

# **The Interpersonal Experiences of an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Exam Requirement Re-Evaluation: The Association of Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO)'s Canadian Assessment Project- Active Audit and Research Report**

Prepared for:

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## Executive Summary

In order to increase inclusion (whilst maintaining rigour) ARIDO navigates a redesign of its exam requirement with a commitment to the development group self-audit of biases. ARIDO positioned an EDI Consultant to provide an EDI Crash Course to the development group, to audit the development meetings, and to research and report findings on the overall process. This report presents findings from a study that asked, how does an accreditation body conduct competencies review and redesign of their exam requirement in order to increase equity and inclusion for diverse groups?

This report is written for the widest audience. ARIDO wanted to share the experience of interpersonal negotiations involved in this equity, diversity and inclusion project to support other organisations, and to set a new standard of openness and accountability.

This report has five parts. Part 1 presents the research design for this inquiry. Part 2 presents this conceptual framework and literature review. Part 3 presents the findings from the active audit and research. Part 4 provides a discussion and conclusion, and Part 5 provides recommendations.

## Abbreviations

DGMs	Development Group Members
ECIDs	Early-Career Interior Designers (post-graduation, pre-registration). Also referred to in DGM quotes as interns, candidates, applicants
EDI	Equity, Diversity, Inclusion
EAP	Exam Alternative Project. Subsequently changed to Readiness Program and Entrance Interview. Referred to in this document as the Canadian assessment.

## Glossary of Terms

<b>Academic and cultural capital</b>	Wisdom and understanding passed to their children to navigate higher education to occupy elite professions.
<b>Capacity Building</b>	The process of developing and strengthening the skills, instincts, abilities, processes and resources need to survive, adapt, and thrive in a fast-changing world. (United Nations, n.d.)
<b>Capabilities</b>	What can be achieved once deciding to do so. The opportunities must be provided (e.g., the opportunity to be a Registered ID) (Sen & Parodoi, 2007).
<b>Discourse</b>	Discourse refers to expressing oneself using words or images, which creates a context for building power and knowledge, for regulation and normalization, and for hegemony (excess authority of one over another) (McGregor, 2003).
<b>Equality of opportunity &amp; Social Mobility</b>	Equality of opportunity is when social mobility is unrelated to ascribed characteristics such as race, sex, class, socio-economic status, or characteristics of the family of origin such as parental education, cultural assets, social networks, and parental motivation (Triventi, 2013). Social mobility is the process of different social classes moving up in the social structure toward higher socio-economic status
<b>EDI</b>	- <b>Equity</b> : Fairness, impartiality, even-handedness. A distinct process of recognizing differences within groups of individuals, and using this understanding to achieve substantive equality in all aspects of a person's life (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013) -A <b>diverse workforce</b> in the public service is made up of individuals who have an array of identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, perspectives and experiences that are representative of Canada's current and evolving population (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2017). -An <b>inclusive workplace</b> is fair, equitable, supportive, welcoming and respectful. It recognizes, values and leverages differences in identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, experiences and perspectives that support and reinforce Canada's evolving human rights framework (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2017).
<b>Massification</b>	The social expansion of student participation across a higher education system (Marginson, 2016).
<b>Meritocracy</b>	Upholding the system of measurable criteria (tests) to award status to individuals and is thought to be achievable for those who work hard enough.

## Introduction

*Standardized tests were positioned as fair because everyone took the same test. But what knowledge is deemed valuable? Who gets to determine and define what counts as achievement? On the grounds of equity, all groups must be offered actual equality of access to the curriculum and examinations; and assessment must be made as fair as possible to all groups otherwise the fairness argument does not hold. (Gipps, 1995)*

### ARIDO's Canadian Assessment & Study Impetus

The Association for Registered Interior Designers of Ontario (ARIDO) is the professional body for interior designers (IDs) in Ontario. ARIDO's mandate is to regulate the interior design profession in Ontario for the betterment of the profession and in the best interests of the public. ARIDO sets standards for admission into membership, including education and experience standards, Practice Standards, professional development requirements as well as adherence to a Code of Ethics and Practice Standards.

For Registered membership, applicants had to meet these criteria:

- Successful completion of the required interior design education (CIDA<sup>1</sup> accredited Bachelor of Interior Design) or the ICRS
- Successful completion of the required supervised work experience
- Successful completion of the NCIDQ (National Council of Interior Design Qualification) examination
- Proof of liability insurance coverage
- Official transcripts sent directly from educational institution(s) to meet the minimum education requirement.

Under an equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) agenda, ARIDO has established an alternative means of allowing diverse applicants to showcase their competencies through the ICRS<sup>2</sup> pathway. This inclusion agenda is now focused on the examination requirement which has been identified by the interior design community (in an ARIDO survey) as being a barrier to Registered membership. This led to the Exam Alternative Project (Canadian assessment) which had the following objectives:

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<sup>1</sup> Council for Interior Design Accreditation

<sup>2</sup> Intern Competencies Review System

- To review the purpose, appropriateness, and relevance of the current examination requirement.
- To design and develop a Canadian alternative to the current exam requirement that can determine if applicants have acquired the competencies necessary to perform unsupervised in order to meet the qualifications requirements for Interior Designers.
- To engage a fair representation of Interiors Designers in all working groups and ensure a fair and equitable path to qualification that aligns with the competency assessments developed by ARIDO for Education (ICRS) and Experience (IDER<sup>3</sup>) requirements.

This work would be done by bringing together a Development Group that would be facilitated by a Competencies Consultant. Development group members (DGMs) were selected against standards established by the Competencies Consultant. As a result, diverse representation was secured (e.g., gender identity, age, registration status, international status, ethnicity) and diverse viewpoints were captured.

ARIDO recognized the importance of an EDI<sup>4</sup> lens to the work at the outset. Rather than creating a solution to be evaluated by an EDI consultant, an EDI consultant would audit and research the process to support an EDI-focused solution and share the findings of this process with the scholarly and professional communities. ARIDO formalized this commitment with the following opportunity statement and scope of work for EDI consultation and researcher for the Canadian assessment project:

#### Diversity Consultant: Opportunity Statement

Many communities face systemic barriers and discrimination often based on their race, gender, sexual orientation, ability status, and other factors, leading to unequal opportunities and outcomes in various settings, including education, employment, and healthcare. Addressing these disparities requires a commitment to advancing equity,

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<sup>3</sup> Interior Design Experience Requirement

<sup>4</sup> Equity: Fairness, impartiality, even-handedness. A distinct process of recognizing differences within groups of individuals, and using this understanding to achieve substantive equality in all aspects of a person's life (Ontario Human Rights Commission, 2013).

