

Building an Inclusive Research Environment:

An Action Plan for Mount Royal University's Canada Research Chairs Program

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Executive Summary

Mount Royal University (MRU) is committed to advancing equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) throughout its Canada Research Chairs (CRC) Program. This Action Plan has been developed in accordance with the Canada Research Chairs Program requirements and provides a strategic framework for strengthening equitable recruitment, support, and retention of CRCs while fostering an inclusive and supportive research environment.

The Action Plan is informed by a comprehensive review of MRU's CRC program, including an Employment Systems Review, Comparative Review, and Environmental Review. Together, these reviews examined institutional policies and governance, recruitment and nomination practices, chairholder experiences, researcher supports, and the broader research environment. Input was gathered through interviews, surveys, institutional data, policy analysis, and engagement with institutional stakeholders.

The reviews identified opportunities to strengthen institutional governance, embed equitable recruitment practices, enhance researcher supports, foster an inclusive research culture, and strengthen ongoing accountability and continuous improvement. They also highlighted the significant progress MRU has made as its CRC program has matured, with many institutional processes continuing to evolve alongside the university's growing research infrastructure. In response, the Action Plan identifies five key objectives:

- Transparent and Consistent CRC Governance
- Equitable Recruitment and Selection
- Researcher Support and Success
- Inclusive Research Culture and Retention
- Accountability, Monitoring, and Continuous Improvement

Together, these objectives establish a coordinated framework for strengthening institutional practices while recognizing the diverse needs of Faculties, disciplines, and research programs. The Action Plan is intended to serve as a living document, supporting ongoing institutional learning and continuous improvement as MRU continues to strengthen an equitable, inclusive, and sustainable research environment.

Institutional Context

Mount Royal University is a primarily undergraduate institution with a growing research enterprise and a relatively small Canada Research Chairs (CRC) allocation. As the university continues to expand its research capacity, the CRC program plays an important role in advancing institutional research priorities, strengthening research excellence, and attracting and retaining outstanding researchers.

Unlike larger research-intensive universities with extensive CRC portfolios, MRU's CRC program has developed incrementally over time. Early CRC appointments occurred during a period when many institutional processes, governance structures, and administrative supports were still emerging. As experience has grown, the university has continued to refine its recruitment processes, governance practices, researcher supports, and institutional coordination, reflecting a commitment to continuous learning and improvement.

The Action Plan recognizes that MRU's size and institutional context shape both the opportunities and challenges associated with implementing the CRC Program. As a teaching-focused institution, research supports must balance institutional capacity with the diverse needs of Faculties, disciplines, and research methodologies. Consistent with MRU's commitment to equity, the objective is not to provide identical supports across all contexts, but rather to establish transparent institutional principles while allowing sufficient flexibility to respond to differing research environments and program needs.

The Action Plan builds on the progress already achieved while identifying practical, sustainable opportunities to further strengthen equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility throughout the CRC program. Its focus is on embedding EDI not only within recruitment and nomination processes, but throughout the entire researcher experience—from governance and recruitment through onboarding, support, retention, and ongoing evaluation.

The Action Plan also reflects the CRC Program's commitment to equity, diversity, and inclusion and its expectations that participating institutions consider equity and diversity targets when managing their CRC allocations and put safeguards in place to minimize the potential impacts of unconscious bias in decision-making. These expectations provide an important foundation for MRU's ongoing efforts to strengthen equitable and inclusive practices across the CRC lifecycle.

The recommendations contained within the Action Plan reflect both the lived experiences shared through the review process and the recognition that many institutional practices have evolved considerably as MRU's CRC program has matured. Accordingly, the Action Plan is intended to support the next stage of the program's development by building on existing strengths while identifying opportunities for continued growth.

Methodology

The Action Plan was informed by a comprehensive institutional review of Mount Royal University's Canada Research Chairs (CRC) Program. The review was conducted between September 2025 and June 2026 and consisted of three complementary components: an Employment Systems Review, a Comparative Review, and an Environmental Review. Together, these reviews examined institutional policies, governance structures, recruitment and nomination practices, researcher supports, workplace culture, and the experiences of current CRCs and researchers.

