

Belonging Begins Here: MODG's Path to Equity.

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Executive Summary

In September 2022, the Province of Nova Scotia enacted the *Dismantling Racism and Hate Act*, providing strategic direction for addressing systemic racism, hate, and inequity within Provincial Government operations. This groundbreaking legislation extends beyond provincial boundaries, requiring all municipalities to develop comprehensive plans to combat these critical challenges by **April 1, 2025**.

The Municipality of the District of Guysborough (MODG) embraces this mandate not merely as regulatory compliance, but as a fundamental commitment to creating lasting change that benefits our entire community. This plan represents our dedication to advancing equity, inclusion, and anti-racism through concrete, measurable actions.

Legislative Context and Timeline

Following the introduction of supporting regulations in July 2024, all Nova Scotia municipalities must create plans addressing systemic racism, hate, and inequity by **April 1, 2025**. This timeline aligns strategically with the three-year review cycle for Municipal Accessibility Plans, ensuring a comprehensive and consistent approach to community progress.

For MODG, this represents an opportunity to develop a public plan reflecting our unwavering commitment to **equity** in every aspect of municipal governance, focused on creating a fairer, more inclusive environment for all residents.

Our Commitment to Change

This plan serves as both roadmap and living document, subject to review and updates every three years to ensure meaningful progress toward our goals. We are committed to actively listening to resident needs and making necessary adjustments to secure an equitable future for everyone in our community.

The development process marks just the beginning of our journey. This initiative provides an opportunity for collective action - acknowledging existing challenges and creating solutions that advance our vision of an inclusive, equitable society where everyone can thrive.

"If people can learn to hate, they can be taught to love, for love comes more naturally to the human heart than its opposite."- Nelson Mandela

Warden's Welcome Message

On behalf of Council and staff of the Municipality of the District of Guysborough, I am honored to present *Belonging Begins Here: MODG's Path to Equity*.

"You Belong Here" is the greeting that welcomes visitors to our municipal website. As we move forward with our Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Accessibility (EDIA) document, it is my hope that everyone truly feels they belong in our municipality.

As Warden of the Municipality of the District of Guysborough, it is my pleasure to share this message within what is intended to be a living, evolving document. In our efforts to open doors that make people feel comfortable living in and visiting our communities, I want to acknowledge the many people who have contributed to this process. Our staff have actively engaged community volunteers, inviting them to participate in the research and development of this document.

To feel a true sense of belonging, people must be given the opportunity to actively participate in shaping how their community functions. They must feel supported as members who can make a positive difference for everyone. Throughout the development of this document, participants have listened to one another across all segments of our municipality, demonstrating a commitment to understanding and improving how MODG serves its residents.

While we have economic development opportunities ahead, it is equally important for a community to cultivate pride and a sense of ownership in its collective identity. The establishment of our EDIA committee has illuminated ways we can improve how we present ourselves to the world - and the world is indeed watching.

Although this is a mandated policy for all Municipalities, it is also simply the right thing to do. The EDIA document before you is a living document, designed to evolve alongside the growth and change in our communities. By welcoming new people, we also embrace the fresh perspectives and energy they bring from their previous homes.

This land existed long before MODG was created, and it is our responsibility to ensure the mistakes of the past are not repeated. We must work together as one community while celebrating and respecting the diversity that enriches our fabric. "You Belong Here" is not just a slogan - it is the way we live each day. Open doors begin with open minds.



Paul Long

Warden, Municipality of the District of Guysborough

Why this Matters: Our Foundation of Inclusivity

At its core, this initiative centers on **inclusivity**, recognizing the lived experiences of individuals facing systemic barriers and inequities while ensuring their voices are heard and respected in planning and decision-making processes.

Through adoption and implementation of this plan, we hold ourselves accountable to creating an environment where every person, regardless of background, feels safe, valued, and included.

Historical Context: A Storied Past

Indigenous Heritage

The area now known as the District of Guysborough has been recognized as special since before European arrival. The Indigenous Mi'kmaq people called the region Chedabouctou—a name preserved in the beautiful bay bordering much of the district's eastern side. Many place names throughout Guysborough County retain their original Mi'kmaq origins, while others reflect the heritage of early French, English, and Black Loyalist settlers.

