Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Action Plan

Centre de Recherche en Biologie Structurale (CRBS)

McGill University

October 12, 2022

Submitted on behalf of the CRBS Community by the CRBS Standing EDI Committee:

Dr. Brittany Carroll
Dr. Mehran Dastmalchi
Yeganeh Habibi
Dr. Terri Lovell
Dr. Lisa Munter
Madeline Shred
Dr. Christopher Thibodeaux
Dr. Jacalyn Vogel
Tianxiao Yang

1. Analysis of Context

The *Centre de Recherche en Biologie Structurale* (CRBS) was founded in 2019 as the premier FRQS-funded center for structural biology in Quebec. The CRBS brings together 45 faculty members and approximately 300 trainees affiliated with 12 academic departments across the Faculties of Medicine and Health Sciences, Science, Engineering, and Agricultural and Environmental Sciences at McGill University. Cumulatively, the CRBS and its affiliated principal investigators operate a slate of state-of-the-art structural biology infrastructure that serves as the foundation for the numerous research, training, and outreach programs enabled by the FRQS funding.

In relation to other FRQ-funded research centers, the CRBS is unique in several aspects. The CRBS is currently the smallest FRQS-funded center and we are highly concentrated at the downtown McGill University campus. Moreover, the vast majority of the CRBS is actively involved in pursuing research as either a principal investigator or a research trainee (postdoc or graduate student). Currently, the CRBS supports the salaries of a single part-time administrator, one full-time and three part-time research support staff located at our various core facilities. These demographics present both opportunities and challenges in relation to assessing and implementing changes to our policies on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI).

First, our small size will enable us to rapidly implement and assess the effectiveness of new programs targeting issues related to EDI, while ensuring that everyone's voices are heard. As detailed in the Action Plan below, we will develop several open-access forums for the entire CRBS community where suggestions and feedback on EDI can be voiced and addressed (either publicly or confidentially) in a transparent and timely manner. As such, the CRBS will be able to rapidly adapt to future needs or changes in the EDI climate. Moreover, we are comparatively well-funded on a per-member basis, and we have a flexible budget that can be used to fund new EDI-focused initiatives or to enhance existing programs at McGill. Third, the concentrated physical location of our center at the downtown McGill campus provides the majority of the CRBS with facile access to many existing EDI-based programs, workshops, events, and initiatives at McGill, ensuring that the barriers to EDI progress and awareness remain minimal. As much as possible, our Action Plan will look to capitalize on and merge our efforts with the many existing EDI initiatives at McGill. Finally, our small size promotes EDI in that we must involve our large body of excellent graduate student and postdoctoral trainees in the governance and administration of the CRBS. A pervasive theme in our Action Plan is to incorporate our trainees at the forefront of all the EDI efforts of the CRBS. We believe this philosophy will not only empower our top trainees to be future leaders in EDI but will also enable the CRBS to stay actively engaged with the issues that most directly affect the next generation of scientists.

In terms of challenges, a fundamental limitation is the inability of the CRBS to directly influence the diversity of our center through faculty hires or the direct admission of trainees into the program. Faculty decisions are made at the Department/University level, while the admission of trainees is determined either by departmental committees or by individual PIs with departmental approval. The CRBS already includes nearly every McGill-affiliated PI that has a strong research component involving structural biology, and decisions regarding graduate student admission are highly variable across the academic units that comprise the CRBS. Nevertheless, as detailed in the Action Plan, we will strive to provide incentives for CRBS PIs to accept and maintain HQP from traditionally marginalized communities. Another significant challenge presented by the small size of our center is that the responsibilities and governance of the CRBS tend to fall onto the shoulders of the same group of active individuals. To help mitigate this, we have created an EDI Action Committee comprised of an equal number of PIs and trainees (graduate and post-doctoral) with a manageable mandate and rotating terms. Concrete actions will involve a combination of new EDI-focused initiatives, enhancing existing CRBS programs though modifications, and by establishing partnerships with existing EDI initiatives at McGill.

2. Objectives

2.1 Mobilize a standing EDI committee: Our first major objective is to form and define the roles of a standing committee whose major responsibility will be to ensure that the CRBS is incorporating best EDI practices into its governance and daily operations. The committee will ensure that all CRBS members have multiple avenues to voice opinions and concerns related to EDI, and the committee will be responsible for tracking progress towards EDI milestones and reporting on the effectiveness of measures to the FRQS and CRBS community.

