

Introducing the New CGS EDI Committee

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The Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) Committee was established by the CGS Board of Directors on September 21, 2025. This committee arose from the work of the previous EDI Task Force, which was focused on increasing members' awareness of EDI issues through webinars, conference sessions, and mentoring. Following the submission and review of the EDI Task Force report in April 2025, the CGS Executive Committee agreed that a permanent committee was necessary for continuing these efforts.

MISSION AND OBJECTIVES

The Committee's mission is to foster a professional community that is equitable, inclusive, and representative of the diverse identities and experiences within Canada's geotechnical profession. The Committee will focus on institutional change and embedding EDI principles into CGS's governance, operations, and decision-making frameworks.

The Committee will take on two main objectives — to ensure CGS's governance framework supports EDI and to create opportunities for CGS members that are accessible, equitable, and inclusive. Governance initiatives will include (1) promoting fair and transparent governance practices by identifying systemic barriers within CGS policies, (2) encouraging representation of diverse perspectives in CGS decision-making, and (3) recommending EDI training for CGS leaders and volunteers. Potential opportunities the committee will initiate include (1) developing programs that reduce barriers to participating in CGS activities; (2) amplifying the voices and contributions of individuals from a wide range of backgrounds, identities, and experiences; and (3) supporting CGS events that are accessible and inclusive of all members, such as conference sessions, webinars, etc.

What is EDI?

The term EDI is commonly used but often misunderstood. Each component is described below.

Equity is about providing fair access and opportunities by identifying and removing the obstacles that limit the ability of some groups or individuals to fully engage and participate in our profession.

Diversity refers to the presence of differences, including but not limited to race, ethnicity, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, disability, religion, socioeconomic status, geographic location, and professional background.

Inclusion is the deliberate effort to build a community where all individuals feel welcomed, respected, and empowered to contribute.