Institutional Self-Assessment

The institutional self-assessment was led by the EDIA Training Specialist for Researchers within the Office of Research, Scholarship and Community Engagement (ORSCE), who coordinated the design and implementation of the review methodology, stakeholder engagement, data collection and analysis, synthesis of findings, and development of the Action Plan. Throughout the process, regular guidance and oversight were provided by the Associate Vice-President, Research, Scholarship and Community Engagement (AVP RSCE). The review also included ongoing consultation with the Director of Research and the Associate Vice-President, Community and Belonging (AVP CB), whose perspectives informed the interpretation of findings, the application of equity, diversity, inclusion, and accessibility principles, and the development of institutional actions. This collaborative approach ensured that the Action Plan was informed by multiple institutional perspectives while maintaining clear accountability for the review process.

Multiple sources of evidence were used to inform the review. These included individual interviews with institutional leaders, Canada Research Chairholders, faculty, research administrators, and other key stakeholders; anonymous faculty survey responses; institutional policies and procedures; collective agreements; CRC nomination documentation; demographic and institutional data; and reviews of relevant programs, supports, and accessibility initiatives. Findings were considered alongside the Canada Research Chairs Program's guidance on equitable recruitment, retention, and inclusive research environments.

Intersectional Approach

Consistent with the Canada Research Chairs Program guidance, the review sought to understand how researchers' experiences may differ across diverse identities and lived experiences. Given the relatively small number of Canada Research Chairholders and the

importance of protecting participant confidentiality, the review emphasized qualitative methods, including confidential interviews and anonymous survey responses, to explore the complexity and intersectionality of researchers' experiences. These approaches provided opportunities for participants to describe how factors such as gender, race, disability, caregiving responsibilities, career stage, neurodivergence, and other aspects of identity shaped their experiences within MRU's research environment.

While the sample size did not support meaningful quantitative disaggregation across all equity-deserving groups, the qualitative findings demonstrated that researchers did not experience institutional systems uniformly. Rather, participants described barriers and opportunities that reflected the intersection of multiple identities, lived experiences, and institutional contexts. These insights informed the development of institution-wide actions intended to strengthen equity, transparency, accessibility, and inclusion, while recognizing that future implementation should continue to be informed by more targeted engagement and ongoing data collection with members of the designated groups and other equity-deserving communities.

The review drew on multiple forms of data to identify recurring themes, understand institutional strengths and opportunities for improvement, and develop evidence-informed actions. Stakeholder engagement across the three review components ensured that the Action Plan was informed by a broad range of institutional perspectives and lived experiences. Findings from the three review components were synthesized to identify shared institutional priorities that form the foundation of the Action Plan.

Key Findings

The Employment Systems Review, Comparative Review, and Environmental Review collectively identified several cross-cutting areas for improvement that informed the development of the Action Plan. While each review examined different aspects of the Canada Research Chairs (CRC) Program, the findings consistently highlighted opportunities to strengthen institutional systems, enhance researcher support, and build on the progress MRU has made as its research infrastructure continues to evolve. The following sections outline the key findings.

Governance and Strategic Alignment

The reviews identified opportunities to strengthen transparency, communication, and shared understanding of CRC governance, including allocation, recruitment, renewal, and long-term planning. While governance structures and institutional processes have matured considerably over time, findings suggest that continued clarification of institutional roles, decision-making principles, and strategic priorities would further strengthen confidence in the fairness and consistency of CRC processes. Collectively, the evidence emphasizes the importance of

balancing shared institutional principles with sufficient flexibility to respond to the diverse contexts of Faculties, disciplines, and research programs. While governance structures and institutional processes have matured considerably over time, participants described differing understandings of allocation mechanisms, faculty roles, and post-award processes. Together, these findings suggest that clearer institutional guidance and shared governance processes would further strengthen confidence in the fairness, transparency, and sustainability of the CRC Program.

Equitable Recruitment and Recognition of Research Excellence

The review found that MRU has established many of the foundational elements of equitable recruitment, including unconscious bias training, structured committee processes, and equity considerations within recruitment activities. Opportunities remain to strengthen consistency in the application of these practices, broaden awareness of research opportunities, and ensure that diverse forms of research excellence are recognized throughout recruitment and nomination processes. The findings also suggest that equitable recruitment requires more than compliance with CRC Program requirements. Continued investment in committee capacity, institutional guidance, and recognition of diverse forms of research excellence will help embed equity throughout recruitment and nomination processes.

