framework that includes guidance on outreach, advertising, candidate engagement, and evaluation practices.	Limited candidate pools in specialized disciplines; reliance on traditional recruitment networks; informal candidate identification practices.	VPAR DECS HR	Jun 2027	Framework developed and approved; percentage of CRC searches using the framework; number of targeted outreach activities undertaken; diversity of applicant pools where self-identification data is available.
Require all CRC Search Committee members to complete bias-awareness training prior to participating in recruitment and evaluation processes.	Variability in EDIA awareness and application during recruitment and selection processes; risk of unconscious bias.	HR	Dec 2026	Percentage of search committee members completing training; number of training sessions delivered; participant feedback on training effectiveness.
Develop a standardized onboarding and support process for new CRC holders, including orientation to research administration, finance,	Inconsistent onboarding experiences; administrative barriers; limited awareness of	VPAR DECS	Jun 2027	Onboarding process developed; onboarding materials created; percentage of CRCs completing onboarding;

institutional policies, and available supports.	institutional systems and processes.			satisfaction ratings from CRC holders.
Create and maintain a centralized CRC and Research Administration resource hub containing procedural guides, key contacts, and standard operating procedures.	Limited procedural documentation; administrative gatekeeping; reliance on informal knowledge-sharing.	VPAR DECS	Dec 2027	Number of procedures documented; resource hub launched and maintained; utilization metrics; CRC satisfaction with access to information and support.
Establish bi-annual review of CRC support structures, including workload, research supports, space allocation, administrative assistance, and other institutional commitments.	Variability in institutional supports; potential inequities arising from discretionary practices; delays in delivering institutional commitments.	VPAR	Beginning 2027 and bi-annually	Annual review completed; identified issues addressed; documented recommendations and follow-up actions.
Clarify institutional accountability for CRC EDI implementation by establishing annual reporting on Action Plan progress and assigning responsibility across relevant administrative units.	Diffusion of responsibility related to equity; lack of clearly articulated accountability structures.	VPAR DECS	Dec 2026	Annual progress reports completed and published; percentage of actions completed on schedule; evidence of unit-level participation in implementation.
Expand EDIA learning opportunities for employees involved in research administration, finance, hiring, and faculty support functions.	Limited EDIA-specific training among front-line administrative staff; inconsistent service experiences.	VPAR DECS HR	Ongoing beginning Summer 2026	Number of training opportunities offered; participation rates; participant feedback; increased confidence in supporting equity-deserving researchers.

5. Conclusion

NSCAD University affirms its commitment to equitable, transparent, and inclusive practices in the Canada Research Chairs Program. This Action Plan outlines the specific and measurable steps the institution will take between 2025 and 2030 to ensure compliance with Tri-Agency requirements and to foster a research environment where all CRCs can thrive.

6. References and Self-Identification Form

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Copy of NSCAD self-identification form:

Are you a Canadian Citizen or do you have a valid Canadian Work Permit?

For the purposes of this survey, visible minorities or racialized as a Person of Colour are persons are people (other than Indigenous/Aboriginal persons) who are non-white, regardless of their place of birth or citizenship. Do you consider yourself to be a visible minority or person of colour?

For the purposes of this survey, Indigenous/Aboriginal persons include people who identify as First Nations (Status and non-Status), Métis, and Inuit. Do you consider yourself to be an Indigenous/Aboriginal person?

For the purposes of this survey, persons with a disability are people who have a chronic, long-term or recurring physical, sensory, mental, learning or intellectual disability, that, in interaction with a barrier, hinders that person’s full and effective participation in society. This includes, but isn’t limited to, people whose functional limitations due to their impairment have been accommodated in their workplace (ex: by the use of technical aids, changes to equipment or other working arrangements). Do you consider yourself a person with a disability?

2SLGBTQIA+ is an acronym for two-spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer, intersex, and asexual and/or aromantic with the “+” representing the diversity of ways people from equity-deserving groups choose to identify their gender identity and/or sexual orientation. Do you identify as a member of 2SLGBTQIA+ communities?

Do you identify as a woman?