A diverse workforce in the public service is made up of individuals who have an array of identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, perspectives and experiences that are representative of Canada's current and evolving population (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2017).

An inclusive workplace is fair, equitable, supportive, welcoming and respectful. It recognizes, values and leverages differences in identities, abilities, backgrounds, cultures, skills, experiences and perspectives that support and reinforce Canada's evolving human rights framework (Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat, 2017).



diversity, and inclusion and actively working to identify and eliminate biases to create a more inclusive environment.

By including an EDI co-consultant within our working group sessions, ARIDO has the opportunity to deploy an "active audit" during our development work, enabling us to identify and immediately address any blind-spots, become more aware of the cultural, social, organizational or credential-based biases affecting our work, and ultimately better enable diverse voices and experiences to develop a truly innovative and inclusive solution. We see this as a valuable opportunity to honour ARIDO's responsibility to forge a new pathway toward advancing equity and diverse representation through actionable programs and policies.

This research projects seeks to imbed an EDI education specialist into the ARIDO Canadian assessment project to inform, observe, record, interpret, and synthesize the process of how an accreditation body redesigns an examination requirement to increase inclusion whilst maintaining professional rigour. The researcher participated in the process of redesigning the exam requirement in so far as to ensure decisions made by the development group are in-line with EDI, observing how the development group negotiates competencies examined and self-audits and works through their individual and collective biases.

This project achieved the objectives through the following activities:

- 1) Research, design, and deliver an EDI Crash Course to development working group: Research context specific (discipline and social group related) barriers to and through examination and overall accreditation for interior designers from diverse groups (social origin, ethnicity, gender, international, Indigeneity etc.), in Ontario.

The breadth and scope of this material formed the basis of analysis during the active audit and participant observation research:

- 2) Active audit: Observe conversations and support the DGMs in their interpersonal negotiations as it relates to EDI. Here, the EDI consultant will formally identify and immediately address any blind-spots, and the cultural, social, organizational or credential-based biases to develop a truly innovative and inclusive solution.
- 3) Participant observation research: Drawing on the active audit, report on how the competencies review and redesign of the exam requirement was completed in order to increase EDI for diverse groups (specific research questions are in Part 1 below).

This report has five parts. Part 1 presents the research design for this inquiry. Part 2 presents this conceptual framework and literature review. Part 3 presents the findings from the active audit and research. Part 4 provides a discussion and conclusion, and Part 5 provides recommendations.

## Part 1: Research Design

This study was designed to capture the experience and sentiments of participants (DGMs) in order to present a window into this work. ARIDO aims to serve as a resource for other organizations to learn from their experiences. This study fills a gap in the literature available given that organizations do not tend to publicize their negotiation of biases in the creation of an inclusive solution.

### Research Questions

1. How does an accreditation body conduct a competencies review and redesign of their exam requirement in order to increase equity and inclusion for diverse groups?
  - 1.1. How does the development group respond to the EDI Crash Course? To what extent do they self-assess their biases in the process?
  - 1.2. What is the nature of the discourse<sup>5</sup> (relating to biases, barriers, rigour, and prestige)?
  - 1.3. Where are there consensuses and what was challenging?

### Data Collection and Analysis Methodology

This study conducted *Overt and Active Participant Observation* of meetings and Critical Discourse Analysis of meeting transcripts and survey responses. Participant observation requires first selecting the case to observe and second, gaining access to this group. Researchers then establish a rapport with members of the group while observing, interacting with, and recording the behaviours of members of the group. Interpretations are made on the information collected (Brancati, 2018, p. 8). Here, the EDI Consultant participated in activities with the subjects (DGMs) and experienced the activities as their subjects would.

Tools (see Appendix A) were designed and used to capture the discussion of the development group meetings. Participants were asked to sign an informed consent form.

Discourse analysis involves thematic analysis of coded discourse. By describing, interpreting, analyzing and critiquing discourse, critical discourse analysis (CDA) aims to reveal and resist sources of dominance and ideological assumptions hidden in discourses that may result in social inequalities (McGregor, 2003).

In relation to practice, “discourses can play a central role in regulating social institutional practices, including the valuing and justification of certain actions over others” (Razack, Maguire, Hodges, & Steinert, 2012, p. 1324). This is what this study

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<sup>5</sup> Discourse refers to expressing oneself using words or images, which creates a context for building power and knowledge, for regulation and normalization, and for hegemony (excess authority of one over another) (McGregor, 2003).

will reveal in relation to DGMs self-audit and negotiation of biases in the development of a Canadian competencies assessment.

Thematic discourse analysis was then conducted. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), “thematic analysis is a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting on patterns (themes) within data” (p. 79). It allows for organizing and describing data in rich detail. Braun and Clarke (2006) describe steps of thematic discourse analysis. Firstly, one must familiarize themselves with the data by reading and re-reading the data, noting down initial ideas. Secondly, the process of initial coding involves the entirety of the data being systematically coded for interesting features, collecting data relevant to each code. Thirdly, codes are searched for themes by gathering all data into relevant potential themes. The fourth step is the review of themes where codes are checked for relevancy to the theme and the entire data set. The fifth step involves defining and naming the themes through ongoing analysis to ensure the overall story produced stems from clearly defined themes. Lastly, the final report selects the most vivid themes including examples. Final reporting extracts data that relates to the research question and literature.

Participant observation → Critical Discourse Analysis (audit)

↓

Critical discourse analysis (of transcripts)

↓

Thematic Discourse analysis

While conducting participant observation, the EDI Researcher and Consultant conducted live critical discourse analysis which reveals to the development group, the power imbalance inherent in the negotiation of barriers and biases discussed. The meetings were transcribed by the EDI Consultant as well as by a research assistant. Meeting transcripts were analyzed by conducting critical discourse analysis. Subsequently, thematic discourse analysis was conducted to present the themes across meetings.

In summary, the findings of this study draw upon the EDI Consultant’s observations during the live audit, the analysis of transcripts made of the meetings, survey (Appendix B) feedback from the EDI Crash Course, and the communications between DGMs, the Competencies Consultant, and the Project Sponsor in the development of a Canadian Assessment.

