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## *How To Develop an Equity Partnership*

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*Organizations with an interest in equality, diversity and inclusion can now access a fast, straight-forward method for strengthening their initiatives.*

Special measures to promote equality of opportunity can be used by equity partners with programs approved by the Saskatchewan Human Rights Commission. Special measures are actions, policies or decisions designed to reduce disadvantages that are linked to a prohibited ground of discrimination. For example, employers with equity programs may make concerted efforts to recruit Aboriginal employees because it would help them develop a representative workforce. Without Commission approval, it would be illegal to focus on ancestry in the hiring process. But in an approved equity program, special measures are understood to serve the same equality goals as the anti-discrimination provisions of *The Saskatchewan Human Rights Code*.

Under the Commission's new procedures, an equity partner can obtain formal approval within several weeks. The equity partner (or sponsor) obtains initial approval by entering an Equity Partnership Agreement with the Commission. In this agreement, the sponsor makes a commitment to the principles and objectives set out in the Commission's Policy on Equity Programs and agrees to meet the policy's requirements. After approval, the sponsor may access Commission services and resources to develop or enhance its program. The Commission will periodically renew its approval while the partnership agreement is in effect, so long as the sponsor meets the Commission's reporting requirements.

### **Prior to signing an agreement, the sponsor will be asked to take the following steps:**

1. Identify the equity group or groups the program is designed to benefit.
2. Identify the areas in which the program will improve opportunities for the equity groups: employment, education, housing and/or public services.
3. Provide information demonstrating that the equity groups identified in step one experience general disadvantage in Saskatchewan.

Note: This step is not necessary where the Human Rights Commission has already noted the existence of disadvantage. The Commission notes that the four traditional equity groups, Aboriginal people, people with disabilities, visible minorities and women, experience disadvantage in employment throughout Saskatchewan. In the area of education, the Commission notes that Aboriginal people, visible minorities and people with disabilities experience systemic disadvantage and that students may also experience disadvantage because of gender. In addition, the Commission endorses the inclusive vision of the Equity in Education Forum, which is dedicated to "the fair and equal treatment of all members of our society who are entitled to participate in and enjoy the benefits of an education."

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4. Provide information demonstrating that the equity groups experience disadvantage within the sponsor's organization.

### **Employment Initiatives**

Sponsors wishing to improve employment opportunities for one or more of the four traditional equity groups will be asked to prepare a statistical analysis of their workforce. This analysis will demonstrate under-representation of the equity groups and provide base-line data against which future progress can be compared.

### **Educational Initiatives**

Step four will not be required of educational institutions because many indicators of success – such as non-discriminatory learning environments – do not lend themselves to statistical analysis. Where Aboriginal students are an equity group, however, sponsors will be asked to provide statistical information on the representation of Aboriginal students, teachers and non-teaching staff by the time of their first progress report. The Commission will continue to work with educational institutions to identify additional indicators of success and disadvantage.

### **New Group or Context**

Where an equity program addresses a new equity group or seeks to improve opportunities in housing or public services, the sponsor will be asked to demonstrate the existence of disadvantage within its own organization.

5. Propose appropriate parameters or limits on the special measures the sponsor wishes to use. This step is not necessary for educational or employment initiatives designed for one or more of the four traditional equity groups, because the Commission itself identifies long-term goals in those circumstances. Equity in employment means a representative workforce that mirrors the working age population in all occupations and at all levels, and supportive work environments that promote the participation of all groups. Equity in education requires an inclusive educational system that provides equality of benefit to all students.
6. In unionized workplaces, obtain the trade union's support for the equity program and ensure the trade union's ongoing involvement in program implementation. For example, the sponsor may provide a letter from the trade union expressing its support for the equity program and a description of a union-management committee or other mechanism that will ensure ongoing union involvement.

Commission approval takes effect upon the signing of an Equity Partnership Agreement by the Commission and the sponsor.

For more information, contact an Education & Equity Advisor at the Human Rights Commission. The Advisor can answer questions, provide survey forms and other resources, and identify any supporting documents that may be needed.