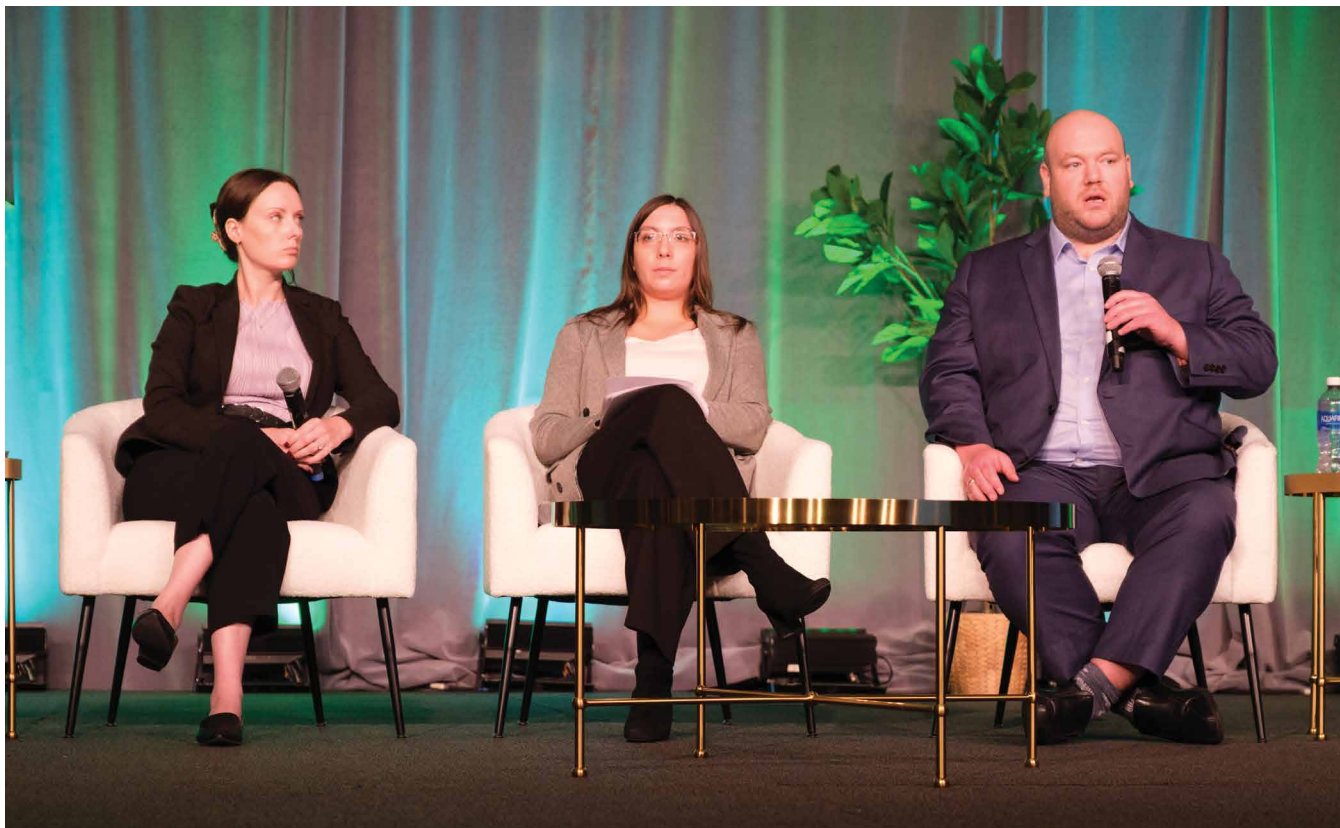
RECENT EDI ACTIVITY: SPECIAL SESSION AT GEOMANITOBA

The Wednesday lunch plenary session at GeoManitoba, "Stronger Together: Increasing Inclusivity from Practitioner and Legal Perspectives", provides a great example of an opportunity that members of the CGS EDI Committee supported. Five case studies were presented in the session where "you" experience one or more forms of discrimination or harassment in the workplace. The session amplified the voices of CGS members from diverse backgrounds by collecting input on harassment and discrimination from GeoManitoba registrants before the conference. This feedback was used to generate the five case studies.

The associated negative impacts, the rights of those experiencing discrimination or harassment, and how the issues should be appropriately dealt with by workplace leaders were presented for each scenario. Lawyers **Jennifer Sokal**, **Allie Moar**, and **Bret Lercher** from MLT Aikins LLP participated in the session to provide insight on the legal implications of each case and required actions to ensure compliance with labour codes and acts. Two of the five case studies are summarized here.

CASE 1: SEXUAL HARASSMENT AT REMOTE WORK SITES

While working remotely, one of your team members has started making romantic and sexual comments towards you. You initially brushed off the comments; however, this behaviour continues and escalates to inappropriate comments/texts after work. You explicitly tell them you are not interested and ask that they stop. Following this, the team member harasses you and demeans your work on the job. You now feel unsafe at the project site.




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Harassment is defined under provincial workplace / occupational health and safety acts and human rights codes. For example, the Workplace Safety and Health Act of Manitoba specifies that harassment is:

- a) objectionable conduct that creates a risk to the health of a worker; or
- b) severe conduct that adversely affects a worker's psychological or physical well-being.

This conduct could either be based on a protected personal characteristic, is repeated and could reasonably cause a worker to be humiliated or intimidated, or has a lasting, harmful effect on the worker. In general, harassment includes discrimination, bullying, and sexual harassment, and can be written, verbal, physical, or environmental. Note that reasonable conduct of an employer or supervisor in respect of the management and direction of workers is not harassment. This includes providing direction or feedback, giving advice, conducting performance evaluations, and delivering disciplinary actions.

Another important consideration for this case is what constitutes the workplace. Several different places are considered the workplace, including offices or buildings (including elevators), vehicles used for work, off-site or remote work locations, camps, hotels for remote work sites, work-related social events (including after-work food/drinks), social media, and virtual workplaces (like Zoom calls). For the above case, the remote work site, hotel, vehicle, and after-work meals constitute the workplace.

The lawyers provided clear guidance on what you (the complainant, i.e., person being harassed) should do in this scenario. First, report this to a supervisor or management. Keep a written record of when, where, what, who, and the names of any witnesses. Finally, if an

investigation ensues, cooperate with management to the best of your ability. If at any time you feel you need legal advice, you should reach out to a lawyer.

Note that the identity of the complainant, alleged harasser, and circumstances related to the complaint are confidential except where necessary to investigate the complaint or take corrective action, or where required by law. The alleged harasser will usually be entitled to know the circumstances underlying the complaint and the identity of the complainant to respond to the complaint.

