



inclusivity

# Building an Inclusion Calendar

How to Choose Meaningful Dates of Acknowledgement for your Organization

May 2024

Inclusivity acknowledges our respect for and deep gratitude to the Coast Salish Peoples, namely the səliilwətaʔ (Tseil-Waututh) and Skwxwú7mesh (Squamish) First Nations, and the xʷməθkʷəy̓əm (Musqueam) Indian Band on whose traditional territories we are honoured to operate.

# About Inclusivity

Inclusivity (formerly HRx) was founded in June 2016 and has become a leading provider of practical, data-informed solutions for equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI). Over the years, we have partnered with hundreds of organizations across North America to build stronger, more inclusive teams. Through our comprehensive suite of consulting services, interactive training programs and data analytics, we help teams at any stage of their EDI journey. We drive sustainable change, whether that's the systems and processes that shape how organizations work, or the behaviours of the employees and leaders who bring cultures to life.

**We approach EDI as the critical organizational practice it is, by designing strategies that drive change at an institutional level and equipping individuals with the knowledge to help build inclusive cultures.**

## Systematic + Practical

We address the right issues at the right time to ensure a coordinated, streamlined & structured approach to change.

## Tailored

We ensure the unique culture of each team is reflected in our work to deliver relevant and high-impact outcomes.

## Data-Driven

We use data to assess the current landscape, influence decision-makers, prioritize high-impact initiatives & measure progress over time.

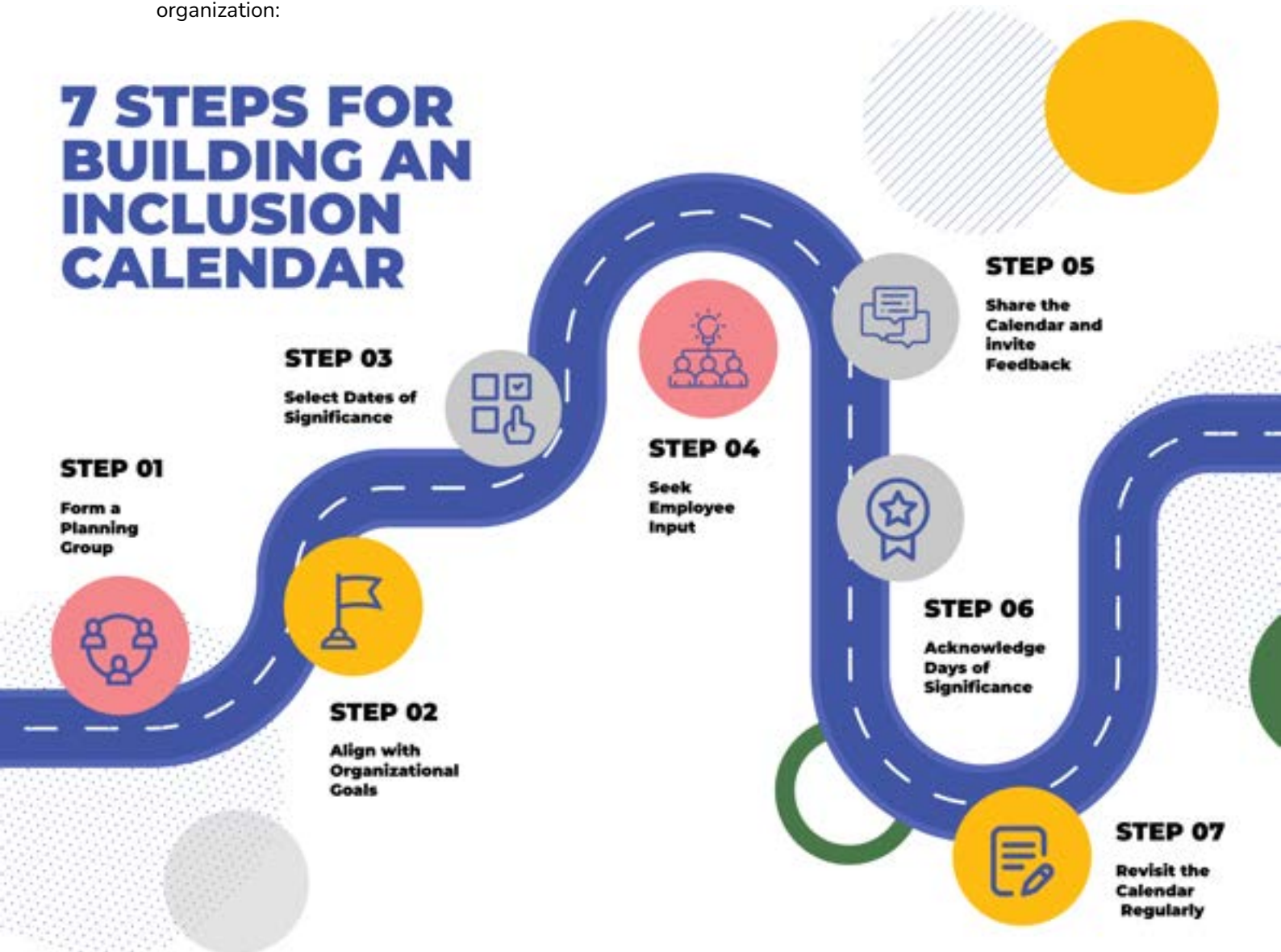
# Best Practices for Building Inclusion Calendars