Researcher Supports and Institutional Capacity

Findings consistently demonstrated that successful CRC appointments depend on more than recruitment alone. Researcher success is supported by coordinated onboarding, mentorship, administrative assistance, research infrastructure, workload planning, and grant development throughout the CRC lifecycle. While many institutional supports are already in place, experiences varied across appointments and Faculties, highlighting opportunities to strengthen coordination, clarify expectations, and ensure that core supports are consistently available while remaining responsive to differing disciplinary contexts and research program needs. These findings suggest that strengthening researcher support should be viewed as an institutional capacity-building opportunity rather than solely a CRC support strategy.

Inclusive Research Culture and Researcher Experience

Across the reviews, participants emphasized the importance of fostering a research environment where researchers feel valued, supported, and able to contribute fully. Workload pressures, administrative complexity, accessibility, and opportunities for meaningful participation were identified as important influences on researchers' experiences of belonging

and long-term success. The findings suggest that strengthening inclusion requires attention not only to formal policies and representation, but also to the broader institutional culture, communication practices, and accessibility of research support. Interviews also suggest that long-term retention is influenced not only by workload and funding, but by researchers' sense of institutional support, recognition, and confidence that concerns can be raised and addressed constructively.

Continuous Learning and Program Maturity

The reviews highlight that MRU's CRC Program has continued to evolve alongside the university's expanding research enterprise. Many of the opportunities identified reflect the natural progression of a growing research program rather than gaps in institutional commitment. As recruitment, renewal, and retention processes become more established, there is an opportunity to continue refining institutional practices through ongoing monitoring, evidence-informed decision-making, and continuous improvement. The Action Plan is intended to support that next stage of development by building on existing strengths while identifying practical and sustainable opportunities for future growth. The findings demonstrate that meaningful progress in equity, diversity, and inclusion requires ongoing reflection, evaluation, and adaptation rather than one-time interventions.

Strategic Action Framework

The following Strategic Action Framework translates the findings of the Employment Systems Review, Comparative Review, and Environmental Review into a coordinated set of institutional objectives, actions, and indicators. Together, these actions are intended to strengthen equity, transparency, researcher support, and accountability across the Canada Research Chairs Program while remaining responsive to the evolving needs of MRU's research community.

Guiding Principle

Throughout the Action Plan, consistency should not be interpreted as uniformity. While MRU is committed to transparent governance, equitable decision-making, and shared institutional expectations, implementation should remain sufficiently flexible to respond to diverse Faculties, disciplines, research methodologies, and individual CRC programs. Equity is achieved not by providing identical supports in every context, but by ensuring that researchers have access to the resources and conditions to support success within their particular research environment.

Objective 1: Transparent and Consistent CRC Governance

Action: Strengthen transparency, consistency, and clarity across CRC allocation, nomination,

renewal, and retention processes.

Action	Lead	Timeline	Indicator
Develop and maintain a centralized CRC Process Guide outlining allocation, recruitment, nomination, renewal, and retention processes	AVP RSCE and ORSCE	Year 1	Guide developed and published
Establish standardized templates, timelines, and process documentation for CRC competitions and renewals	AVP RSCE, ORSCE + Associate/ Vice Deans Research	Year 1	Templates implemented institution-wide
Clarify institutional roles and responsibilities across faculties, ORSCE, and senior leadership	AVP RSCE	Year 1	Roles documented and communicated
Conduct annual review of CRC processes and lessons learned following competitions and renewals	AVP RSCE + Associate/ Vice Deans Research	Annual	Annual review completed and documented
Develop a multi-year CRC planning approach aligned with institutional priorities and CRC allocations	AVP RSCE + Provost	Years 1–2	Planning framework established

Objective 2: Equitable Recruitment and Selection

Action: Ensure CRC recruitment and nomination processes are fair, transparent, inclusive, and aligned with EDI principles.

