



**CGEn 2023 IDEA Report**



## CGEn

CGEn is a federally funded national platform for genome sequencing and analysis. Established in 2014, CGEn employs over 200 staff, and is funded primarily by the Canada Foundation for Innovation (CFI) through its Major Science Initiatives Fund (MSI), leveraging investments from Genome Canada and other stakeholders. CGEn operates as an integrated national platform with nodes in Toronto ([The Centre for Applied Genomics](#) at The Hospital for Sick Children), Montréal, ([McGill Genome Centre](#) at McGill University) and Vancouver ([Canada's Michael Smith Genome Sciences Centre](#)), providing genomic services, including genome sequencing and analysis, that enable research in agriculture, forestry, fishery, the environment, health sciences, and many other disciplines of interest to Canadians.

CGEn has committed to prioritizing Inclusion, Diversity, Equity & Accessibility (IDEA) in both research and the workplace environment. To action this commitment, a dedicated CGEn IDEA Manager was hired, the CGEn IDEA Committee was initiated, and a CGEn-wide survey was developed and distributed to all staff to collect baseline self-identification and employee experience data. The purpose of collecting and analyzing this data was to build on the initial CGEn IDEA action plan developed in 2021, guide the ongoing development of the CGEn IDEA strategy and to have a reference for measuring change overtime. The following report presents key insights from this assessment and suggested next steps. Although the results are a snapshot of 50.6% of CGEn staff who provided survey responses, this information enables CGEn to learn more about the composition of its community, identifies opportunities for growth, and provides guidance for our actions.

We would like to acknowledge all of those who contributed to this important work including the three CGEn nodes, the CGEn IDEA Committee, SickKids' EDI Offices, and the CGEn-Central team. Your feedback, support, and insights are invaluable in our efforts to listen, learn, and leverage the diverse strengths of the CGEn community to embrace change and achieve IDEA excellence.

## IDEA Survey

Using an [intersectional](#) framework, we created an IDEA survey to identify what we could do better, and importantly, what we were doing well. To realize this, the survey was distributed to CGEn's 237 staff and the Scientific Directors of each CGEn node, in Spring 2023. We received 120 responses, a 50.6% response rate. Although the survey data reflects only a portion of CGEn staff identities and experiences, and this report does not present the full scope of the results, the information presented here provides valuable insights and next steps in our ongoing efforts to advance IDEA.

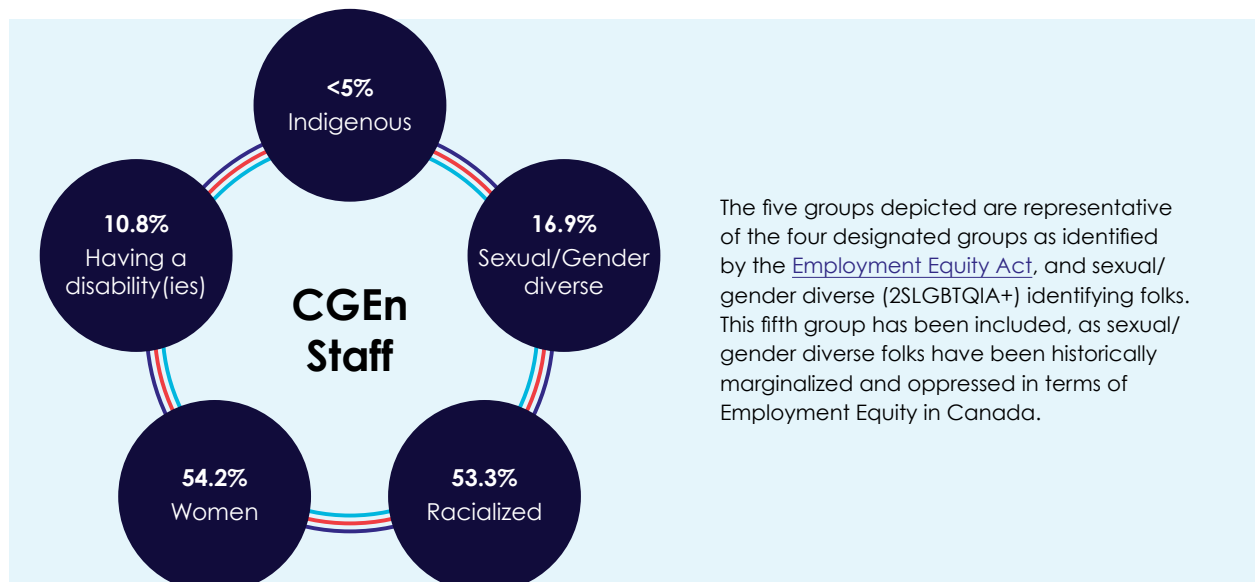
# Results

## Key Self-Identification Data

It is well documented that companies with diverse staff representation have higher work quality, but it is equally important to engage in ongoing learning and trust building activities when it comes to supporting equity and inclusion (Ely & Thomas, 2020). In genomics, IDEA does not stop with workplace equity; promoting data diversity and inclusion is needed to promote the advancement of human genetics. In order to guide our IDEA strategy and initiatives forward, we asked CGEn staff to answer 11 self-identification questions including their identified population group, religion, education, citizenship, gender identity and sexual orientation.