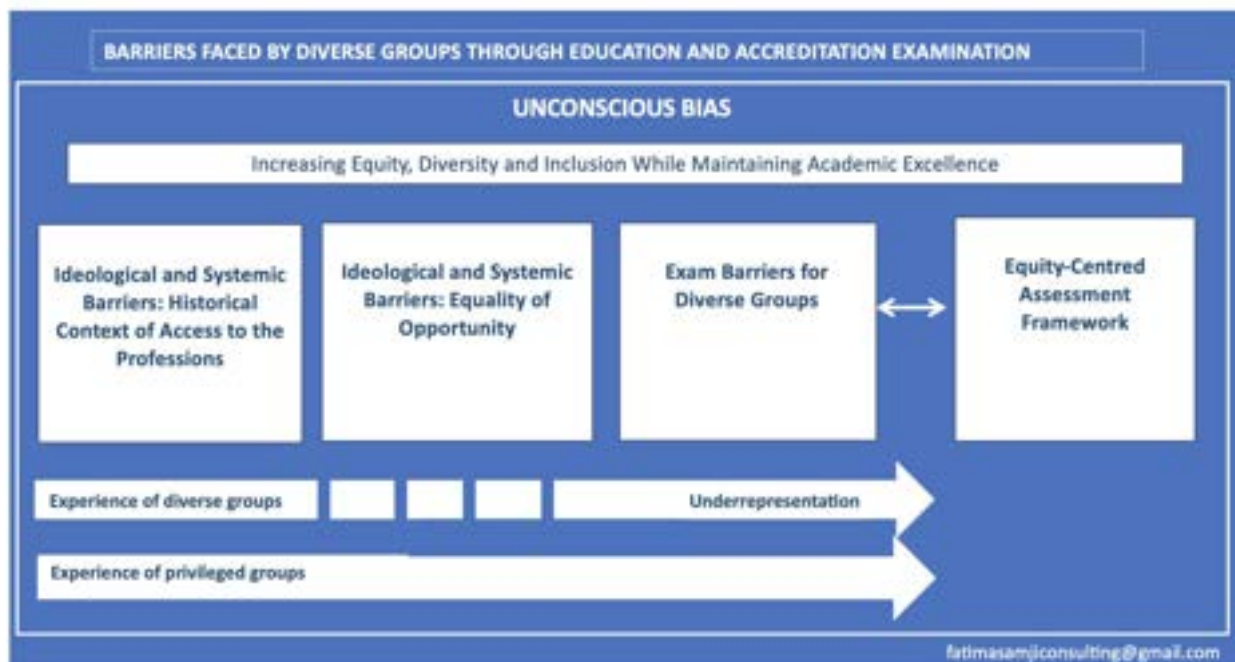
This data will inform to what extent ARIDO's experience of creating an inclusive assessment is representative of the barriers faced by organizations that do this work, and where it is providing a case for success in accomplishing this task. Part 2 presents the conceptual framework and literature review that provided a lens for the EDI Crash Course, EDI live-audit, and research. Compiled by the EDI Consultant, this literature positions ARIDO in the broader context of EDI and assessment within a political and business/market context. This formed the basis for the EDI Crash Course to purposefully inform DGMs of how their work is at the intersection of ideological and system tensions. Making these explicit would support DGMs in negotiating their biases and overcoming barriers to EDI work.

## Part 2: Conceptual Framework & Literature Review

Organizations face pressures from their stakeholders, to be strong businesses and to also serve diverse members of society. Often organizations face pitfalls when attempting to address EDI if the ability to navigate various tensions is not supported. This work (EDI in assessment) requires an understanding of the lived experience of diverse stakeholders from a systems-wide lens, positioning organizations within that, and understanding the social and political context (Figure 1). Then organizations begin to have the capacity to understand the impact of their role in the broader context. Members begin to know what it means to be truly transformative because our roles exist within a broader system, at the interplay with history, contemporary contexts, ideologies, funding structures, etc.

Figure 1

*ARIDO's Canadian Assessment: EDI Crash Course—A Conceptual Framework for EDI in Accreditation Examination*



Historically, **access to higher education and the professions were reserved for privileged social groups** (White, Catholic, males) (Trow, 1976). As higher education systems expanded post World War Two, and massified<sup>6</sup> in Ontario in the 1970s, forms of elite higher education were maintained in more accessible universities through retaining professional programs. These professional programs are used by universities as an indicator of excellence and rigour which supports their market strength (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013). Consequently, access to the professions remains to be for the (academically) elite, requiring high entry grades and examinations to gain entry to the accreditation organization.

This is protected by **upholding the controversial topic of the meritocracy**. Being perceived as a prestigious (academically excellent) profession has historically been ensured through selectivity, rigour, and upholding the meritocracy. Meritocracy refers to awarding status to individuals, often through standardized tests like the SATs in the United States (Guinier, 2015) which should be achievable for those who work hard enough. This argument has been debated for decades. For example, Nobel Prize

<sup>6</sup> The social expansion of student participation across a higher education system (Marginson, 2016).

winner Sen and Parodi (2007) reveal the flaw of conflating merit to characteristics of groups of people (those who test well) and how the meritocracy allows for the exclusion of some groups based on what characteristics are deemed to be deserving of merit (by the privileged). Furthermore, Lani Guinier in her work *The Tyranny of Meritocracy* (2015) shows that it is the “merit-based” admissions practices that select privileged individuals. Elite professional programs have not been advanced inclusion (Guinier, 2015). She states that neither grades or the standardized tests are an accurate assessment of knowledge or one’s ability to perform.

However, **testing remains a predominant gatekeeping mechanism** by education organizations wishing to retain an elite perception. **Organizations function in a market** competing for resources often dependent upon on academic excellence (Marginson, 2016). Therefore, when students are admitted through inclusion policies that allow *alternative* admissions, the perception of rigour may be challenged, and the value of the credentials in the labour market may be threatened (Borgna, 2017; Triventi, 2013) That is one reason why examinations are protected and even made more rigorous than what is required to perform (more rigour results in a more coveted perception).

Armstrong and Hamilton (2013) acknowledge the increase in diversity of the student body as a threat to prestige rather than a source of it. Part of that is the perception of selectivity. This is measured by “the percentage of applicants turned away and the quality of those accepted” (Armstrong & Hamilton, 2013, p. 20). Consequently, it has been observed that “institutions that absorb [their majority from] disadvantaged populations are usually less prestigious” (Ayalon & Yogev, 2006, p. 201).

