



Ideating and Prioritizing Activities

IMPLEMENTATION TOOLKIT

This tool is for leaders supporting their faculty, division, department or unit's implementation of the Equity Action Plan (EAP). By following the suggested process outlined in this resource, units will 'brainstorm' and prioritize potential activities that advance the actions laid out in of the EAP. After using this tool, units will have created a shortlist of priority activities.ⁱⁱ

Overview

Advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion across a large organization can be complex and slow-moving. This is due to the many interconnected structures and systems within the university. Some changes, even those that are urgently needed, may take years of coordinated cross-institution efforts. Other changes which may seem challenging can happen very quickly when the right levers are activated.

While it is important not to lose sight of the larger goals of the [Equity Action Plan](#), it can be equally important to identify activities that you can take at the unit level. Seemingly small projects can help to establish a needed lever for change. Once they are successfully tested, these projects can also be replicated or scaled up for systemic change at the university.

Summary

This resource includes suggested steps for further developing your unit's Equity Action Agenda. By following the three steps below your unit will emerge with clear priorities so that you can move into the next phase of the [Implementation Framework](#). Your unit should go through the following steps:

Step 1 – Understand degree of influence: Refine your list of EAP actions by considering which actions your unit can best advance either alone or through collaboration.

Step 2 – Ideate supporting activities: 'Brainstorm' activities your unit could undertake to accomplish the actions you have identified in Step 1.

Step 3 – Prioritize activities: Consider both your unit's short term (annual) planning and longer-term (5 year) strategic planning as you determine what activities to prioritize considering competing responsibilities and duties.

Allow for creativity

How exactly you complete these three steps will depend on your unit context. You are encouraged to use different collaborative methods as you engage in the discussions and steps laid out in this tool. Host meetings or open houses, send out emails and surveys, use flip chart paper or sticky notes.

Before you start

To use this tool, you will need a list of actions your unit may be required to lead, has responsibilities related to or which respond to a need or challenge your unit/faculty faces.

To build this list be sure to review the [Your Unit within the Equity Action Plan tool](#) (and the Equity Action Plan Review Worksheet). This list should also include any actions that you or your unit have received direction from senior leadership to advance.

To complete the following steps, you will need to understand the difference between an action and an activity:

- **Actions:** Listed in the plan as committed actions, these are acts that UVic is committed to undertaking as we work towards each EAP goal. These actions have been developed with input from community engagement, adapted Scarborough Charter commitments and leadership priorities.
- **Activities:** In recognition that each action may require multiple unit-level projects or changes to accomplish, activities are the initiatives undertaken in support of an action.

Step 1: Understand degree of influence

Reviewing your list of actions, consider who can make each action happen. Understanding which actions are firmly within your unit's control and which will require collaborating with other units or championing in other ways can help you decide where to focus your efforts.

As you review the actions, group them into the following categories:

Who can make this happen?	Description	Implications
Our unit	Action is firmly within your unit's area of responsibility. Your unit can accomplish all or part of the action. (Other units may still need to advance the action in their units, be consulted and/or will need to implement changes to practices or policies.)	Your unit can develop a plan to clarify how you will accomplish this action. OR Your unit will develop supporting activities that contribute to this action.
Collaboration required	Action requires coordinated effort from multiple units including your own.	Your unit will work with other units to accomplish this action.
Other units	Actions are outside of your unit's area of responsibility and will be led by other unit(s). Changes may still have an impact on your unit.	Your unit may not be able to directly make this action happen. You can consider what your unit might need to be ready to implement any changes that affect your work or provide support as needed.

As you move into Step 2, you should focus on the actions identified as either within your unit's control or which require collaboration while being prepared to support other actions as needed.

Step 2: Ideate supporting activities

Since you have a refined action list from Step 1, it is time to generate possible activities that can be implemented to progress each action.

Ideation is also known as ‘brainstorming.’ Ideating invites people to think beyond the status quo or the ‘normal way things work’ to imagine new possibilities. Ideation, when done with the right conditions in place, can encourage innovative, creative, exciting and courageous ideas.

Importantly, as your unit begins this step, ensure to include a diversity of voices in the process. Consult the [Equitable Engagement for Implementation resource](#) to help you determine who should be included at this stage. Consider where there may be opportunities for engagement beyond your working group or planning committee such as hosting an open house or creating an online survey to gather suggestions from those impacted by and within your unit.