When compared to recent Canadian Statistics, in some ways, CGEn staff respondents highlight the diversity of Canada – for example, 54.2% of CGEn staff respondents self-identify as women, 53.3% as racialized and 16.9% as sexual/gender diverse. However, we must also recognize that there are also instances of underrepresentation across the CGEn staff population. For example, according to recent Canadian Statistics (2017; 2021), 5% of respondents identified as Indigenous, 3.5% identified as Black, and 22% identified as having a disability(ies); when it comes to CGEn staff respondents, the number of staff who identified as either Black or Indigenous were less than the Canadian Statistics, and only 10.8% of CGEn staff identified as having a disability(ies). These results highlight opportunities for CGEn to focus recruitment efforts and target retention programs, particularly when it comes to historically underrepresented populations. Championing increased diversity may enable CGEn to gain new perspectives, illuminate marginalized voices, and harness innovation to continue advancing genomics research.

**Figure 1:** Key CGEn Staff Self-Identification Responses

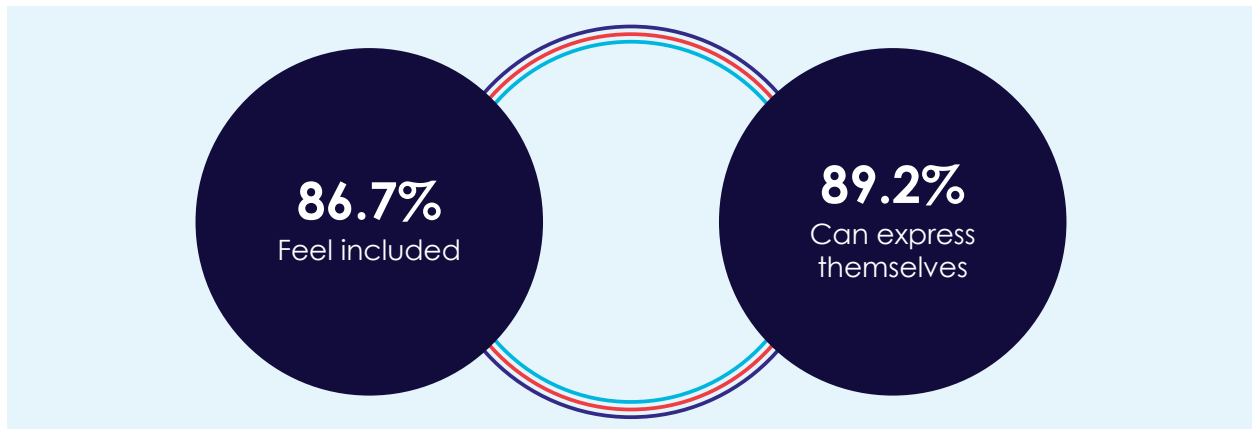


## Intersectional Experiences

Kimberlé Crenshaw presented the term “intersectionality” in 1989 and explained that in the context of law, discrimination was focused on a single-axis such as gender or race. However, there was no consideration for the ways in which these two compounding, intersectional aspects of identity uniquely marginalized folks such as Black women. At CGEn, we are committed to working collaboratively to identify where subtle discrimination and inequitable actions may exist, so that we may develop an informed action plan to move forward. In the CGEn IDEA survey, multiple intersectional aspects of identity were explored. Here, we highlight some of the results of the intersectional analysis as they relate to gender and population identity.