Early Settlement Patterns

Following the typical pattern of eastern Canada, the area transitioned through French and English control until English dominance established itself in the 18th century. The Municipality of the District of Guysborough has maintained a significant Acadian population and rich heritage throughout this history.

United Empire Loyalists

The largest single settler group arrived as Loyalists at the American Revolution's conclusion. During this period, Guysborough received its name, honoring Sir Guy Carleton, commander-in-chief of British forces in America and Governor General of Canada during the 1780s.

Black Loyalist Perseverance

Black Loyalists arrived during this same period, though promises of prime seaside land went unfulfilled. Despite these broken commitments, these resilient people persevered, establishing the first North American settlements by Free Blacks. Although they faced unfair distribution of land, tools, and supplies, Black communities grew from approximately 200 people in 1786 to over 900 by 1872. The descendants of these courageous and resilient people continue as vital community members today.

“Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.”

— Maya Angelou

Our Strategic Framework: Three Focus Areas

EDUCATE

Foundation: Raising Awareness

Our *Educate* initiative focuses on providing opportunities for learning, dialogue, and understanding. This includes creating resources to help council, staff, and residents understand racism's history, ongoing impacts of community barriers, and collaborative approaches to creating change. We will offer lunch-and-learn workshops for committee members and staff, provide training for staff and council, and partner with existing community events to build knowledge and foster equity conversations.

CELEBRATE

Foundation: Honoring Diversity

Creating inclusive communities requires celebrating the diverse cultures, traditions, and backgrounds that make our region unique. Through the *Celebrate* initiative, we will amplify historically marginalized voices and honor the rich cultural heritage of all groups. Whether through featured art in our spaces, programs reflecting different cultures, or ensuring our services and spaces visually represent the people we serve, we are creating places where everyone feels welcome to share, learn, and grow together.

DRIVE

Foundation: Implementing Change

Meaningful change requires action beyond discussion. In the first three-year cycle, the *Drive* focus area turns to our communities for input. We will engage with all residents throughout our Municipality to identify strategies for implementing equity in decision-making processes. We will advance partnerships by working closely with local organizations to ensure equity is embedded in everything we do - pushing forward with determination to guarantee all residents equal access to opportunities and resources.



If you want to go quickly, go alone. If you want to go far, go together. African Proverb

Goal #1 EDUCATE

Through education and awareness activities, MODG staff and Council will increase their knowledge and understanding of racism's impact and equity gaps experienced by community members.

Objective 1.1 Education & Training - Key Initiatives

1. Mandatory Training Implementation

- **Timeline:** December 2025 - June 2026
- **Leads:** Manager of Special Initiatives & Communications, EDIA Committee
- **Objective:** Ensure all staff and council members complete mandatory Diversity, Equity & Inclusion (DEI) training.

2. Ongoing Learning Culture

- **Timeline:** January 2026 - March 2028
- **Leads:** Manager of Special Initiatives & Communications, CAO
- **Objective:** Promote an environment of continuous learning through short-format training sessions. Embed micro-learning opportunities into regular staff engagements.

3. Lunch-and-Learn Series Launch

- **Timeline:** October 2025 - March 2028
- **Leads:** Manager of Special Initiatives & Communications, EDIA Committee
- **Objective:** Foster education through informal learning sessions, encouraging open dialogue and knowledge sharing.

4. Community Storytelling Initiative

- **Timeline:** January 2026 - March 2028
- **Leads:** EDIA Committee, Manager of Special Initiatives & Communications
- **Objective:** Engage the community through storytelling and videos. Increase audience engagement and gather positive feedback to assess impact.

5. Host a KAIROS Blanket Exercise

- **Timeline:** April 2026
- **Leads:** Manager of Special Initiatives & Communications, EDIA Committee
- **Objective:** Coordinate a KAIROS Blanket Exercise, an interactive learning experience that fosters truth, understanding, and reconciliation by exploring the shared history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Canada. This exercise will help staff and Council build awareness of the impacts of colonization, deepen cultural understanding, and support ongoing efforts to uphold the spirit and intent of the Treaties of Peace and Friendship.