On the other hand, employers and supervisors are required to ensure their workers' health and safety — including psychological safety — as far as reasonably practicable. The company should already have a written harassment policy in place that includes instructions on how to make a harassment complaint and how the complaint will be investigated. If the company becomes aware of alleged harassment, it must take steps to determine if the complaint is substantiated and to correct the behaviour. This involves conducting a formal investigation, including interviewing witnesses, and implementing corrective actions, including training and discipline.

In summary, sexual harassment is unfortunately quite common in the engineering profession and there is often a lack of transparency around harassment history on project sites. Harassment can negatively impact work environments by eroding overall trust and safety, impacting productivity and job satisfaction.

CASE 2: RACIST AND ANTI-IMMIGRANT BELIEFS ON JOB SITES

You are an engineer and recent immigrant to Canada. You generally feel welcomed and comfortable at the office and around your peers, as they are accommodating of your religious obligations throughout the day.

Unfortunately, you do not feel the same level of accommodation in the field. You constantly must listen to inappropriate comments and jokes regarding your background and religion. When you raised concerns about the comments with your supervisor, they were dismissed as "contractor talk". You were instructed to ignore the comments rather than address them, ultimately to prevent delays and avoid making other workers feel uncomfortable. You are frustrated that no action was taken to ensure you have a safe working environment on-site.

This case highlights another form of harassment: verbal harassment in the form of jokes, nicknames, taunting, or even mimicking an accent. If you experience this type of harassment and lack of support from your supervisor, you should inform them that you are filing a formal harassment complaint, and if appropriate steps are not taken, you should then file a harassment complaint with higher management. You should also keep a record of the incident(s), including time, place, witnesses, etc. and any attempts to file a complaint or have it handled appropriately. If appropriate steps are not taken, you have the right to file a complaint with your provincial Human Rights Commission (or occupational/workplace health and safety body). Even if your company has a harassment policy, you are still permitted to file a complaint with the Human Rights Commission or exercise any other legal rights.

All supervisors have a duty to ensure that any worker under their supervision or direction is not subjected to harassment in the workplace. In this scenario, the supervisor is ignoring their responsibilities and is not in compliance with the law. Once a

complaint has been made, employers have a duty to investigate any complaint or incident of workplace harassment or discrimination. Even if the complainant declines to formally file a complaint, employers are still obligated to address workplace harassment and discrimination. If an investigation is substantiated, the company must take steps to correct the behaviour and communicate the results of the investigation to the complainant.

In summary, this case explores how racism and microaggressive comments may be covered up as jokes, or "contractor talk", in the field. One may not feel like they have the right to speak up about something in the moment, in fear of making others uncomfortable or worse, endangering their own safety on remote sites. This behaviour, even if not directed at your own background, can still be uncomfortable to encounter on a regular basis and is indicative of an unsafe working environment. Accommodations for religious practices are possible (like in the office) and should be raised to the same level of importance on the job site.

The new CGS EDI Committee is still in the formation phase, and we are looking for additional members at large. For more information on the Committee or how to join, please reach out to VP Communications, Marie-Lin Bréard Lanoix, at vpcomm@cgs.ca.



Kathryn Dompierre completed a B.Sc. in civil engineering at the University of Manitoba, a M.Sc. in environmental policy at the London School of Economics and Political Science, and a Ph.D. in geoenvironmental engineering at the University of Saskatchewan. She joined the GeoStudio engineering research team in 2016 and now leads the North American user success team for Seequent's geotechnical analysis products. Outside of work, Kathryn serves on the boards of two environmental NGOs, the Lake Winnipeg Foundation and Manitoba Eco-Network, and is involved in the Canadian Geotechnical Society's EDI Committee.



Jean Hutchinson is the Vice President Technical of the Canadian Geotechnical Society and the President Elect (2027 & 2028). A Professor Emerita of Geological Engineering at Queen's University and the Vice President of Innovative Geomechanics Inc., Jean advocates for diversity in mining and geological engineering and raising awareness of diverse perspectives and inclusivity challenges. Her efforts in these areas were recognized by the Women in Mining Canada Trailblazer Award in 2024. Jean was honoured to be elected as a Fellow of the Engineering Institute of Canada in 2011 and the Canadian Academy of Engineering in 2020.



Marie-Lin Bréard Lanoix, P. Eng., M.A.Sc., is currently Vice President Communications and Member Services of the CGS, and a geotechnical engineer at Glencore Canada in the North American Legacy Assets group. She graduated from Polytechnique Montréal and has accumulated 10 years of experience in tailings management and mine closure. 🐼