# TRANSFORMING FROM THE INSIDE OUT: STRATEGIES TO OVERCOME INSTITUTIONAL BARRIERS

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**The Region of Peel is a regional municipality comprising Mississauga, Brampton and Caledon with a total population of 1,300,000. Peel's population has undergone a rapid shift, increasing by 30 per cent between 2001 and 2011. As a result, the ethno-cultural demographics of Peel have changed significantly. Today 57 percent of its population is racialized and just over half of its residents are immigrants to Canada.**

## BACKGROUND

Recognizing significant demographic changes taking place, the Region of Peel developed a Diversity and Inclusion Strategy in 2010. The Canadian Coalition of Municipalities against Racism and Discrimination (CCMARD) was identified as a vehicle through which to support implementation of the objective to "Influence the delivery of programs and services to meet the needs of the Region of Peel's diverse communities of interest." In 2011, the Region of Peel became a member of CCMARD and a small staff team, mostly from Human Services at the Region of Peel, has been working for over two years to develop a Plan of Action against racism and discrimination. A draft plan has now been developed, but the approval process and implementation has been slow to move forward. Recognizing the need to adjust tactics, discussions have taken place with staff and senior leaders to better understand how to enable and inspire the transformation that is envisioned. Below is a list of some of the challenges that we have encountered.

## CHALLENGES DEVELOPING AND IMPLEMENTING AN ACTION PLAN TO ADDRESS RACISM AND DISCRIMINATION

### 1. READINESS FOR CHANGE

There is a general need to build consensus on the scope and vision for enhancing diversity, equity, and inclusion at the Region of Peel. It has been identified that there was initially insufficient discussion with leadership to assess the corporation's readiness for the anti-racism and discrimination work prior to endorsement of the CCMARD declaration. The organization therefore did not make this decision with a full understanding of the implications of joining CCMARD and this has impacted the momentum of work at the outset.

### 2. LEADERSHIP COMMITMENT AND SUPPORT

While the Region of Peel's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy was driven forward both by passionate community stakeholders and Region of Peel staff, the CCMARD membership came about through a staff report to Regional Council. Staff

did not initially engage leaders who could have stewarded and resourced the implementation of the CCMARD plan. This marks a missed opportunity for building a strong commitment and championship to undertake work in the ten commitment areas.

### 3. CHANGE MANAGEMENT

The Diversity and Inclusion Strategy has helped the organization to move from a "celebration of culture" to "diversity and inclusion." While staff members have identified change management pieces that are necessary, there is currently no plan in place to address the sensitive nature of systemic racism and discrimination. Important work can be done in this area both within the municipality and with our broader community.

### 4. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Staff have identified that there exists an inconsistent understanding of diversity, equity, and inclusion among employees at the Region. Communications can therefore be a powerful tool to build capacity both internally and externally. Having a common set of terms and understanding among employees contributes to the promotion of a clear vision among all parties.

### 5. GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE

The CCMARD planning team was asked to use an external partner as a Steering Committee rather than forming a new one internally. The external partner however, was not prepared to undertake this role and in the absence of a clear governance structure, there have been difficulties with decision-making. This experience reinforces the importance of putting appropriate and effective structures in place so that effective work can be designed and delivered.

### 6. RESOURCING

Since the Region's Diversity and Inclusion Strategy was formed in 2010, there have been significant shifts and resulting gaps in the resourcing of the work. With each shift, diversity has become the responsibility of a different manager with an existing portfolio of unrelated work. This has resulted in delays in "picking up" where their predecessors left off and in the redirection of efforts to different projects. Further, the Diversity and Inclusion, Accessibility, and CCMARD plan development have been managed separately, from different areas of the corporation. The decentralization of this anti-discrimination work has meant that opportunities to leverage synergies have been missed.