Success Criteria

- **Knowledge and Awareness:** Staff demonstrate increased understanding of equity and anti-racism, identifying opportunities for improvement in public and colleague interactions.
- **Feedback and Engagement:** Storytelling initiatives and learning series show increased listener numbers and positive community feedback.
- **Continuous Improvement:** Staff surveys indicate that ongoing learning initiatives add value to personal and professional development.

Collaboration and Partnerships

- **Brainstorming Topics and Guests:** Committee and staff collaborate to develop a comprehensive list of topics and potential guest speakers for storytelling initiative.
- **Cultural Exchange Partnerships:** Partner with community organizations and Guysborough District Business Partnership (GDBP) newcomer coordinator to invite diverse community members to share cultural experiences and perspectives.



Goal #2 Celebrate

Celebrate distinct cultural populations, neurodiverse and gender diverse communities within MODG to improve their sense of belonging and feeling welcomed and supported by our programs and services.

Objective 2.1: Celebrate and Showcase Cultural Diversity through Events and Public Art

Timeline: January 2026 - March 2028

Lead: EDIA Committee, Manager of Special Initiatives & Communications, Public Works, ArtWorks East, Council, Community Partners

Action Items:

1. Develop an annual calendar to acknowledge cultural, heritage, and inclusion dates. Collaborate with community partners to co-host events, proclamations, and awareness celebrations.
2. Create an inventory of municipal spaces suitable for displaying diverse artwork.
3. Partner with ArtWorks East and local artists to display culturally inspired works.
4. Host unveiling events and rotating exhibits that highlight community stories, local talent, and cultural heritage.

Success Criteria:

- Increased community and staff awareness of cultural organizations and resources.
- Enhanced participation and engagement in events and exhibits.
- Positive feedback from residents, partners, and visitors regarding inclusivity and representation.
- Strengthened partnerships with artists, cultural groups, and community organizations.

“There is no power for change greater than a community discovering what it cares about.” - Margaret J. Wheatley.



Objective 2.2: Supports for Recognition of Significant Cultural and Historical Events

- **Timeline:** January 2026 - March 2028
- **Lead:** EDIA Committee, MODG staff and council, local school administration and staff, community organizations

Action Items:

- Partner with local schools to celebrate Black Excellence Day
- Partner with community organizations to host National Day of Truth and Reconciliation Event
- Partner with community organizations to support Emancipation Week, Acadian Heritage Month, African Heritage Month

Success Criteria:

- Community members provide positive feedback on municipal support
- Satisfied partnership relationships and effective processes.

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere.”

— Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



Goal #3 Drive

Engage with all residents throughout our Municipality to identify implementation strategies for equity in decision-making processes.

Objective 3.1: Vision Statement Development

Timeline: January 2026 - March 2026

Lead: Manager of Special Initiatives and Communications, EDIA Committee Members

Action Items:

- Prepare discussion questions/guides for vision statement creation
- Gather samples from other municipalities for idea generation

Success Criteria: Committee drafts vision statement with staff support and Council approval by March 2026.

Objective 3.2: Community Outreach Strengthening

Timeline: December 2025 - March 2028

Lead: Manager of Special Initiatives & Communications, EDIA Committee

Action Items:

- Engage through existing community events
- Attend community events for feedback gathering
- Share feedback and learning with committee and Council on ongoing basis
- Modify MODG existing events through an EDIA lens

Success Criteria: Track event attendance numbers; collect community feedback, stories, and concerns; establish monthly Council reporting process; demonstrate Council acknowledgment and use of information in decision-making.

Objective 3.3: Regular Community Feedback System

Timeline: January 2026 - March 2028

Action Items:

- Create ongoing tools (digital forms, suggestion boxes) for resident feedback collection

Success Criteria: New website with accessible, online forms for public feedback collection.

Objective 3.4: Inclusive Communications Update

Timeline: January 2026 – March 2028

Lead: EDIA Committee, Manager of Special Initiatives & Communications

Action Items:

- Review all MODG external communications for inclusive language, imagery, and accessibility

Success Criteria: Continuing committee feedback on communications demonstrates improvement.