This is **one mechanism that leads to isomorphism** (organizations becoming similar) (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). *Mimetic* isomorphism stems from organizations imitating the behaviour of perceived successful organizations. *Normative* isomorphism occurs when formal professional training produces a similarity in professional practices that membership of professional networks reproduce (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). These specifically pertain to upholding examinations in the accreditation process without reason other than the normative value of meritocratic indicators of excellence. ARIDO is questioning whether their examination requirement is being retained to uphold the meritocracy and normative isomorphism or as a valuable opportunity for IDs to demonstrate their competencies in the accreditation process.

Having established the ideologies within the system, how do different groups navigate the education system to a professional designation? **This brings us to the topic of “equality of opportunity.”** *Equality of opportunity* is when social mobility (the



process of different social classes moving up in the social structure toward higher socioeconomic status) is unrelated to ascribed characteristics such as race, sex, class, socioeconomic status, or characteristics of the family of origin such as parental education, cultural assets, social networks, and parental motivation (Triventi, 2013). In most countries, children of parents with higher education occupy elite programs that lead to lucrative careers like the professions (Triventi, 2013).

These parents have what is referred to as **academic and cultural capital**, which is passed to their children and empowers children with the knowledge required to navigate to and through elite positions like professional Registered membership. These students know how to fit in the culture that is expected across various elite settings and what knowledge is valued. Often what happens when examinations are not reviewed, they maintain the historic Eurocentric knowledge that diverse groups do not have equal opportunity to access. It is those from privileged groups with the academic and cultural capital that do well on those assessments. For example, there is a correlation between socioeconomic status, cultural competency, and the comfort and ability students have to engage authority figures in an elite university. The privileged students with greater cultural competencies were comfortable and proactive in doing so while those from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were resistant and withdrawn (Jack, 2016).

All of which leads to **underrepresentation**. The issue of EDI in education institutions in Ontario has become a public policy priority (Tamtik & Guenter, 2019). It is becoming increasingly apparent which groups are being excluded from these elite spaces. Rae (2005) identified Aboriginal students, Francophone students, students who are the first in their families to attend post-compulsory education and students with disabilities as being underrepresented in Ontario universities (in the report *Ontario, a Leader in Learning: Report and Recommendations*). Note that the groups noted for special attention from the government does not include racialized groups. It is the universities and colleges that are taking the responsibility to increase the participation of diverse racial groups. We see at the institutional level, the start of separate admissions into elite professions at prestigious institutions for racialized students.

In the case of ARIDO, we know from the Matrix360 survey that the community is a relatively homogenous group comprised of White, heterosexual, able-bodied and educated females. In the effort to increase EDI of ARIDO members, this research takes a critical look at the process of redesigning an examination requirement for accreditation in Ontario to increase EDI whilst maintaining rigour. Firstly, we must know what exam barriers are for diverse groups.

### **Exam Barriers for Diverse Groups**

The examination of diverse groups has been of interest to researchers who have revealed that most examinations perpetuate awarding privileged groups and not capturing the capabilities<sup>7</sup> of diverse groups.

**Validation of knowledge** (exams) measure substantive and non-substantive elements. Substantive elements of performance measures knowledge, non-substantive gains measure test-taking skills. In order to accurately measure professional competencies (knowledge and skills), tests should not have items that allocate gains for non-substantive test-taking skills. The ability to take tests is an area of attention for scholars who reveal that this is a barrier for diverse groups who do not have equal capital in test-taking readiness. If equity in opportunity to learn material is not possible, and the purpose of the assessment is to examine how much has been learned in a particular program, an issue of validity is now raised.

**Assessment is inherently biased.** Assessment is not apolitical and not fully objective. Assessment happens within a... larger society, and assessment is conducted by human beings with specific preferences, perspectives, experiences, etc. It is conducted within social institutions guided by norms and policies which means bias is inherently a part of the process because assessment is socially situated. Those conducting assessments need to be well versed on the issues of equity. The goal is to use equity in assessment to give voice to those who are often marginalized in education by addressing systems of power and questioning any underlying Western paradigms for assessment (Montenegro & Henning, 2022).

**Test Bias** is when the test does not measure the same achievement across different social groups. Test bias occur when questions are more familiar to one group of exam takers (i.e. students of high socioeconomic status), which aligns with the creator of the exams who have historically also been of high socioeconomic status and White (Jankowski & Lundquist, 2022).

**Most tests reinforce Eurocentrism** where there are elements of cultural value to the White middle class embedded in the assessment. With the movement toward cultural sensitivity, greater attention has been paid to the issue of cultural fairness in testing. There are four general perspectives to fairness in testing: 1) lack of test bias—avoid use of tests that produce results that have different meaning across social groups; 2) equitable treatment in the testing process—equal opportunity to demonstrate their understanding on the competency being measured; 3) equality in outcomes of testing—examinees who perform equally well on the test should have an equal chance of being

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<sup>7</sup> What can be achieved once deciding to do so. The opportunities must be provided (e.g., the opportunity to be a Registered ID) (Sen & Parodoi, 2007).

chosen regardless of their social group; and 4) Equal opportunity to learn—or achieve the construct being measured.

Most of these test biases can be prevented by employing an equity framework.

### **An Equity-Centered Assessment Framework**

An equity-centered assessment framework was provided to DGMs within the EDI Crash Course to highlight how to design an assessment that would be fair and relevant for diverse groups, ensuring equality of opportunity to demonstrate capabilities. This would support DGMs in the negotiation of personal biases around assessment as they crafted an assessment that was in-line with the following:

- **Antiracist Assessment:** Assessors question “whose knowledge counts, and who has access to the knowledge” and “focuses on the process of learning, not necessarily making students reach a uniform and prescribed outcome” (Kishimoto, 2018p. 546).
- **Bias-free assessment:** Test items do not offend and test items that do not penalize students for their diversity (Popham, 2012)
- **Critical assessment:** Considers the roles of power and privilege in assessment design and gives a voice to all the people involved with the assessment (“from the people designing and performing the assessment to those who are being assessed— as individuals affected by social, political, and economic drivers, and seeks to account for those factors in societal change” (Benjes-Small et al., 2019, para. 1, p. 60).
- **Culturally responsive assessment:** Recognizes that demographic, sociopolitical, and contextual dimensions, locations, perspectives, and characteristics of culture matter in evaluation (Baker & Henning, 2022).
- **Deconstructed assessment:** Exposes and dismantles systems of power and oppression in society that are perpetuated through social structures, including policies, practices, norms, social institutions, etc. (Tenets of this practice are sited in the handout).
- **Decolonized And Indigenous Assessment:** Including Indigenous ways of knowing and Indigenous knowledge systems. Assessors take a critical colonial worldview, examining the lasting impact of colonization on society and higher education; reflect upon whose agenda is being served by a particular assessment; recognize their insider/outsider status and the power and motivations assessors bring to assessment and evaluation (Baker & Henning, 2022, p. 65).