### 7. BUILDING A COMMUNITY PLAN

The Region of Peel is an upper tier municipality with limited jurisdiction over some of the areas that the CCMARD 10 Common Commitments cover. We have struggled with how to build and steward a plan where we are accountable for the 10 Commitments, despite not being directly responsible for many of them. The Region recognizes the importance of community stakeholders in helping to build and drive initiatives. However, key stakeholders in the community want to see an approved Plan before deciding how to be involved. This has proven a challenge in developing the level of community ownership that could potentially drive successful implementation.

## WHAT WE HAVE LEARNED

Though there has been a strong commitment expressed by leaders within the organization, there is also the recognition that the work has not moved forward. The CCMARD team has reviewed literature related to change management and recommended processes to develop the plans. We have reached out to other municipalities to learn from their experiences. Facilitated discussions were held with staff selected based on their experience with the diversity and equity work at the Region and with senior leaders in the corporation, in order to identify challenges and possible enabling strategies to overcome them. The following lessons were drawn from this reflection process.

### 1. ASSESS ORGANIZATIONAL READINESS FOR THE WORK

Meaningful change will require the organization to go beyond the "quick wins." This means being willing to have tough conversations, to confront fears, to take risks, and accept resource implications as a result. Before embarking on this process, municipalities can take stock of their organizational readiness. Is there a clear vision? Are there shared values to support this direction? Are executive-level leaders ready to champion the work, both internally and externally? Are there human and financial resources available for this project? The more you can answer "yes" to these questions, the more accommodating the municipal climate for anti-discrimination work.

### 2. BUILD AND SUPPORT CHAMPIONS

Support senior leaders– Council members, leaders within the organization and those in the community- to be champions and advocates for change. Senior leadership can show commitment by being prepared to address obstacles and having clear accountability for results. Champions can be supported

by enhancing their understanding, giving them tools to lead difficult conversations with staff and community members (such as competing rights, raising awareness of supporting policies and procedures), and including equity and inclusion in leadership competencies and performance expectations.

### 3. HAVE A STRONG CHANGE MANAGEMENT PLAN

This is not a project; but rather an organizational and community transformation. Getting ahead of the change will be very important in order to build trust and comfort with the work that lies ahead. As the population of a municipality changes, so too might the types of initiatives. Accepting that change is a necessary element of socially-minded work and building this tenet into planning processes can maximize the impacts of work and promote innovation.

### 4. CREATE A BUZZ

Communicate why tackling racism and discrimination is a top priority for the organization and the community. There are risks associated with the change and in many individuals this can create fear and opposition. In these cases, a lack of accurate and clear information can be a barrier to acceptance. By picking key, concise messages to make sure that everyone inside and outside the corporation understands what the Plan is about and why it is important is critical to shaping a common vision.

### 5. GET THE RIGHT PEOPLE ONBOARD

Form a strong committee comprising internal and external stakeholders. Once these people are together, work collaboratively to create a clear vision, scope of work, and governance structure. A Project Manager needs to be able to influence key players across the organization and in the community in order to optimize the implementation of actions.

### 6. BUILD TRUST IN THE COMMUNITY

It is important for community leaders to see that there is a strong commitment to this work on the part of senior leadership in the Municipality. Communication needs to be honest and transparent, but also clear about what stakeholders can expect from the Municipality and what can be expected from them in return. Building relationships and partnerships based on mutual respect and shared decision making is essential for success and can help to weather and setbacks that might emerge.

## CONCLUSION

One of key advantages of CCMARD membership is access to a forum to learn about what others are doing to mitigate obstacles. It is also a great outlet to share what we are learning. This process of reflection has given us the opportunity to invigorate our efforts by naming our challenges and gaining broad input on how to move forward. Diversity and inclusion are part of a new leadership-enabling priority for the next four years at the Region of Peel that will ensure not only that this is a top priority for the organization, but that we hold ourselves responsible for measuring and reporting progress regularly. A new dialogue has started to move us along on our journey towards becoming a community that is equitable, inclusive, and embraces the diversity that is one of our region's greatest assets.