

EXECUTIVE BRIEFING

External Review Panel on the UPEI Equity, Diversity, Inclusion & Human Rights (EDIHR) Office

Purpose of the Review

The University of Prince Edward Island commissioned an external review of its EDIHR Office in the context of significant institutional instability, heightened public scrutiny, and community concern regarding UPEI's capacity to address discrimination, harassment, systemic inequities, and sexual violence.

The Panel's mandate focused on examining:

- The structure, mandate, staffing, and operations of the EDIHR Office
- Accessibility and effectiveness of human rights systems
- Trauma-informed and culturally safe practices
- Compliance with the UPEI Action Plan and the Rubin Thomlinson Report
- Alignment with national standards and promising practices

Across **11 consultation sessions** with **29 community members**, including students, faculty, staff, Indigenous leaders, unions, EDI practitioners, and current EDIHR staff, the Panel identified significant system-wide challenges as well as shared aspirations for a transformational shift toward a more coherent, accessible, and trusted equity ecosystem.

Key Themes from Community Consultations

1. Lack of Clarity and Visibility

Participants consistently reported uncertainty about the EDIHR Office's purpose, how to access services, and what to expect from institutional processes. Many described not knowing "where to go" with concerns.

2. Fragmented Support Systems

Equity and human rights issues are dispersed across multiple units—EDIHR, HR, Student Affairs, Accessibility, Indigenous Relations, SV-PRO—creating duplication, gaps, inconsistent responses, and retraumatization as individuals must retell their stories repeatedly.

3. Limited Trauma-Informed and Culturally Safe Practices

Participants found institutional processes overly formal, legalistic, or bureaucratic. Indigenous leaders emphasized the need for Indigenous-led approaches, safe ceremonial spaces, and relief from widespread unpaid cultural labour.

4. Insufficient Capacity and Role Ambiguity

Staff described unmanageable workloads and conflicting mandates spanning intake, education, investigations, anti-racism work, outreach, training, and mediation—roles that should be structurally separated.

5. Institutional Mistrust

A history of unresolved complaints, leadership challenges, and lack of visible accountability has eroded confidence in the system. Many community members expressed fear of retaliation.

6. Overreliance on Marginalized Individuals

Equity-involved faculty, staff, and students reported being regularly sought out to carry equity burdens without recognition or compensation.

7. Shared Desire for Systemic Transformation

Despite challenges, stakeholders expressed strong commitment to building a relational, culturally grounded, trauma-informed, and accountable human rights and equity framework.

Gap Analysis: Current State of the EDIHR Office

The Panel identified gaps across five core domains:

Structural Gaps

- Overly broad, centralized mandate
- Lack of separation between education, intake, and investigation
- Insufficient Indigenous and accessibility expertise
- Minimal data capacity

Process Gaps

- No standardized intake or triage system
- Absence of early-resolution pathways
- Reliance on formal complaints
- Inconsistent communication

Capacity Gaps

- Undercapacitated across all functions
- Limited trauma-informed and cultural competency training
- Lack of administrative and data support

Cultural Gaps

- Deep mistrust in institutional systems
- Perceived inconsistency in how cases are handled
- Fragmented internal relationships

Governance Gaps

- No central oversight body
 - Limited transparency and reporting
 - Misalignment between decentralized equity-supporting units
-

Summary of Recommendations

The Panel recommends a **modernized, community-embedded, trauma-informed equity ecosystem** anchored in five pillars:

1. Structural Redesign: A Four-Stream EDIHR Office

- **Human Rights Complaints & Investigations Unit**
- **Equity Education, Training & Culture Change Unit**
- **Sexual Violence Prevention & Response (SV-PRO)**
- **Strategic Communication, Reporting & Accountability Unit**

This redesign reduces ambiguity, separates conflicting functions, and aligns with national standards.

2. Standardized Intake, Triage, and Early Resolution

- A “single front door” intake model
- Plain-language process maps
- Trauma-informed intake
- Early Resolution Program using restorative and facilitated approaches

3. Trauma-Informed and Culturally Safe Practice

- Required training across campus
- Indigenous-led and culturally grounded processes

- Consistent follow-up protocols
- Safer physical environments

4. Strengthened Indigenous Engagement & Accessibility Supports

- **Indigenous Engagement Lead** and an **Indigenous Advisory Circle**
- Strengthened accessibility coordination
- Annual accessibility audits
- Inclusive pedagogical training

5. Data, Transparency & Leadership Accountability

- Annual human rights and equity report
 - Dashboards for Senate, Board, and senior leadership
 - Equity competencies integrated into leadership evaluations
 - Creation of the **Presidential Advisory Committee on Human Rights & EDI (PACHREDI)**
-

Implementation Roadmap (High-Level)

Phase 1: Immediate (0–3 months)

- Announce commitment to new structure
- Establish interim leads
- Launch unified intake
- Form PACHREDI

Phase 2: Short-Term (3–12 months)

- Develop Early Resolution Program
- Modernize policies
- Build data infrastructure
- Roll out foundational training

Phase 3: Medium-Term (1–2 years)

- Recruit redesigned roles
- Implement Indigenous engagement strategy
- Conduct first accessibility audit

Phase 4: Long-Term (2–3 years)

- Embed equity in leadership evaluations
- Conduct climate surveys

- Fully integrate equity into institutional planning
-

Conclusion

The University community is deeply committed to equity, reconciliation, and human rights. However, the current system remains fragmented, unclear, and insufficiently trauma-informed. The Panel's recommendations provide a credible pathway toward a trustworthy, transparent, culturally grounded equity ecosystem that aligns with national standards and supports meaningful institutional transformation.

UPEI now has a significant opportunity to rebuild trust, strengthen accountability, and demonstrate national leadership in human rights and equity excellence.