Objective 3.5: Anti-Racism Charter in Recreation

Timeline: January 2026 - March 2028

Lead: EDIA Committee, Manager of Special Initiatives & Communications, Recreation Staff

Action Items:

- Adopt charter and commit to implementing necessary actions addressing and acknowledging racism's impact in recreation

Success Criteria: Racialized participants report feeling more welcome and represented in MODG recreation spaces; monitor participation trends post-implementation.

“When we are talking about diversity, it’s not a box to check. It is a reality that should be deeply felt and held and valued by all of us.” – Ava DuVernay



Goal #3 Drive

Objective 3.6: Equity in Municipal Operations

Timeline: January 2026 - March 2028

Lead: Manager of Special Initiatives and Communications, EDIA Committee Members, CAO, Directors

Action Items:

- Revise job posting language and recruitment strategies to attract diverse candidates
- Establish relationships with organizations serving equity-seeking communities for recruitment outreach
- Prioritize grant applications that advance equity goals

Success Criteria: Job postings are consistently shared with partner organizations, evidence of increased applications from individuals connected to partner organizations, increased number and diversity of applicants for municipal job postings (measured through voluntary self-identification.) Dedicated EDIA budget established and maintained annually.

Objective 3.7: Build on Historical Knowledge

Timeline: September 2026 - December 2026

Lead: Manager of Special Initiatives and Communications, EDIA Committee

Action Items:

- Research and document the histories and timelines of First Nations, early settlers, and other cultural groups that have shaped the Municipality of the District of Guysborough.
- Partner with the Guysborough Historical Society, Knowledge Keepers from African Nova Scotian communities, First Nations, and Acadian communities to co-create and validate historical content for our municipal website and current plan.

Success Criteria: A comprehensive historical timeline is developed and approved for public use and incorporated into municipal website.