Shared calendars help communicate priorities across an organization. An inclusion calendar is a living document that marks dates of significance, recognition and celebration for people of diverse identities and backgrounds. It helps employees understand one another and promotes the recognition and appreciation of non-dominant social groups within the organization.

But the process of creating an inclusion calendar raises many questions. How does an organization choose which days to recognize? How does it mark or commemorate these occasions? Having a clear, intentional process for creating an inclusive calendar helps generate dialogue, build a sense of community, and avoid common challenges.

In this guide, we describe seven steps for building an inclusive calendar that works for your organization:

## 7 STEPS FOR BUILDING AN INCLUSION CALENDAR



# 01

## Form a Planning Group

Decide who will be involved in the planning and coordination of the calendar. An EDI committee or working group, if your organization has one, can lead the efforts to develop the calendar. In smaller organizations, communications teams or administrators commonly coordinate the process, which will involve reaching out to employees (as described in step 3).



# 02

## Align with Organizational Goals

Reflect on why the calendar is important so that you can communicate about its purpose clearly with employees.

Consider how inclusion calendars can work to challenge broader cultural assumptions, which are often based in Western, Euro-centric views. See our *Best Practices for Inclusive Holidays* guide for a discussion of how the conventional calendar of holidays is rooted in assumptions that might not reflect the beliefs or experiences of employees and can leave out days of significance for many.

Identify how the inclusion calendar is important to your organization's purpose and work specifically. It may connect with specific priorities in your strategic plan or EDI strategy, or help you achieve other already-identified goals more broadly.



## Principles of an Effective Inclusion Calendar

Throughout the process of developing an inclusion calendar, the following principles are important for building an practical, tool within a broader culture of inclusion:

- An inclusion calendar is **a living document**, built from dialogue and the contributions of employees. Its creation is an ongoing process, with opportunities for feedback and change.
- **Learning is the fundamental goal** underlying the creation of the calendar. Events to commemorate days of significance should emphasize learning, too.
- Each inclusion calendar will be **specific to the individual organization**, based on its work, priorities, and employees.
- **Marginalized groups should not be burdened** with extra work or the responsibility to explain or commemorate their days of significance.
- An inclusion calendar must be **part of a broader, overall equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) strategy**. The calendar should not dictate an organization's EDI initiatives; as one EDI analyst writes: "A common message I've heard through conversations with folks from marginalized communities is this: Show up for us all year, or don't show up at all."<sup>1</sup>



## 03

# Select Dates of Significance



When creating an inclusion calendar people commonly feel overwhelmed by the options. There are many examples of “diversity and inclusion” calendars available online. It is important to note that your calendar will not cover all days of significance for all groups. A clear strategy, developed by a diverse group of people, with employee input, helps you to prioritize and make those decisions.

You may consider an approach that marks days of significance of the groups designated under the federal *Employment Equity Act*: (1) First Nations, Inuit, and Métis workers; (2) Black workers; (3) 2SLGBTQI+ workers; (4) women; (5) visible minorities; (6) people with disabilities.<sup>2</sup> These are groups who have faced systemic, structural bias and discrimination in workplaces; marking significant days for these groups can help build a broader understanding in support of employment equity.

To identify key EDI-related days, it can be helpful to start by consulting the calendars of political agencies across scales to see what events are regularly marked in the regions where you live. This will help you gain a general sense of officially recognized EDI days of significance that you may want to include in your calendar.



### OFFICIAL DATES

**MUNICIPAL:** Some municipal governments have lists of official days and observances. See, for example, [this list](#) from the City of Vancouver.

**PROVINCIAL:** Provincial governments have lists of events to mark or commemorate. See, for example, the list of [Ontario's Celebrations and Commemorations](#) or [BC's list of annual proclamations](#).

**FEDERAL:** The Government of Canada has a page of “[important and commemorative days](#)” and one of “[health promotion days](#).”

**INTERNATIONAL:** The United Nations has [a calendar of international days and weeks of commemoration](#).

Many organizations create a draft calendar of suggested days of significance to distribute to employees for feedback (as described in step 5, employees may then add additional dates to the calendar). This initial draft calendar will include some key EDI-related days as well important EDI events specific to the type of work that your organization does. For example, if your organization works in the field of health or disability, you may be interested in the list of “health promotion days” identified by the Government of Canada. Be specific about what aspects of EDI your organization wants to address.