Conditions for ideation

When ideating as a group, ensure the following conditions are in place:

- Create an environment of psychological safety where all ideas are welcomed and no one is afraid to speak up.
- Defer judgement about the ideas that are generated. At this point all ideas are welcome.
- Encourage wild ideas. Think beyond the status quo and allow yourself new ways of approaching the issue. Share what comes to mind even if it does not feel possible right now.
- Build off other ideas. Be inspired by the ideas being shared by other people. Consider how can we create new ideas together.

Ideation questions and prompts

As you ideate, it is important to stay focused on topic. Approach each action one at a time and try using a main guiding question. For example, “How might we [identified action]?”

The activity ideas you generate are only starting places for action. As your unit works to plan and implement some of these activities, they will shift due to constraints and new input. For this reason, ideation works best when we suspend judgements on what is possible and instead give ourselves permission to think creatively.

Ideating is hard work that may not come easily to everyone, so we suggest using thought provoking questions to spark ideas for potential activities, for example:

- What might be possible given our current context?
- What would you do if there were no resource or time constraints?
- What would you do if you had to do something tomorrow?
- What would you do if you did not have to consider the processes and guidelines that you currently must be followed?

To keep your list of activity ideas manageable for the next step try to limit yourself to around 5 ideas per action. If needed, you can group similar activities together. For example, if participants suggest different places that job descriptions could be posted instead of listing each location as a different activity, cluster these ideas as “Find more venues to advertise job postings.”

Step 3: Prioritize activities

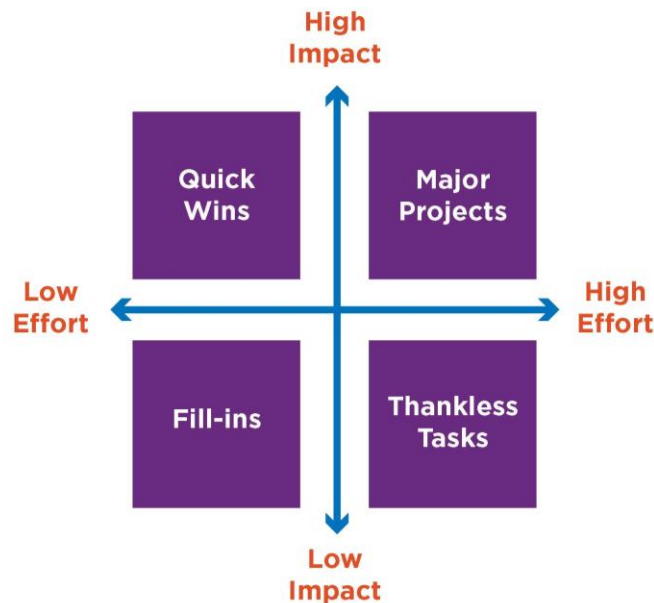
Now that you have a list of activity ideas, you should determine which activities to implement through a process of prioritization. We suggest considering both your unit’s short term (annual) planning and longer-term (5 year) strategic planning as you determine what activities to prioritize.

You may choose to use one or both options below (in any order) to consider effort, impact and other criteria when setting priorities. As with earlier steps, consider who needs to be part of this collaborative decision-making process to ensure an equitable process.

No matter how you prioritize your activities, consider revisiting your list from Step 1 before finalizing your list of short-term and long-term priorities so that you end up with a manageable list that advances a diversity of EAP actions.

Option 1: Estimate effort and impact

For each activity idea, plot them on the priority matrix below. Consider where you would place it in relation to the effort it would take to achieve the idea and the estimated impact that achievement would have.



Estimate effort

For each activity idea, estimate how much effort it would take to accomplish relative to the other activities. To do this, consider:

- the resources (human and financial) that would be needed to bring this activity from idea into reality;
- how readily relevant systems and structures could accommodate the activity without requiring major changes;
- existing resources or initiatives (within the unit, UVic, or elsewhere) that you may be able to draw on or build upon (vs. starting from scratch);
- how easy it will be to motivate the relevant people to implement the activity; how much excitement the idea might generate;

- whether the activity is totally or mostly within the control of your unit or whether you would need to advocate for others to work collaboratively with you.

Estimate impact

For each activity idea, how much impact it would have relative to the other activities. To do this, consider:

- whether the activity is advancing a targeted action or responding to a barrier identified in the EAP;ⁱⁱⁱ
- how deeply the activity will improve the experiences of people from historically and systemically marginalized communities;
- how broad the reach of the activity is, how many people it will impact, or how sustained this impact will be;
- how well-aligned the activity is with UVic and unit priorities (e.g., UVic Strategic Plan, Indigenous Plan, Aspiration 2030, etc.);
- whether achievement of this activity will have positive impacts on other parts of your work.