- An equity lens: Assessment practitioners reflect on the assessment process as a whole to check biases, and include student perspectives and changes to address equity.
- Awareness is noticing what you are noticing. Knowledge and understanding that something is happening or exists. It is practiced by being “in the question.”

The above conceptual framework and literature review is specific to this project. However, also useful to note from an organizational change management perspective are the general pitfalls to successful EDI work in the education sector.

### Organizational Pitfalls

In an attempt to transform, organizations that are more performative meet these pitfalls, partly because organizations are negotiating business pressures.

- **Tick-in-the-box- Approach** (Ahmed, 2012).

Creating an auditable system through documentation (which can be measured for awards) is known as the *tick-in-the-box* approach. At performative organizations, the focus is on measurable and marketable consumer satisfaction and activities that are subject to audit. Writing EDI documents or policies becomes a substitute for action. There is no assessment of whether the activities named in the documents are being initiated. Moreover, paradoxically, a document that documents the inequalities of the organization becomes usable as a measure of good performance. Furthermore, these organizations commit to inclusion, without allocating responsibility or resources to those who should be acting on those commitments. Documents may gain value through circulation, but circulation depends on not challenging the status quo. Commitments do not guarantee acting on implementing initiatives to produce the desired EDI outcomes, but act as a brand or form of organizational pride. Inclusion as public relations might be how organizations maintain goodwill with the public or defend a reputation of being inclusive.

- **Kool-Aid Approach** (Stewart, 2017).

With inclusion work, this is where visible but superficial efforts never support systemic change. An example is hiring people of colour without addressing the systemic barriers that prevent those groups from being more represented at the organization.

- **The Brick Wall** (Ahmed, 2012)

The brick wall is an ongoing phenomenon. This refers to where commitments to inclusion made in public-facing documents are not supported with funds or identified talent structures. No one knows whose job Inclusion is or what authority those departments have across the organizations departments.

The above literature presented as a conceptual framework will support the full appreciation of the findings from this study. Part 3 presents the analysis and findings from the active audit and research.

## Part 3: Analysis and Findings

Part 3 analyses the transcripts from the active audit across the three DG meetings by applying critical discourse analysis to present the impact of the EDI Crash Course. Note that the findings that address the broader research questions will be released as the project develops. A high-level summary is provided in the discussion section of this report.

### Meeting 1

The EDI training concluded with an overall sentiment of appreciation and genuine interest. DGMs appreciated the placement of the EDI Crash Course at the outset of this project as it served as a “reframing mindset masterclass” with original conversations that were found to be missing across professional bodies. The EDI Crash Course had a positive impact on DGMs as they felt they now had greater capacity to contribute to the project- “They loved the crash course. It resonated with the task asked of the DGMs which increased excitement about the project. This early integration of a formal EDI lens supported “getting everyone on the same page with dialogue.”

The EDI crash course received positive feedback with participants stating that it helped to reinforce their understanding of the limitations of exams as measures of competence that can exclude diverse groups. They felt that it brought light to issues that may not have been in the foreground. For instance, a participant stated that “it made me further question an exam as a method of measuring knowledge”.

After the first working group meeting, all participants reported high levels of satisfaction with both the content and process of the first meeting. More specifically, they expressed having an in-depth understanding of the objectives of the project, the role of the development group, the objectives of the working session, the feedback survey results, and the characteristics of competency (i.e., knowledge, skill, and ability).

DGMs also reported feeling that they had a good understanding of the perspectives and thoughts of the other participants as well as ample opportunities to express their views and hear the opinions of others. They noted that they could freely share their ideas while brainstorming without feeling pressured and were able to form thoughts and decisions independently, without being affected by preconceived notions. All participants felt that there were sufficient opportunities to reconsider their ideas and be receptive to the suggestions of others.

None of the participants reported noticing instances where they themselves engaged in upholding biases and most did not report noticing others engaged in maintaining biases. There was one instance where a participant reported having observed a case of authority bias, where they felt another participant attributed more weight to the opinion of someone perceived as an authority figure rather than independently analyzing the issue.

Further, having an active audit helped keep EDI at the forefront of the conversation, and helped maintain accountability. As elaborated by a participant, “open discussion from different perspectives brought light to issues not previously considered that were important injections to the process (i.e., EDI, application of knowledge, equal access to membership)”. They also noted that the presence of an EDI consultant greatly contributed to their interpersonal negotiations around equity and excellence.

This concludes the findings from meeting one. What follows are the findings from meeting two.

## **Meeting 2**

After the refresher of the EDI Crash Course at the second DGM, I asked the group if they had any questions or reflections between the first presentation and their professional practice. In response, the DGM reflected back in gratitude that EDI is being considered. DGMs now consider the path people might have taken to get to where they are with a heightened awareness. This signifies interpersonal growth.

After the second working group meeting, participants continued to feel that they had an in-depth understanding of the objectives of the project and the prevue of the development meetings, and how to assess characteristics of competency considering EDI. Overall, there was a general sense of accomplishment.

All participants also noted being highly satisfied with the process and acknowledged that there were ample opportunities to express their views, hear and understand the perspectives of others, freely share ideas during brainstorming, and have sufficient opportunity to reconsider ideas and be receptive to suggestions of others. They were able to form thoughts and decisions independently, without being affected by preconceived notions or personal agendas.

Participants did not report noticing any forms of bias displayed by themselves during the course of the working group discussion. They credited the EDI Crash Course from the first meeting as important in helping them reflect on their team member's

journeys and be more aware of their biases. It specifically helped them gain a better understanding of diversity and how diverse groups are considered by ARIDO. It became clear how ARIDO is trying to make sure all individuals from diverse groups can have equal rights with ARIDO. Most importantly, the EDI Crash Course helped provide a deeper understanding of the inherent tension between increasing inclusion and maintaining excellence. It enabled them to look at things from an alternate lens. For example, where “excellence” can create a barrier and gatekeeping of the profession.

Lastly, the refresher was a good way to keep the EDI lens top of mind with a participant noting the invaluable input of the EDI consultant whose added perspective and contributions were stated as being “on point” in the DGM’s pursuit of EDI in this assessment.