# Frequently Asked Questions About Selecting Days of Significance

- ➔ **Do I have to make a list in advance, or can I just ask employees what days of significance are important to them?** Some organizations may just opt to email employees a list of questions about days of significance for them in the calendar year. This approach can be effective, too. Taking the extra step of making a list can be helpful because (a) it includes key events, (b) it provides employees with more information with which to make recommendations and engage in dialogue and (c) it avoids putting the burden on employees to do the research.
- ➔ **If I do make a list, how do I decide which events to put on it?** This is a challenging question and there are no right answers. In general, a draft list to be shared with employees may be quite long; with a long list, you can give employees more knowledge and opportunity to identify what is meaningful to them.
- ➔ **Do I include religious holidays on my list?** Some organizations choose not to include religious holidays on their inclusion calendars. Because there are so many different religions and religious observances, it can be difficult to be comprehensive; people may worry about offending employees. However, because the aim of the calendar is to help employees understand one another and share in each other's lives, including religious events can be helpful. Employees may better understand, then, their colleagues' religious practices and meaningful times of year. As we describe below, you may decide to commemorate religious events internally but other events externally.
- ➔ **Do I include "fun" days or local events?** Days that are fun or whimsical, such as "donut day," and local or community events should be documented on a separate calendar so that they do not detract from the importance of days of significance.



## 04 Seek Employee Input



Once you have developed a draft list of events, you can connect with employees and ask for feedback. It is important to communicate clearly why you are creating the calendar and invite participation. Explain the scope of the calendar (e.g. whether it is for internal or external purposes). Make sure you explain that the process is one of ongoing learning and that all feedback is valued.

When asking for input, let people know that not every possible event can always be included. (Depending on the feedback you receive from employees, you may wish to have both an internal and external calendar; the internal calendar may cover employees' recommended dates more easily; see step 6, below.) This kind of clear communication is very important. If you ask people for input and they take the time to share what is meaningful to them and their recommendations are not included, the result can be a sense of frustration and exclusion – the opposite of what is intended.

You may choose to share the list in a staged process. For example, you could start by sharing it with employee resource groups (ERGs) or members of an EDI committee (if the list was developed by one or two people) in advance of sharing the list organization-wide. You can ask employees to review the list and make comments. It will be important to ask them if there are any other dates they would like to add. Providing an open field for any additional comments will make sure that employees have space to raise any issues that the calendar brings up for them. Include a point person that employees can contact with any questions. Days of significance can be deeply personal. Avoid making assumptions and consider what makes a safe space for people from equity-seeking groups to share their views and experiences.

## 05 Share the Calendar and Invite Feedback



When the dates have been identified, it's time to build and share the calendar. Different organizations have different types of software, communication channels, and ways of sharing dates. For some, the EDI calendar may be a PDF list of dates to acknowledge; others may put dates on existing shared calendars or a dedicated EDI internal portal.

Whatever the format, it is important to make the calendar easily available among all staff. If you announce the calendar at a townhall or by email, continue to describe the process as an opportunity for employees to learn about one another and commit to continuing to hear feedback. You will need to have a process to adjust the calendar in response to any feedback you receive.

### Creating a Context for Learning

The calendar works best as part of a broader strategy to communicate about EDI among employees. A broad understanding of why equity, diversity, and inclusion are important will build context for the calendar and the ongoing acknowledgement of the events on it. Learning about topics such as anti-racism and decolonization will work alongside the calendar to undo Western cultural biases and assumptions that create barriers for equity-seeking groups. The inclusive calendar and events will, in turn, then contribute to this broader organizational understanding of equity-based values.

## 06

# Acknowledge Days of Significance



After identifying what dates to acknowledge, the next step is deciding how to acknowledge them. How organizations choose to do this is specific to them; it varies considerably based on the size, budget, structure, sector as well as the organization's commitment to inclusive workplaces practices.

At a basic, operational level, it is important to have an equitable approach to holidays and paid time off (PTO). People's observances need to be accommodated within the operations of the organization for inclusion to be authentic. For more information on inclusive approaches to holidays and PTO, see our guide: *Best Practices for Inclusive Holidays*.

### General Considerations

- ☐ Create a diverse event planning committee. Remember that existing EDI committees or ERGs may or may not be able to take on the additional work of event planning.
- ☐ If possible, allocate a budget to support the activities you plan to acknowledge.
- ☐ Consider choosing a certain number of events to acknowledge annually. Some organizations may choose to mark some main events regularly, every year, while selecting among other different days each year for opportunities of organizational learning.
- ☐ Create calendar invites for employees and be sure to give plenty of lead time.