2.2 Enhance awareness of EDI in the CRBS: The Standing EDI committee and CRBS leadership will make a more concerted effort to keep issues related to EDI at the forefront of decision making by the CRBS. This will be achieved in a variety of ways such as announcing specific EDI-themed activities during CRBS events, sending regular emails to the CRBS community, providing EDI-related information on the CRBS website, and incorporating EDI considerations into our award competitions.

2.3 Capitalize on the existing EDI-conscious culture at McGill: The CRBS is fortunate to be physically located in the heart of the downtown McGill University campus. As such, we are in a position to interface with the many different ongoing EDI initiatives established by the University, individual Departments, and our numerous student groups. Logistically, interfacing with other McGill groups will help to reduce the administrative burden on the Standing EDI Committee, will allow us to focus efforts on engaging the CRBS community, and will be essential for helping the CRBS remain in touch with the EDI climate of our community.

2.4 Encourage CRBS trainees to take leadership roles in the EDI Action Plan: A core objective of the CRBS is to provide world class training opportunities for our students and postdocs. Our current trainees will eventually be the leaders in structural biology research. Thus, if EDI considerations are ever expected to transform society and the workplace, it is essential for these future leaders to fully grasp how EDI shapes our access to opportunities and success. Therefore, it is our intention to involve students and postdocs in all aspects of the development and implementation of the CRBS EDI Action Plan.

2.5 Modify existing CRBS competitions and programs to be more equitable: A major emphasis of the Action Plan will be to provide additional awards to trainees from underrepresented demographics and to incorporate personal statements into various competitions for CRBS funding, such that applicants can outline how barriers related to EDI have shaped their academic careers. Updated application evaluation guidelines will also be provided to assist reviewers in accommodating this information into their reviews. We will also enhance the visibility of underrepresented trainees by providing them with named awards and public speaking opportunities.

3. Specific Actions and Programs

3.1 Establishing and defining the roles of a Standing EDI Committee: The CRBS needs an administrative body to ensure that the CRBS is incorporating best practices with regards to EDI and to identify and implement actions or activities to improve the EDI climate. Over the past several months, we have solicited volunteers throughout our center to serve on the inaugural CRBS Standing EDI Committee (S.E.C). The demographic makeup of the S.E.C. is well balanced and reflects the inherent diversity of the Center. Currently, the committee is composed of four principal investigators (two tenured Professors, two tenure-track Assistant Professors), two postdoctoral fellows, and three graduate students. In addition, the committee is well-represented by traditionally disadvantaged demographics in STEM (women, racial/ethnic minorities, religious minorities, and the 2SLGBTQIA+ community). The S.E.C. will be headed by a chair, who will be responsible for organizing committee activities and for presenting regular (tri-annual) EDI updates to the CRBS Executive Committee. Membership in the S.E.C. will be on a volunteer basis. Regular calls for membership will be made to the CRBS community through e-mails and by nominations/suggestions from sitting S.E.C. members. Each year, the sitting S.E.C. chair will nominate a current member of the S.E.C. to serve as the chair for the following year. The idea is to continually replenish the committee with new members and leadership to provide fresh ideas and motivation for continued advancement. Importantly, any new EDI initiatives will need to be discussed by the CRBS Executive Committee before approval. The S.E.C. will never act autonomously to implement new policies without the consent of CRBS leadership. The primary roles of the S.E.C. will be to:

1. Develop and oversee implementation of the EDI Action plan, in collaboration with feedback from the FRQS. Serve as liaison between the FRQS and the CRBS community.
2. Provide reports of EDI activities at the tri annual CRBS Executive Meetings, annual Strategic Advisory Board meetings, FRQS reviews, and annual General Meeting. Provide a written annual statement on progress towards EDI Action Plan goals that is distributed to the CRBS community and posted on the CRBS website.
3. Meet every four months to brainstorm for new ideas, to discuss logistics for upcoming activities, to discuss how the EDI-related workload of the Center should be distributed among the committee and larger CRBS community, and to discuss the success/effectiveness of past activities.
4. Collect and analyze feedback from the CRBS community on the effectiveness of activities and the need for additional initiatives. New ideas put forth by the CRBS community will first be vetted by the S.E.C. and then discussed in the Executive Meetings to determine if specific actions should be taken.

3.2 Actions to increase awareness of EDI. In many ways, progress on the EDI fronts detailed below began with a simple awareness that we all approach our academic endeavors from unique perspectives. The diversity of the CRBS community is already commendable. Nevertheless, we still have a unique opportunity to draw from our individual experiences to collectively enrich the environment within the CRBS community. The CRBS will take the following actions to boost awareness of EDI and to better engage CRBS members in efforts to maintain and promote EDI.