“None of us are free until all of us are free.” — Marsha P. Johnson

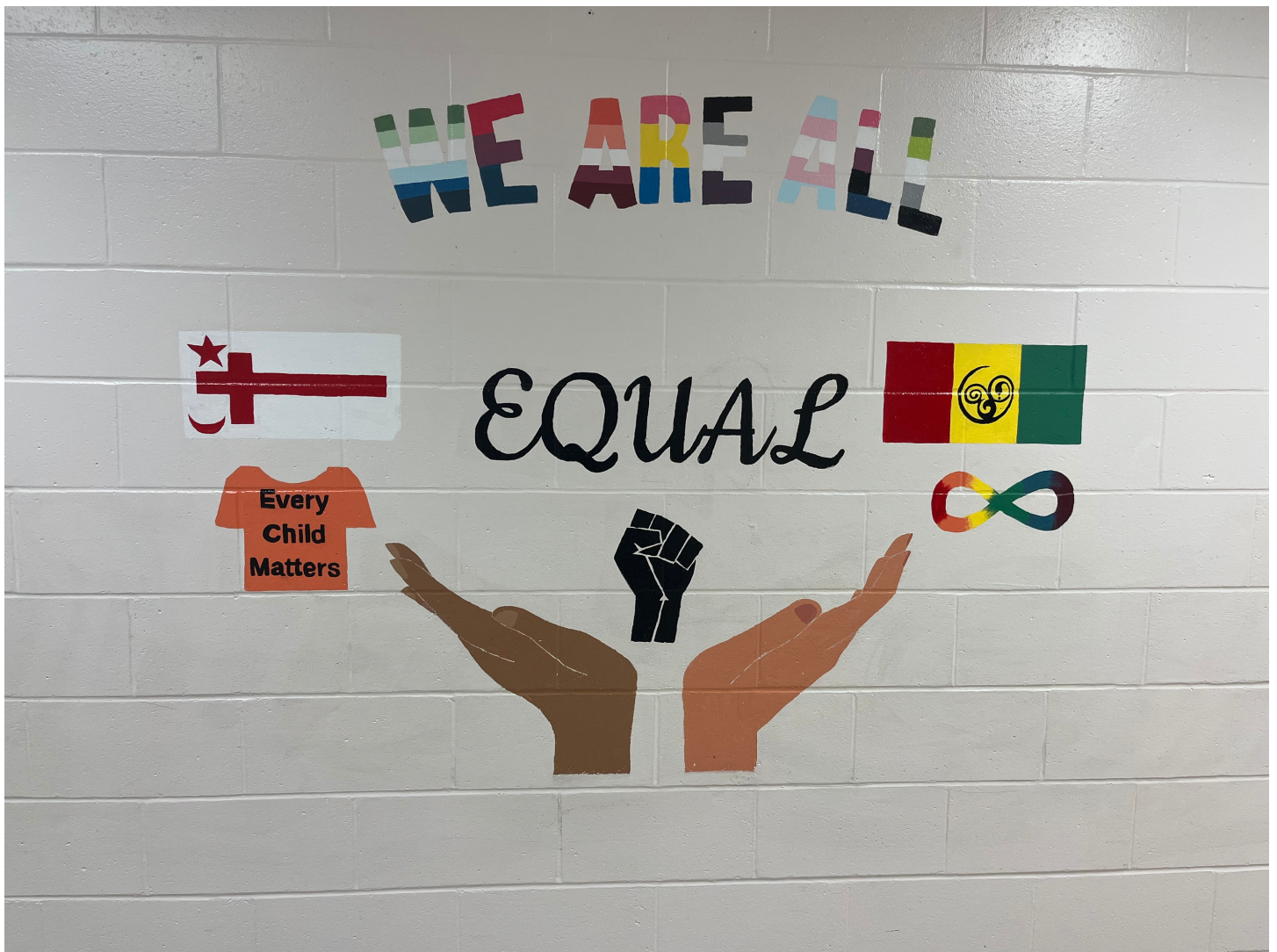


Accountability and Evaluation

This plan will be reviewed and updated every three years, ensuring continuous progress toward equity and anti-racism goals. Success will be measured through:

- **Quantitative Metrics:** Participation rates, survey responses, feedback collection
- **Qualitative Assessment:** Community feedback, staff development, partnership satisfaction
- **Ongoing Monitoring:** Monthly Council reports, annual progress reviews, community engagement tracking

“The world is not ours; the earth is not ours; it’s a treasure we hold in trust for future generations.” - Kofi Annan



Glossary of Terms

Discrimination: Action, speech, or behavior by individuals, organizations, or groups producing hatred, intolerance, and/or prejudice against others based on prohibited grounds under the Nova Scotia Human Rights Act and Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Includes illegal/arbitrary denial of rights with intent to exclude or limit equal participation in economic, political, social, and cultural life.

Diversity: Broad range of attributes, both seen and unseen, including race, ethnicity, religion, language, gender, sexual orientation, economic status, age, abilities, geographic location, and family name. A diverse workplace reflects our broader community's richness.

Equity: Fair treatment considering individual, specific needs, barriers, and accommodations to ensure equal opportunity for full workplace participation.

Inclusion: Creating culture and environment where individuals or groups feel welcomed, respected, supported, and valued for full participation.

Systematic Barrier: Obstacle excluding individuals or groups from equitable treatment. Often unintentional, occurring when policies, procedures, and practices lack diversity consideration. Example: online-only job applications preventing qualified candidates without technology access from applying.

Microaggression: Subtle, often unintentional comments, actions, or behaviours that communicate bias or prejudice toward a marginalized group. These everyday slights or insults can reinforce stereotypes or make individuals feel excluded or devalued based on aspects of their identity such as race, gender, ability, sexual orientation, or other differences. While they may seem minor, their cumulative impact can contribute to feelings of alienation and inequity.

Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until its faced. - James Baldwin



Conclusion

This Equity and Anti-Racism Plan represents the Municipality of the District of Guysborough's dedication to fostering an inclusive and anti-racist environment. Through continuous evaluation and accountability, we remain committed to ensuring equity and anti-racism principles are not merely ideals but actively practiced in all operational and cultural aspects.

The *Dismantling Racism and Hate Act* calls every level of government, organization, and community across Nova Scotia to action. In the Municipality of the District of Guysborough, we take this call seriously and eagerly work toward building a future that is just, equitable, and welcoming for all.



“One head does not exchange ideas.” - Ghanaian Proverb