

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Accessibility Promising Practice/Success Story

Highlighting: Town of Kentville Diversity and Belonging Task Team

This month's Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Access (EDIA) success story comes from the Town of Kentville, highlighting their recently established Diversity and Belonging Task Team (DBTT). The Town's Inclusion and Accessibility Advisory Committee has established this ad hoc investigative/research group, which comprises African Nova Scotian, Indigenous, and racialized Kentville citizens and partners tasked with bringing first-voice and cultural representation to the municipality at its fundamental core.

The DBTT currently consists of 11 members representing these groups and their allies. They meet once a month to explore and identify whether African Nova Scotian, Indigenous, and racialized citizens are adequately represented through town governance, policy, services, and programming and build solutions through a collaborative and first-voice perspective to support council and staff initiatives associated with anti-racism, diversity, and cultural celebration.

The values and expectations of the task team include accountability, integrity, diversity, collaboration, confidentiality, and a commitment to serving the public good. Goals include exploring whether racialized citizens and partners feel adequately represented by the Town of Kentville, identifying any barriers they may face, and working with the Town Council and staff to ensure that members of racialized communities feel welcome and comfortable accessing town programs, events, and services.

The DBTT will work with Roxy Peterson, the Town's Neighbourhood Outreach Program Coordinator, to build strong relationships with African Nova Scotian, Indigenous, and racialized citizens. They will engage with these communities to gather thoughts on the Town's engagement strategies and support grassroots events and groups for these communities.

This project has not been without its challenges. Peterson says there needs to be more awareness and understanding of the contributions of African Nova Scotians and Indigenous people's contributions to the community, which has led to misunderstandings, miscommunications, and a loss of history. Additional challenges for the DBTT have been deep-rooted cultural and structural barriers that exist within the Town, which have hindered EDIA efforts in the past, including ingrained biases, traditional power dynamics, and exclusionary practices.

Peterson has gained valuable insights from this process and is eager to share advice with others considering similar projects. He emphasizes the importance of leaders and elected officials demonstrating a commitment to EDIA efforts through their words and actions. This can be achieved by providing necessary resources and professional development opportunities to help leaders understand the significance of EDIA efforts. Peterson also suggests establishing clear success criteria for the EDIA project and regularly reviewing these goals. Furthermore, seeking input from and engaging with diverse communities is recommended, allowing them to share their lived experiences and historical perspectives. Finally, Peterson stresses the importance of acknowledging and valuing diversity in the workplace and communities. He advocates for celebrating and recognizing various cultures and viewpoints, proposing events, cultural awareness days, and recognition programs to honour and appreciate workers' diverse backgrounds.

The DBTT's ultimate goal is to become a standing committee of the Town of Kentville. Peterson emphasizes the importance of this, stating, "This initiative must be fully incorporated into the Town of Kentville's culture and procedures to avoid the risk of being viewed as tokenistic." He explains that the task team focuses on making meaningful changes and not just appearing diverse or inclusive. The next priority for the DBTT is to review the new anti-racism policy that Peterson has written.