Plot your ideas in the matrix above where the x (horizontal) axis is effort, and the y (vertical) axis is impact. As you complete this activity, you might find that you want to edit your ideas to increase estimated impact or decrease estimated effort. Allow yourself to add those activity ideas to your list, this is part of the process.

The matrix sorts activities into four categories. Ideally, your unit’s prioritized list of activities should include a mix of ‘quick wins’ and ‘major projects.’

Category	Description	Implications
Quick wins	Activities that require low effort and have a high impact.	These are great ideas to take on because they can make an impact in a relatively short time frame and help build momentum for change.
Major projects	Activities that require high effort but also have a high impact.	These are important to make space for but should be balanced with ‘quick wins’ to help maintain a sense of momentum.
Fill-ins	Activities that require low effort but also have low impact.	These ideas can be addressed when possible; for example, when they fit into existing workflows easily but do not need to be prioritized.
Thankless tasks	Activities that require high effort and have low impact.	Ideally avoid these ideas that will divert resources from more impactful work.

Option 2: Vote as a group

A group voting exercise can help to structure a discussion about priorities for activities. The way committee or team members vote can provide useful information about where the energy is to move forward. Here are some tips on organizing your vote:



- Create a list of all potential activity ideas and display them visually in the meeting space. Sort the ideas alphabetically or in another way that reduces bias toward any particular activity or group of activities.
- Participants should be encouraged to decide their votes using criteria that centres equity considerations. Use the criteria below as a starting place.
- Ask participants to vote for their top ideas that they would like the unit to prioritize. For example, give each participant three stickers to place next to their preferred ideas or create an interactive online poll.
- If you have a large number of activity ideas, you may need to vote in multiple rounds so that participants can decide their priorities among a short list of activities.
- After everyone has voted, review which items received the most votes. Use the debrief questions below to guide discussion.

Keep in mind the potential for the emergence of group-think and other dynamics that may affect how people participate in this activity. Depending on your group, you may decide to vote anonymously or to skip this option.

Voting criteria

In the absence of criteria, voting can encourage participants to rely on their own biases. Therefore, before voting the group should discuss and agree on a set of criteria that everyone will vote based on, this allows there to still be differences in opinions but asks us to go beyond thinking about our personal preferences. Here are some suggestions for criteria to use as a starting place:

Vote based on:

- How urgently you think this activity is needed;
- Which activities have the potential for greatest impact;
- How novel or exciting the activity is;
- Which activities address root causes of inequity rather than just symptoms (i.e., 'band aid solutions');
- Which activities will have impacts and support solving more than one specific challenge;
- Which activities address barriers named in the Equity Action Plan.

Group debrief

As a group, discuss the items that received the most votes. Some guiding questions include the following.

- Is there anything unexpected or surprising in the vote patterns? Discuss participants' rationales for voting the way they did.
- Does the group agree that the goals that received the most votes are highest priority or is further refinement needed?
- Does it make sense to tackle the activities with the most votes at the same time, from a logistical perspective? For example, how would capacity and resources be balanced across the prioritized activities? Do most activities require the efforts of a particular team as opposed to a balance of effort across different teams?

Next steps

With a manageable number of priority activities, your team should now have a clear understanding of why the chosen activities were selected and what EAP action they will advance.

Update your Equity Action Agenda so that it reflects your refined list of actions (Step 1) and the list of priority activities (Step 2). Your Equity Action Agenda is your unit's overall plan to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion which can be especially beneficial when getting your whole unit on the same page about priorities and communicating unit level commitments. As your unit works to plan the activities you have prioritized, ideas and priorities may shift due to constraints and new input - this is a normal part of the process and be sure to regularly update your agenda.

Your unit's Equity Action Agenda is also the starting place for beginning to implement individual activities using the next four phases of the Implementation Framework. Use the tools included in the toolkit to support your next steps.

Questions?

Find the Implementation Framework and full list of tools on the [Equity Action Plan website](#). If you get stuck or are not sure what the next step is for your unit, help is available. The Equity Action Team can assist with coaching and troubleshooting. Email us at equityaction@uvic.ca

Version: October 2023

ⁱ For the rest of this document, we use "unit" as the generic term for units, departments, faculties, and divisions, and other relevant UVic groups.

ⁱⁱ This resource is adapted from University of British Columbia (2020). "Prioritizing Your Inclusive Actions Started." Accessed at: <https://equity3.sites.olt.ubc.ca/files/2021/04/PrioritizeInclusiveActions.pdf>

ⁱⁱⁱ Targeted actions in the Equity Action Plan are actions drawn from the list of committed actions that address each of the identified barriers. To access the barriers and targeted actions, visit uvic.ca/eap