DGMs have been successful at navigating the tensions associated with inclusion in assessment. Regardless of pressures (those referenced in the literature review) DGMs stepped beyond the pitfalls and did the interpersonal work required in the creation of an innovative solution.

### **Meeting 3**

DGMs noted the impact of the EDI crash course on their role as development group members. They acknowledged that the EDI crash course helped raise awareness about discrimination, bias, and inequality as well as helped increase their self-awareness— “It encouraged me to examine my own biases, privilege, and behavior, leading to positive changes in my interactions with others.”

It brought forward an EDI lens that provided the opportunity for checks and balances at various stages. Participants were further able to distinguish assumptions from evidence. The EDI crash course helped change participants' views around entry into ARIDO. From being previously focused on developing an assessment tool to accommodate unrepresented groups, participants now considered ways in which ARIDO could provide equal opportunity to become a successful Registered ID.

Participants also acknowledged the benefits of this Crash Course on their professional practice, stating that it helped provide an equity and inclusion lens to their work outside the working group. It helped provide a new perspective on how to increase the pool of effective designers who provide meaningful contributions to clients and the design industry.

While all participants stressed the need to maintain existing levels of rigour they attributed the EDI Crash Course as important in helping them move towards employing



a deliberate and thoughtful approach to maintaining rigour. DGMs ensured that they maintained high academic or professional standards without excluding individuals based on their backgrounds or abilities. This can be achieved by designing flexible and culturally relevant curricula, providing equitable access, and fostering an inclusive environment that values diverse perspectives. Additionally, continuous assessment and adaptation of practices are essential to strike the right balance between challenging individuals and ensuring that everyone has the opportunity to thrive and contribute to their fullest potential.

The Crash Course helped contextualize ARIDO's goals, with participants acknowledging that ARIDO is actively trying to increase opportunities for all interested IDs.

Participants however admitted that the process of figuring out a system to assess all individuals with EDI principles was challenging and were conflicted over what was to be assessed—good designers or the tools to become good designers. Participants also believed that the public perception of the profession was lower than the level of rigour required to practice and were unsure how an inclusion agenda by ARIDO could change such public perceptions. They suggested that changes to the licensing process where IDs have the authority to stamp drawings may be useful in enhancing the public's perception of interior design as a more professional career.

DGMs commend the facilitation team for providing relevant information at key points during the discussion and valued the respectful debates, diversity of participants and perspectives, and the collaborative approach that led to a more comprehensive and effective decision-making process.

The process of negotiating this experience with other DGMs through an EDI lens was appreciated. DGMs had the opportunity to engage in discussions with individuals from diverse backgrounds and expertise, all of whom shared a common goal. It was thought to be incredibly enriching to collaborate with such a varied range of perspectives. The collective efforts brought a well-rounded and innovative approach to the shared objectives. This diversity in the discussions led to a more comprehensive and effective decision-making process. What was key to the above was a group that respectfully debates issues utilizing all resources available.

DGMs noted the impact of the EDI lens (Crash Course and live audit) on their role as DGMs, particularly acknowledging their raised awareness about systemic discrimination, bias, and inequality as it relates to assessment of diverse groups. Specifically, DGMs noted that the EDI lens helped increase their self-awareness on

topics that were relevant for creating a relevant and fair assessment. As stated by a participant, “the EDI crash course encouraged me to examine my own biases, privilege, and behavior, leading to positive changes in my interactions with others”.

What follows is the summary of findings from this study.

## Part 4: Discussion & Conclusion

ARIDO is focusing on having greater accountability to the communities it serves, part of which means creating pathways to ID for diverse groups. One way ARIDO is doing that is by re-assessing the relevance and fairness of its registration requirements. A survey of ARIDO’s community identified the examination requirement as a major barrier for many reasons. ARIDO launched The Exam Alternative Project (referred to in this report as the Canadian assessment project) which aimed to:

- To review the purpose, appropriateness, and relevance of the current Examination requirement.
- To design and develop a Canadian alternative to the current exam requirement that can determine if applicants have acquired the competencies necessary to perform unsupervised in order to meet the qualifications requirements for IDs.
- To engage a fair representation of IDs in all working groups and ensure a fair and equitable path to qualification that aligns with the assessments developed by ARIDO for Education (ICRS) and Experience (IDER) requirements.

Three meetings brought together DGMs to engage in a facilitated process to meet these objectives.

An EDI Consultant was positioned at these meetings to:

- 1) Research, design, and deliver an EDI Crash Course to development working group.
- 2) Provide an active audit by observing and supporting the development group as they negotiated biases and barriers with the goal of increasing inclusion and maintaining rigour of their assessment. Here, the EDI consultant formally identify and immediately address any blind-spots, and the cultural, social, organizational or credential-based biases to develop a truly innovative and inclusive solution.
- 3) Research this process, conducting participant observation research.

Specifically, this research asked:

## Research Questions

2. How does an accreditation body conduct a competencies review and redesign of their exam in order to increase equity and inclusion for diverse groups?
  - 2.1. How does the development group respond to the EDI Crash Course? To what extent do they self-assess their biases in the process?
  - 2.2. What is the nature of the discourse (relating to biases, barriers, rigour, and prestige)?
  - 2.3. Where are there consensuses and what was challenging?

While conducting participant observation, the EDI Researcher and Consultant conducted live critical discourse analysis to reveal to the development group, the power imbalance inherent in the negotiation of barriers and biases discussed. Notes from the meetings were analysed through critical discourse analysis which is concerned with power imbalance in society. Themes were identified from this analysis and presented and interpretations were made based and relating these findings to the relevant literature. This provides greater insight on how this process maps onto trends in the field of EDI initiatives within organizations. This also allowed for the identification of where and how ARIDO overcame common barriers to this type of work, resulting in recommendations for other organizations that will negotiate EDI and standards of excellence.

### **1. How does an accreditation body conduct a competencies review and redesign of their exam in order to increase equity and inclusion for diverse groups?**

The Competencies Consultant and Project Sponsor created space for the EDI Consultant and integrated EDI into every aspect of the DG meetings. For example, while the EDI Consultant would be responsible for providing an EDI Crash Course, the Competencies Consultant still took responsibility for providing EDI insights from a competencies lens.