1. Regular announcements regarding EDI-themes events/activities will be made during our biweekly seminar series.
2. The S.E.C. will provide a yearly EDI update to the CRBS community. This letter will detail specific achievements in the previous year, how we have addressed specific concerns raised by the CRBS community, and our plans for future activities. To boost accountability, the letters will also be publicly posted in perpetuity on the CRBS website, such that interested people can track our year-to-year progress.
3. Implement an EDI interview series where students will lead a Q&A session with various CRBS members (faculty, staff, PDFs, grad students) to better understand our individual paths/barriers

to becoming successful research scientists. The interviews will be announced through email and recordings of the interviews will be linked to the CRBS website.

4. An annual EDI award (voted on by the CRBS student council) will be given to someone from the center who has gone above and beyond to promote EDI at the CRBS. Current members of the S.E.C. will not be eligible. The award will be presented at the annual CRBS EDI Day.

5. Establish a student-organized CRBS EDI Day. The agenda for the day's activities will consist of research presentations by under-represented CRBS trainees and an invited external/internal keynote speaker, formal presentation of the EDI award, and a presentation from the chair of the S.E.C. on recent and upcoming actions. The symposium will conclude with an informal round-table discussion to receive public input/feedback from the community on EDI actions.

6. We will add a webpage dedicated to EDI on the CRBS website. This webpage will contain links to McGill resources for EDI, announcement of CRBS-sponsored/themed EDI activities, annually updated statements for how CRBS is addressing EDI and incorporating EDI into competitions, links to EDI interviews, a webform for voicing confidential EDI-related suggestions, and links to other miscellaneous resources.

3.3 Tapping into existing EDI training opportunities: As mentioned in the Analysis of Context, the CRBS does not have the capacity to support full-time personnel dedicated to overseeing EDI. Moreover, while the S.E.C. can handle the additional duties detailed above, it is important that the committee not be overburdened with too many additional tasks, as each member of the committee also has numerous other research and teaching responsibilities. Thus, an essential component of the CBRS EDI Action Plan will be to take advantage of the many EDI resources already available at McGill, to make these resources more accessible to the CRBS community, and to incentivize participation in these EDI activities by making them a requirement for CRBS funding. Specific actions include:

1. We will take advantage of resources provided by McGill's Office of Organizational Development, who offer courses on a variety of topics related to EDI such as *Accommodating Employees with Disabilities*, *Gender Diversity and Inclusive Language*, *EDI – Challenging Conversations in the Workplace*, *Microaggressions in the Workplace*, and *Equitable Hiring in the Workplace*. A running list of these (and other) courses will be maintained on the CRBS website.

2. To incentivize participation in these workshops, funding for certain CRBS initiatives (Studentships, Travel Awards, Blue Sky Seed Funding, and Equipment grants) will be contingent upon completion of at least one of these EDI training modules. Accordingly, the wording of our competition and award announcements will be altered to clearly communicate our expectation that recipients complete EDI training modules. Award recipients will be asked to self-report/confirm participation in these workshops.

3. The CRBS will also look to actively sponsor, advertise, and participate in other intramural activities that promote EDI. A few specific examples of events that could be sponsored include the "*Out Loud symposium*" organized by Queer McGill and the Students Society of McGill University (SSMU) and the "*Win4Science*" mentorship program for women established by the Pharmacology Department. The CRBS will actively engage these (and other groups) to develop jointly sponsored activities and to enhance the participation of CRBS members.

4. Upcoming EDI-themed events will be discussed at each S.E.C. committee meeting. By making this a regular item on the S.E.C. meeting agenda, the hope is that the committee will be on the active lookout for new opportunities.

3.4 Actions to improve equity and increase diversity: Currently, the CRBS sponsors annual competitions to fund studentships and travel awards for trainees. To keep these competitions merit-based, the evaluation of applications has – to date – been based solely on achievements in research, academics, and service. As a center, we will take actions to acknowledge that individuals from certain demographics may have experienced barriers in their research/academic careers that may have had an adverse impact

on their productivity relative to more privileged individuals. The CRBS will take the following actions to help "level the playing field" for underprivileged groups and to promote the active recruitment of a diverse workforce.