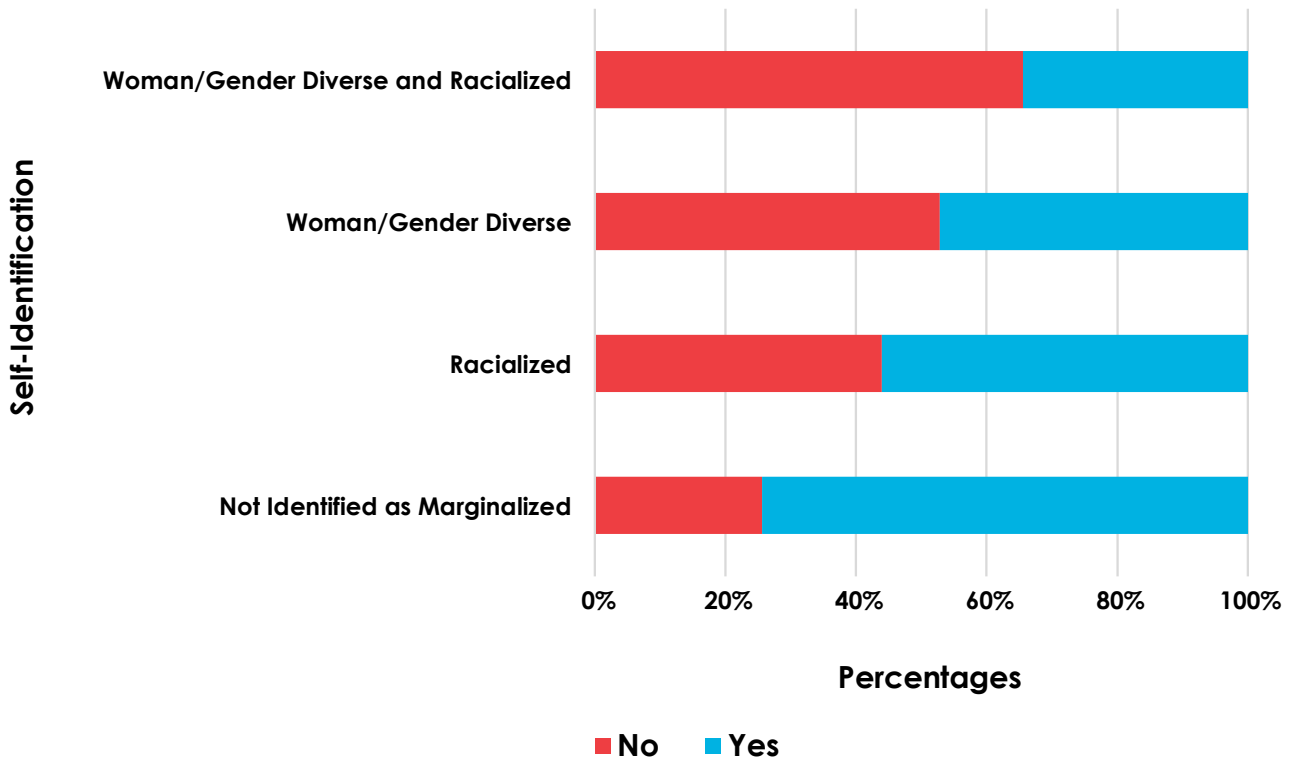
When asked about their experiences, 86.7% of CGEn staff respondents feel included in their workplace, and 89.2% can express themselves authentically, demonstrating that in many ways, CGEn and its host institutions are cultivating an inclusive workplace.

**Figure 2:** Inclusive Workplace Responses



It is important however, that we address inequities experienced by some CGEn staff respondents, and the ways in which intersectional identities may impact these experiences. For example, when staff were asked if they had adequate opportunities for advancement/growth, 32.5% responded “No”. Breaking this down further, almost 50% of the staff who responded “No”, self-identified as having multiple intersecting identities (Figure 3). When looking at the composition of staff who responded “Yes” (58.3%) to having adequate opportunities for growth/advancement, only about 25% self-identified as having multiple intersecting identities. Further exploration as to why some staff, particularly those with multiple intersecting identities, are having this experience, and determining actions to reduce these inequities are important next steps. These actions are needed to support and advance staff with diverse backgrounds and experiences, to challenge our current systems that continue to promote folks with similar identities. When examining CGEn’s leadership, there are opportunities to diversify the team and broaden perspectives in our pursuit of excellence.

**Figure 3: Advancement/Growth Opportunities**



This graph specifically focuses on the intersection of population identity and gender. Thus, staff represented in the “Not Identified as Marginalized” bar may align with marginalized identities outside of this scope.