There were structural components of the DG meetings that were conducive to the success of these DG meetings taking on an EDI lens:

- EDI Crash course, with supporting resources and consistent in/formal check-ins: This empowered DGMs to situate their knowledge in the broader academic, professional, and business contexts, providing a safe space to re-negotiate beliefs and values and supportive resources for life-long learning.
- Charter of Respect: This established the organizational expectations for group norms that would support the facilitation of possibly contentious topics.
- Understanding and Identifying Group Biases: By making potential unconscious performance biases explicit, each DGM understood how to embody EDI while doing this work.
- Materials that supported the DGMs in their work underwent an EDI review: Supporting materials and processes related to this project had an EDI lens prior to dissemination and so EDI was infused at every level.

This curated culture of the meetings was observed to be successful in creating an environment that would allow DGMs to self-assess personal biases in the negotiation of equity and excellence to create an inclusive assessment.

DGMs underwent a selection process and as a result there was diversity of socio-demographics, of thought, of lived experience and career experience. Most importantly, it was clear that each member was present not because they had a personal interest in giving back to ARIDO and supporting inclusion for the ID community. They understood the pitfalls of their profession's system of regulation. These individuals were then empowered with knowledge of how diverse groups navigate the system to regulation through the EDI Crash Course. This mobilized the capacity of DGMs to advise as they mapped their knowledge and experience onto the research presented.

The Competencies Consultant facilitated DGMs through the development of a Canadian Assessment. He did not persuade members in any direction. The EDI Consultant would provide questions that would support DGMs through various interpersonal negotiations during this process. However, it was the DGMs that did the "heavy lifting" of working through big questions around EDI, assessment, and their profession. This was successful because of the meeting culture that was established. DGMs shared their personal positions on contentious topics. They established a "brave space" where they debated biases, and discussed the relevance of their lived experiences to the system, defending different positions. There was room to change positions on such personal points of view that most individuals would find difficult to shift in the course of a meeting. Ultimately, while we all have a personal relationship with our professions, egos were not a barrier here. There was pride in the profession, personalities were offended in the process.

These DG meetings all concluded with a sense of success because DGMs left feeling heard, seen, and that their discussions concluded with a sense of resolve and excitement. The Project Sponsor, Competencies Consultant, and EDI Consultant would debrief and discuss how each meeting met or succeeded EDI and project development goals. Where EDI goals were met, new targets were set. For example, where the DGMs were able to understand and apply the Crash Course information and use the terminology to negotiate personal beliefs and values, the second meeting would provide a deeper look at an EDI Framework for Assessment.

The interactions of DGMs, both consultants and Project Sponsor, ensured that this work avoided the aforementioned pitfalls of EDI initiatives. The Project Sponsor encouraged DGMs by explaining how their thinking could be supported by the organization and how it mapped onto strategic planning. The way ARIDO conducted a competencies review and re-design of their assessment provides many good examples of successful conditions that will be noted in the recommendations section.

### **1.1. How does the development group respond to the EDI Crash Course? To what extent do they self-assess their biases in the process?**

DGMs were grateful that the EDI Crash Course was delivered at the beginning of the project. Taking a system lens was appreciated as it contextualised the implications of individual actions of people in power to the broader context (as being either restrictive or supportive of diverse groups). DGMs used the language of course throughout the meetings and would reference the Crash Course as it applied to their discussion. They ensured to avoid pitfalls of assessment that would create barriers for diverse groups, as mentioned in the course.

DGMs noted having a heightened awareness and sensitivity in their personal and professional interactions around the diversity of lived experiences for those they interact with. Some individuals they work with at senior levels have immense capacity but would not excel in all areas of the established pathway in the same ways. Knowing that these individuals could work in the team-based profession and excel solidified the acceptance that diverse groups are “excellent” in different ways. DGMs were encouraged to examine their own biases and notions of privilege and professional competency. DGMs converged on their commitment based on the information from the EDI Crash Course- the ARIDO assessment would note gatekeep potential IDs from practicing, it would equalize opportunity to practice across diverse groups.

## **1.2. What is the nature of the discourse (relating to biases, barriers, rigour, and prestige)?**

The conversations in which the DGMs negotiated biases, rigour, barriers, and professional prestige as it relates to assessment was deeply connected to the history of ID. IDs was granted legislation to regulate their own profession but is still connected to the Architects in practice and “public protection” in its legislation.

DGMs had the difficult task of differentiating their professional identity outside of their history, the legislative contexts, and practice-based hierarchies. By doing this, they could then focus on those contextual elements of their profession, but this assessment would not create a prestige-based barrier with a higher level of rigour that was not meaningful, fair or relevant to their professional practice. This also allowed for the identification of relevant and fair competencies at the point of registration.

Most significantly, these conversations shifted the spirit of the assessment to be a humanising process, where ARIDO would equalise opportunity for diverse groups through a module-based assessment with an entrance interview.

## **1.3. Where are there consensuses and what was challenging?**

Often when organizations create working groups for a project that is EDI-oriented, groups may be comprised of leaders across various departments because of their position within the organization and not necessarily for their support of EDI work. Whether those individuals buy-in to EDI is not guaranteed and this results in tension as ideologies conflict. For example, a common confusion is to what extent an organization is responsible for changing its standards to serve groups in society who have not made it through the established pathways while others have.

This was not the case with the ARIDO DGMs. All members agreed that ARIDO should develop a fair, relevant and inclusive assessment to serve Canadians. The challenge was to create an innovative solution in a political and business context. DGMs questioned such things as:

- What is the professional identity of IDs and is that accurate? Does this have implications on our assessment, and should it?
- How might changes in legislation over the regulation of IDs affect the assessment solution, and should it?
- What level of rigour is appropriate? Does rigour of assessment validate a profession? If so, should it for IDs?

- Who is ARIDO accountable to with this assessment and how does that affect the perception of what an assessment should capture?
- What should be included at the point of registration? What are the minimum standards?
- How do we validate international creative solutions while protecting public interest?

Throughout these discussions and debates, DGMs would raise certain tangential points, but all members agreed that these tangents had relevance for the assessment and so they were discussed.



ARIDO's Exam Alternative Assessment Project serves as an encouraging case of how an organization conducts an assessment re-evaluation under an inclusion agenda. ARIDO is navigating political changes and market pressures that require the re-negotiation of how it regulates its profession. While securing regulatory oversight of its profession, ARIDO took on an innovative inclusion change initiative that challenges traditional and protected standards of merit. ARIDO wanted to be more accountable to its community and this alternative assessment project was part of allowing ARIDO to do that. ARIDO is now in a position to respond to the needs of IDs in Ontario and Canada more broadly through the provision of this assessment that serves as an inclusion pathway.