1. We will amend current trainee-focused competitions (Studentships and Travel Awards) by allowing trainees to submit a 1-page personal statement detailing any barriers they have faced (or are currently facing) during their studies/academic career and whether/how these barriers have affected productivity or academic performance. The competition guidelines will be updated to reflect this optional component. Reviewers of the Studentship and Travel Award applications will be provided with guidance on how to incorporate these personal statements into the application scoring metric.

2. In an effort to level the playing field and to increase diversity, the CRBS will also provide financial incentives to faculty who recruit underrepresented postdocs into their labs. To be eligible, PIs will have to have an EDI statement on their websites and the postdoc will have to provide a short description of their research proposal and a personal statement detailing barriers to career success that they have encountered (or are currently encountering). This initiative will additionally help the CRBS to be more inclusive towards postdocs, who are currently underserved by the training initiatives provided by our Center.

3.5 Actions to increase inclusion: The CRBS has already taken steps to enhance the inclusivity of our center by ensuring that our Executive and Standing EDI Committees are well-represented by different demographics. This has helped to ensure that different perspectives are taken into account at the administrative level in order to make our practices and competitions more equitable. Nevertheless, moving forward, we plan to take a more direct role to enhance inclusivity through the following actions.

1. Using guidelines provided by McGill Webservices (https://www.mcgill.ca/web-services/resources/toolkits/style-guide-toolkit/diversity-and-inclusion), we will carefully check the CRBS website and any official communications for gendered and other exclusive language.

2. We will work with the space committees in the Faculties of Medicine and Science to designate quiet spaces for lactating mothers, prayer rooms, and resting areas. Plans are already in place to create a space in the Pulp & Paper building for lactating mothers. This will serve the CRBS community in the Chemistry Department. We have also contacted the space committee from the Faculty of Medicine and Health Sciences to provide similar spaces in the Bellini and McIntyre buildings, where the majority of the CRBS members work.

3. Accommodation will be made for the mobility, hearing, and visually impaired members of the CRBS community, as well as for CRBS members with dyslexia and ADHD. Footnotes will be provided on seminar announcements that our primary seminar room (McIntyre 501) and other live events (such as the CRBS Symposium and Annual General Meeting) are wheelchair accessible. Upon request, we will provide audiovisual recordings and transcripts of seminars for the hearing and vision impaired.

4. To improve inclusiveness and access to training opportunities for our postdoc community, we will prioritize postdoc involvement as leaders of our annual summer bootcamps, and we will run a competition for a postdoc speaker slot at the annual CRBS Symposium.

4. Tracking the effectiveness of EDI Action Plan

We know that the effectiveness of our policies towards equity, diversity, and inclusion should be evaluated directly by the people affected by those policies – namely, the CRBS community. Thus, our philosophy for tracking the effectiveness of the CRBS EDI Action Plan is to remain as transparent as possible with regards to our progress, intentions, and actions, and to provide multiple avenues to engage the CRBS community for effective feedback. Discussions regarding the actions of the CRBS towards EDI will also become a regular component of Executive Committee and Strategic Advisory Board meetings. Through these processes, CRBS members and stakeholders will be able to directly gage progress made by the center towards EDI objectives.

Our efforts to maintain transparency and to assess EDI Action Plan effectiveness will be achieved through the following actions.

- The finalized EDI Action Plan will be made publicly available on the CRBS website.
- A confidential webform for voicing EDI concerns/suggestions will be made available to all members of the CRBS. Comments received though this webform will be archived for reporting and discussed during S.E.C. meetings.
- The S.E.C. will keep the CRBS community engaged in EDI activities by providing regular announcements regarding EDI activities at CRBS-sponsored events (such as the biweekly student symposium). Through these announcements, the S.E.C. will also solicit/encourage participation and encourage feedback.
- The S.E.C. will keep informal records of approximate attendance by CRBS members at EDI-themed events. Following an event, we will circulate a short questionnaire to gage attendance and to acquire testimonials from CRBS members on the effectiveness of EDI-themed events.
- The S.E.C. will regularly discuss the effectiveness of various activities by considering CRBS member testimonials during the tri annual S.E.C. meetings. A transcript of these proceedings will be retained for reporting and transparency purposes.
- The CRBS community will be given an opportunity to publicly voice their opinions and/or suggestions related to EDI during both the Annual General Meetings and EDI Day.
- Annual statements detailing progress towards EDI objectives and plans for the future will be posted on the website and will be sent to all members of the CRBS via e-mail. These statements will address specific suggestions/considerations voiced throughout the year by the CRBS community through the numerous mechanisms mentioned above (confidential webform, testimonials from event follow-up, and public discussions at the AGM and EDI Day).