Action	Lead	Timeline	Indicator
Maintain mandatory unconscious bias and equitable hiring training for CRC	AVP RSCE + Office of	Ongoing	Training completion

committee members	Community and Belonging		tracked
Standardize use of inclusive position advertisements and accommodation language	ORSCE, Associate/ Vice Deans Research + HR	Ongoing	Standard language incorporated into postings
Monitor applicant pool diversity at key recruitment stages and adjust outreach strategies where appropriate	AVP RSCE + Search Committees	Ongoing	Diversity monitoring process established
Develop guidance for evaluating non-traditional, Indigenous, community-engaged, and interdisciplinary research contributions	Office of Indigenization and Decolonization + Academic Leadership	Years 1–2	Guidance document developed
Strengthen conflict-of-interest awareness and disclosure processes within CRC competitions	ORSCE, Associate/Vice Deans Research + HR	Year 1	COI guidance updated and communicated

Objective 3: Researcher Success & Institutional Capacity

Action: Strengthen the institutional supports that enable CRCs and other researchers to build successful and sustainable research programs.

Action	Lead	Timeline	Indicator
Develop a structured CRC onboarding process for new Chairholders	Faculties	Year 1	Onboarding process implemented
Establish a CRC mentorship model, including internal and/or external	Faculties	Years 1–2	Mentorship opportunities

mentors where appropriate			available to all CRCs
Improve coordination of administrative, financial, compliance, and grant-development supports for CRCs	ORSCE	Ongoing	Improved processes
Develop shared resources and guidance documents to support grant development, research administration, and research planning	ORSCE	Years 1–2	Resource repository established
Identify opportunities to reduce administrative burden associated with CRC activities and research management	HR + Finance + Faculties	Years 2–3	Administrative process review completed

Objective 4: Inclusive Research Culture and Retention

Action: Foster an inclusive research environment where CRCs and researchers feel supported, valued, and able to thrive by strengthening institutional culture, accessibility, and belonging.

Action	Lead	Timeline	Indicator
Conduct periodic environmental review activities to assess researcher experiences and workplace climate	AVP RSCE + Office of Community and Belonging	Every 2–3 years	Environmental review completed
Promote awareness of institutional EDI, accessibility, Indigenous engagement, and researcher support resources	ORSCE + Campus Partners	Ongoing	Resource inventory maintained and communicated
Strengthen opportunities for CRC networking, peer connection, and community-building	AVP RSCE or delegate	Ongoing	Networking opportunities offered

			annually
Develop retention planning discussions as part of CRC lifecycle management	AVP Research + Deans	Ongoing	Retention considerations incorporated into annual CRC planning
Explore mechanisms to support CRCs experiencing significant career, caregiving, accessibility, or life-transition challenges	Faculties	Years 2–3	Support options reviewed and documented

Objective 5: Accountability, Monitoring, and Continuous Improvement

Action: Monitor progress, assess outcomes, and ensure ongoing accountability for CRC EDI commitments.

Action	Lead	Timeline	Indicator
Collect and monitor CRC self-identification and representation data in accordance with CRC Program requirements	ORSCE	Ongoing	Data monitored and reported annually
Monitor participation in CRC processes, training, and support initiatives	AVP RSCE	Ongoing	Annual monitoring completed
Conduct periodic review of CRC-related policies, procedures, and supports to identify improvement opportunities	AVP RSCE + ORSCE	Every 2–3 years	Review completed
Publish annual progress updates on implementation of the CRC EDI Action Plan, in accordance with Tri-Agency requirements.	AVP RSCE	Annual	Progress report published

Refresh the CRC EDI Action Plan every 5 years, informed by ongoing consultation and data collection	AVP RSCE + Institutional Stakeholders	Every 5 years	Updated Action Plan completed

Implementation and Monitoring

Implementation of the Action Plan will be led by the AVP RSCE and coordinated through the Office of Research, Scholarship and Community Engagement in collaboration with institutional leadership, Faculties, Human Resources, and other administrative partners, as appropriate. While individual actions have identified leads and timelines, successful implementation will require shared institutional responsibility and ongoing collaboration across the university. 12

Progress will be monitored through regular review of action items, institutional data, and feedback from researchers and stakeholders. Indicators identified within the Strategic Action Framework will support ongoing assessment of implementation, while periodic review of institutional policies, recruitment practices, and researcher experiences will help ensure that the Action Plan remains responsive.

Recognizing that MRU's CRC Program will continue to evolve, the Action Plan is intended to function as a living document. Progress will be reviewed regularly, and actions may be refined as institutional priorities, research capacity, and CRC Program requirements continue to develop.