## Policies and Procedures

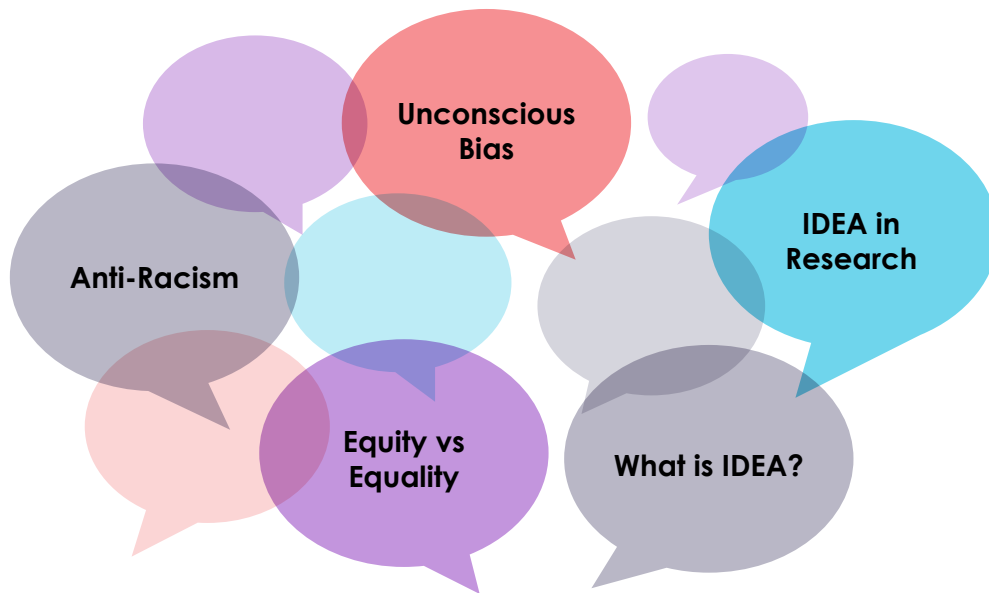
Policies and procedures may unintentionally (or intentionally) perpetuate systemic barriers for employees, which undermines the very purpose they serve. When asked about their home institutions, 52.5% of CGEn staff respondents indicated that they were not aware of procedures for reporting an IDEA related complaints or experiences of harassment/discrimination, and 55% were not aware of the process for requesting accommodations in the workplace. Considering many employees do not report instances of harassment, even when they are on the basis of [protected grounds](#) (Zheng, 2020), it is important that we clearly communicate all reporting and requesting processes to minimize additional barriers. The survey results point to an opportunity for change, requiring timely action. This may include revisiting current strategies to communicate these processes, or developing intentional workshops/presentations to ensure staff have access to these resources.

## Qualitative Themes

### Education

Currently, less than half (30%) of CGEn staff respondents are participating in IDEA education at their home institutions, which could indicate a need for greater promotion of IDEA education, or perhaps an issue related to access or communication. This does, however, provide an opportunity for CGEn-Central, in collaboration with the three CGEn nodes, to develop and facilitate IDEA learning activities to fill this gap. CGEn staff respondents suggested and identified a range of education topics including some of the examples shown in Figure 4. Additionally, microaggressions were brought up as an area of concern for 16.7% of respondents and should be prioritized as an IDEA education topic.

**Figure 4:** CGEn Staff Respondents Suggested Education Topics



### Accessibility

One of the more challenging areas to address is physical barriers, as these will vary from institution to institution and will rely on the individual infrastructure and budget of each node. With that said, it is important that spaces are accessible for staff and visitors and are meeting building codes. The two key accessibility areas identified by CGEn staff respondents included physical barriers and barriers to mental health support.

**Physical Barriers.** Some respondents highlighted the challenges of navigating office space with a disability and the absence of buttons to automatically open doors, particularly in washrooms.

**Mental Health.** Some respondents noted a lack of mental health supports. This included insufficient funds from benefits, and a desire for more workplace flexibility when it comes to navigating family challenges.

It is important that accessibility is prioritized across the CGEn nodes and their home institutions. Given the survey results, further data collection and exploration into solutions to mitigate these barriers is needed.

## Learning Resources

A shared platform where staff can access IDEA related resources, was identified as a potential tool for IDEA development; this could be a virtual space to share current research and keep users up to date on IDEA related advances such as inclusive language. This platform could also work as a space to easily access institutional related resources, policies, and processes (e.g., instructions for filing accommodation requests). Finally, this platform could serve as space to post events/speakers/workshops and professional development opportunities to better communicate IDEA focused activities.

## IDEA Strategy and Actions Moving Forward

With the strengths and opportunities for growth outlined in this report, we are developing a CGEn IDEA Strategy. This strategy will include sections such as principles, values, objectives and specific action items with timelines to address the identified gaps and opportunities for growth and change.

In order to actualize a successful strategy and promote accountability, the CGEn IDEA Strategy will be developed in consultation with CGEn leadership, including the CGEn Executive Committee and Boards, CGEn staff at the three CGEn nodes, the CGEn IDEA Committee and other relevant stakeholders. As continuous improvement is not possible without on-going monitoring, the IDEA Manager will also lead the development of a plan to continue assessing progress overtime, to ensure adjustments are made to maximize success and strive for an inclusive, diverse, equitable and accessible CGEn community.

## References

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