

## Supporting inclusive leaders and change champions

The purpose of this practice brief is **(1)** to introduce the concept of championing change; **(2)** to examine the importance of everyday leadership for the cultivation of a more inclusive community; and **(3)** to provide support and resources around becoming an inclusive leader and change champion. EDs/CEOs, managers, frontline staff, consultants, volunteers and community residents can use this practice brief in order to operationalize the commitments in the D&I Charter of Peel.

### INTRODUCING THE ISSUE

In order to build momentum around diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) within an organization or community, it is important to consistently recognize, support and *champion* the change process. Change championing can occur in a multitude of ways – whether by practicing inclusion on a daily basis or by leading long-term systems transformation. Similarly, supporting the change process, from the sidelines, from the middle or from the top (e.g., as a community advocate, a faith leader, a frontline staff member, a middle manager, an Executive Director), is crucial to mobilizing long-term change.

Supporting inclusive leaders and change champions is important and beneficial for a number of reasons:

- It is vital for embedding and sustaining change within organizations and communities
- It builds trust and aids in organizational/community adaptation to change
- It creates a culture of psychological safety within an organization or community
- It encourages critical reflection and community dialogue
- It allows individuals to feel self-expressed and respected as employees, as team members and as members of a larger community
- It makes room for creative collaborations and innovative partnerships
- It fosters the development of healthier, happier, more productive, and more sustainable communities

It is important to ask: **WHO** can be an inclusive leader and a change champion; and **HOW** does one begin the work of supporting and advocating for change? The goal is to recognize and foster change agents that are committed to the vision of equity and inclusivity, that are moving the work forward within organizations and communities, and that are together creating vibrant, innovative and engaged communities.

### 'HOW TO': TIPS AND SUGGESTIONS

- **Engage in active listening:** Listen with all the senses, cultivate empathy, allow room for different voices/perspectives
- **Cultivate a safe and welcoming environment:** Ensure that everyone feels welcome, comfortable, and included (in conversations, in physical spaces, at events, within organizational structures)
- **Create new resources to inspire dialogue and action:** Challenge old methods and inspire the creation of new ones (e.g., resource groups, team huddles, new community events)
- **Engage in critical self-reflection:** Recognize and manage your own values, beliefs, privileges
- **Seek opportunities to advance the work:** Be proactive – take advantage of existing opportunities to influence change and creatively search for new ones
- **Utilize assets to advocate for change:** Use your unique skills/interests/resources (e.g., subject matter expertise, passion, team-building skills) to mobilize others
- **Adapt toolkits and promising practices to specific contexts:** Don't reinvent the wheel; be open to learning from others and adapt effective practices to your own context
- **Celebrate ongoing contributions to DEI:** Recognition and celebration of individual/institutional success is an important motivator for renewing commitment

### RESOURCES & MORE INFORMATION

- "How to be a More Inclusive Leader" (The Guardian 2014)
- Moving the Dial – Measuring Inclusive Leadership (Diversity Journal, 2014)
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
- Peel-Halton Project – Social Planning Council of Peel and Community Development Halton (2004)

### INCLUSIVE LEADERS AND CHANGE CHAMPIONS – WHO ARE THEY?

*Leadership* is a fluid concept, most often understood as the ability to inspire, influence and support others towards an identified goal.

In the context of improving diversity, equity and inclusion outcomes, both within an organization and within a community, it is important to think of leadership not as a **position** but rather as an **action** (Maytree 2006).

Thus, a leader is someone, *anyone*, who has a vision and works creatively and collaboratively with others to see it through – whether from the front of the crowd, amongst, or behind. Organizations can be similarly defined as leaders and change champions.

The importance of everyday leadership should not be understated. By reflecting on your own values and taking action to understand and be inclusive of others around you, you are bridging the gap between DEI policy and practice.

Similarly, by acknowledging our roles in driving change forward – *as individuals, as team/community members, and as representatives of an organization or of a larger group* – we recognize the importance of having a *horizontal leadership structure* where diverse voices are heard in the change management process.

With inclusive leaders and change champions driving the work, we move closer to our vision of equitable and inclusive societies.