What concludes this report are the recommendations for future EDI initiatives at ARIDO and for other organizations that aim to avoid the historic pitfalls of change management for EDI initiatives.

## Part 5: Recommendations

The EDI Consultant observed these strategies that specifically supported this project in being completed without pitfalls and with comradery.

- **Diverse Representation:** Because of the diversity of DGMs, there was a wider range of thought that would inform discussion. This resulted in fewer cognitive bridges needing to be built between those in power creating the solution (the Canadian assessment) and the lived experiences of Canada's diverse potential IDs.
- **Strategic Representation:** EDI work generally goes against historically exclusionary professional norms within a political and business context. There are enough challenges to innovating inclusive solutions. Working group members who are intrinsically driven will support project success. If group members are chosen because of their position over their views on EDI, than the EDI Crash Course would support the project – as individuals are educated on the broader system context, buy-in is obtained if not for social justice reasons, than for validity of assessment and because inclusion has been a metric for excellence.
- **Capacity Building:** The EDI Crash Course acknowledged that it is not expected for everyone to have this knowledge. There is no judgement for those who were previously unaware of the barriers diverse groups face. However, we are building the capacity of DGMs to understand the barriers so that they can use that information in their work.
- **Empowerment:** Make it clear to what extent this work is supported by senior leadership and the organizations both through policy, other initiatives, funds, etc. Ambiguity is a barrier to EDI work, and it may stifle what DGMs think is possible (informing the level of their recommendations) or whether their efforts will be implemented. Noting the relevance of this work to the broader community is also encouraging.
- **Facilitate Self-Assessment:** The EDI Audit was positioned not as a means to police conversation, but as a resource for DGMs to meet project goals. Because of that focus the environment was open for questioning established standards



and beliefs. This supported DGMs self-assessing personal biases around assessment and professional standards.

- **Formalize EDI:** Not formalizing EDI into project structure has been what has historically prevented the success of EDI initiatives. Structuring EDI as an intersectional lens that encompasses the project yields different results. For example, having applicants' voice inform the assessment is part of an EDI Framework for Assessment as should be formalized into the process (as it was here). Additionally having EDI check-ins encourages accountability to self-assessment.
- **Stakeholder Engagement:** The success of organizational change based on developed initiatives may be hindered if those within the organization are unclear as to why changes are occurring, why their voice was not heard, and the ambiguity associated with roll-out, etc. Having front-line staff observe the process supports project roll-out as that group witnesses the challenging process of developing innovative inclusive solutions.
- **EDI Agenda:** Allowing the recommendations for other areas of improvement may support the formation for an organizational EDI agenda. Documenting these opportunities for future consideration maximizes the contribution these meeting have on the possibilities of for the organization.

Groups who intend to prioritise EDI in their work can support their success by thoughtfully establishing parameters for success at the outset. These recommendations can aid in developing supportive cultures and structures for work that infuses EDI at every stage of project development and rollout. However, each community (group of people coming together) must identify what is meaningful for their unique context. EDI work is never boiler plate, it requires drawing on what individuals know about their unique environment.

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## Appendix A

### Research Project: ARIDO Canadian Assessment Project: The Interpersonal Experiences of an Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Exam Requirement Re-Evaluation

These are the notes of \_\_ PI \_\_ RA

#### Summary Page

Activity (what): EAP Development Group - A fair & equitable Canadian Alternative Working Session #\_  
Venue (where):  
Date (when):  
Participants (who):

#### Research Questions (for reference):

This study asks, how does an accreditation body conduct competencies review and redesign of their exam requirement in order to increase equity and inclusion for diverse groups? Specific research questions explore:

1. How does the working group self-assess their biases in this process?
2. What is the nature of the discourse (relating to biases, barriers, rigour, and prestige)?
3. Where are there consensuses and what was challenging?

#### Notes (initial themes):

#### Analytical Memo: *(to be written after the meeting)*

### Note Taking Template [inserted under each Agenda item including breaks]

Adapted from Lareau, (2021).

**Room layout:** To draw on paper

<b>Line No.</b>	<b>Activity</b> (discussion point, who is talking person, men vs. women, facilitator vs. participant, amt of talk – here I describe what’s happening)	<b>Reactions and Emotions</b> (how are others reacting and responding to what’s happening)	<b>Behaviors (includes timing- how slowly or quickly someone is speaking)</b> verbal and non verbal (tone, raising voice, aggressive, friendliness and to whom, anxious smile, rigid body language, emotions – look out for facial, arms movement)	<b>Inaction (silences or lack of response)</b>	<b>Quotes</b>	<b>Questions &amp; Interruptions</b>	<b>Shift in conversations</b>

### ANALYSIS

<b>Transcript</b>	<b>Code</b>	<b>Theme</b>	<b>CDA (of Transcript)</b>	<b>CDA Theme</b>

## Appendix B

### ARIDO EAP: EDI Audit & Research Post-Development Group Meetings Survey

#### Section 1: Impact of the EDI Crash Course

- 1) What impact did the EDI Crash Course and audit have on your experience as a development group member?
  - a. How did the EDI Crash Course & audit shape your thinking? Did it shift assumptions you may have had? Please describe.
  - b. Do you view entry into ARIDO differently after the EDI Crash Course? If yes, please describe.
  - c. Will these insights impact your professional practice? If so, how?
  
- 2) If at all, to what extent did the EDI Crash Course shift:
  - a. Your perception of your profession as an ID?
  - b. Your beliefs of the level of rigor required to gain entry to ARIDO?
  - c. The relationship between rigor and inclusion?

#### Section 2: Interpersonal Negotiations

- 3) Please describe any interpersonal negotiations that arose as you took an EDI lens to this work.
  - a. What biases or barriers (if any) became clear to you during this process that were not clear before?
  - b. What did you find challenging or conflicting?

#### Section 4: Professional Identity

- 4) How do you think the public perceives Interior Designers? Do you think the level of perceived rigor to gain entry to ARIDO contributes to this?

- a. What impact do you think an inclusion agenda will have on the public perception of Interior Designers, if any?
- 
- 5) To what extent do you anticipate interns to opt for the Canadian alternative assessment? Please describe.

### **Section 6: Group Cohesion**

- 6) What was your experience negotiating this process with other development group members?

### **Section 7: Life-long Learning**

- 7) Do you feel you require additional information on EDI for your professional practice?