Events can be marked or commemorated internally or externally (publicly). Below we have included examples of the types of events you can do for each, along with important considerations.

### Internal Acknowledgements of Days of Significance

Here are some examples of the ways that people mark events internally:

- Acknowledgement at team/organization meetings
- Speakers
- Articles in internal newsletters
- Webinars or Workshops
- Forums or panel discussions
- Celebrations
- Zoom background image
- Shared resources
- Book clubs (shared reading)
- Volunteer opportunities

### Considerations

- ☐ Internal acknowledgement of days of significance may be at the group level or organization wide. The way you acknowledge or mark events on a small team will be different than across a large organization.
- ☐ Try to create opportunities for dialogue and participation, rather than a one-way sharing of information.
- ☐ Consider how you can mark the day appropriately without putting the burden of commemoration on employees from equity-seeking groups. To do so, ensure adequate resources and facilitate open communication.
- ☐ Decide on ways to invite feedback after events.



## External Acknowledgements of Days of Significance

Overall, the ways that an organization chooses to mark these diverse days of significance can help organizations build a more inclusive culture and connect with diverse customers and clients. Such communications, however, must stem from systematic work on EDI in order to be authentic and effective; otherwise, event commemoration can appear as tokenism or hypocrisy (see box below on McDonald's and Black Lives Matter).

Organizations can do many things to commemorate days of significance. Examples of such activities include:

- Press releases or public statements
- Sharing stories on social media or website
- Fundraising or donating to related causes
- Participating in or hosting public events

## Considerations

- ❑ Align internal operations and missions with broader EDI objectives before publicly communicating about EDI-related events.
- ❑ Broader training on EDI and accessibility in communications will facilitate effective public commemoration of days of significance.<sup>3</sup>
- ❑ Focus on social learning, such as by sharing stories or resources.
- ❑ Amplify diverse and marginalized voices. You can consider sharing employee stories or voices: see, for example, McKinsey's "Our Black Voices" initiative<sup>4</sup> or JP Morgan Chase's work on "Coming Out in Corporate America."<sup>5</sup>

## McDonald's & Black Lives Matter

*In the wake of the murder of George Floyd in 2020, McDonald's restaurant signs showed support for Black Lives Matter across the country; McDonald's publicized this move on its website and in its communications.<sup>6</sup> McDonald's has since been criticized for promoting its position on anti-Black racism while Black employees and franchisees face systemic racism and discrimination. Black franchisees sued the fast-food giant for a pattern of bias and discrimination that created significant barriers to successful restaurant operation. A USA Today report stated: "The lawsuit puts a spotlight on what many workers and labor advocates deem to be the hypocrisy of many corporations that have declared their support for the current national movement challenging systemic racism yet fail to root out bigotry within their own organizations."<sup>7</sup>*



## 08

# Revisit the Calendar Regularly

The team that oversees the calendar must find ways to invite feedback regularly and make changes as needed. An annual scheduled review can be helpful to identify gaps and capture the needs of any new employees.



## Summary

As one recent *Harvard Business Review* article noted, “the key to inclusion is understanding who your employees really are.”<sup>8</sup> A calendar of days of significance can help employees learn what dates matter to one another during the calendar year, helping build inclusion into day-to-day life of the organization.

Remember — an inclusion calendar is a useful tool, but it works best alongside fundamental, system-wide work in EDI planning. One EDI consultant recently noted that organizations “are eager to fund one-time ‘inspirational’ events to ‘raise awareness’ about equity, but far less enthusiastic about medium-to-long-term interventions that change incentive structures, shift the balance of power or resources, or reimagine personnel processes like evaluation, promotion, and conflict resolution.”<sup>9</sup> Ensure that you are prioritizing a strategic long-term vision for equity, diversity, and inclusion in your organization. Within that vision, an inclusion calendar can be an important educational tool to facilitate dialogue and ongoing learning within the broader aim of building a more inclusive organizational culture.



# References

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- 2 The *Employment Equity Act* historically identified four “designated groups”: (1) women; (2) First Nations, Métis, and Inuit; (3) people with disabilities; (4) visible minorities. The federal government has recently begun work to “modernize” the language of the act to reflect “careful, intersectional, contemporary understandings and concerns of First Nations, Métis and Inuit workers, workers with disabilities, Black and racialized workers, and 2SLGBTQI+ workers.” See Adelle Blackett, 2023. “[Chapter 3: Rethinking equity groups under the Employment Equity Act framework](#).” Government of Canada.
- 3 A full discussion of inclusive and accessible communications is outside the scope of this guide, but see, for example: Government of Canada, 2022. *Plain Language, Accessibility, and Inclusive Communications*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/privy-council/services/communications-community-office/communications-101-boot-camp-canadian-public-servants/plain-language-accessibility-inclusive-communications.html>
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