

SFU School of Resource Management and Environmental Studies
Social Equity Strategy Plan, 2025-2030

Prepared by REM Executive Committee

December 2025

The SFU School of Resource and Environmental Management is located on Burnaby Mountain, and we respectfully acknowledge that these are unceded traditional territories of the Coast Salish peoples, including the sə́lilwə́tał (Tseil-Waututh), kʷikʷə́łəm (Kwikwetlem), Sḵw̓x̓w̓ú7mesh Úxwumixw (Squamish) and xʷmə́θkʷə́yəm (Musqueam) Nations. REM teaching, research, and community outreach activities further take place in localities throughout the world, often in former or current colonized territories, and we extend our acknowledgement and respect to these places and Peoples.

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What is social equity in REM?

Social equity is used in this document to comprise three interrelated concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion. These apply throughout our society in many different ways, but in the context of REM, we define them as follows.

Equity exists when responsibilities, resources, and opportunities are distributed fairly and justly among all group members and done so in a manner that works to resolve historical and current disadvantages for under-represented and marginalized groups.

Diversity refers to a broad range of human differences, including but not limited to ethnicity, race, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, socio-economic position, ability, age, religion, and national origin. Further, as an academic institution, we are informed by diverse knowledge-sharing practices and ways of thought.

Inclusion exists when all community members are recognized, respected, and welcomed, as well as enabled to freely engage with, question, and shape the community's activities. A critical aspect of inclusion is being mindful of the impact that differences in power and privilege can have on perceptions, experiences, relationships, and freedom of expression.

Purpose of this document

This document provides a strategic roadmap to support understanding and initiatives related to social equity within REM. The document does not replace the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) strategies of Simon Fraser University (SFU) or the Faculty of the Environment (FENV) but is intended to work with them to guide more specific actions that can be taken proactively at the REM Department level. An overview of the SFU and FENV EDI guidelines is included below.

The REM strategy also highlight past equity actions undertaken before social equity goals were formally adopted. These will be important for informing proposed actions based on the perspectives of REM staff, faculty, and students. Social equity goals do not have an “endpoint,” but we do suggest specific benchmarks to be evaluated at different points within the five-year timeline of this document.

REM positionality

The SFU School of Resource and Environmental Management is one of Canada's leading research and teaching institutions and is particularly renowned for its explicitly interdisciplinary approach to the very wide range of topics and geographies that comprise the REM scope.

A unifying thread is that all of our work continuously engages directly and indirectly with issues of social equity and environmental justice. Our position is that considering aspects of social equity in our work is expected in any academic pursuit and should also be expected within our departmental processes and relationships.

Although we are all part of an institution rooted in science-based methods, REM students, staff, and faculty come from many different backgrounds. We recognize that this diversity of perspectives, ways of knowing, and methodological approaches can be a challenge but also an opportunity for us as a department to find inclusive ways to arrive at common principles on social equity goals.

SFU social equity strategy

While the purpose of this document is to outline REM-specific perspectives and actions towards social equity goals, it is important to situate our department within university-wide efforts. SFU recently launched the 'Equity Compass,' a strategic plan to advance equity, diversity, and inclusion goals throughout the university:

https://www.sfu.ca/content/dam/sfu/vp-people-equity-inclusion/Equity_compass_short.pdf

The plan includes five strategic goals and 11 objectives under a five-year timeline (2023-2028). From the SFU Equity Compass:

Respect, Inclusion and Belonging Culture & Structures All SFU community and constituents experience respectful engagement and have a strong sense of belonging.

Accountability, Leadership and Governance We implement clear coordination of EDI-related work across the institution, with appropriate allocation of resources.

Our accountability measures move us beyond a benevolence/goodwill/performative approach to equity.

Education and Capacity-Building SFU community are provided with EDI education, capacity-building activities and access to resources so that EDI becomes an integral component of their learning, teaching, research and work. We are known as a Centre of Excellence for inclusive excellence research and education.

Employment and Pay Equity We have equitable employment practices in place for all aspects of the employment relationship, including recruitment, hiring, succession-planning, promotion, performance management, retention and exit.

Equity Data SFU regularly collects data to support equitable and accountable decision-making and measure progress toward fulfilling institutional commitments to EDI.

REM Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion scoping survey

https://qfreeaccountssjc1.az1.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9SplkzsmgwqDgPQ

Background

REM began the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion Committee when MRM students initiated discussions on the topic through department roundtables and conversations with the REM Director. These initial meetings paved the way for a comprehensive workshop to showcase concepts, ideas, and solutions with the entire REM student cohort. Students presented a first workshop that aimed to foster a platform for participants to share their experiences and aspirations for enhancing equity, diversity, and inclusion in REM; this has now become part of REM 801, a course requirement for all first-year MRM students. Encouraged by the positive response and engagement from the REM community, the REM Executive Committee (REM Exec) established a formal committee.

The REM EDI Committee was formed to address and support social equity initiatives within the department, reporting to and under the overall direction of the REM Exec. Terms of reference for were approved by the REM Exec and include the overall

objectives and make-up of the committee itself, with faculty, staff, and students represented and equally considered in decisions.

With the overall aim of collaboratively creating a REM EDI vision and strategy that reflects the perspectives of all within the department, an initial action of the EDI Committee and REM Exec was to design, debate, and deploy a first survey related to social equity issues as perceived by those currently within REM. Surveys were entirely anonymous and all questions were optional. As stated in the survey introduction, only Irina Borgos (REM PhD student) and Andrés Cisneros-Montemayor (Assistant Professor and EDI Committee Co-Chair) accessed individual (anonymized) survey questions for the sole purpose of preparing summaries and analyzing results.

Overall, 45 surveys were sufficiently completed and included in summary results. Based on surveys that indicated the respondent's roles within REM included staff, MRM and PhD students, and faculty, responses are roughly representative of the overall makeup of REM. This survey did not target undergraduate students, but this could be expanded in future iterations.

Summary results

Survey questions addressed three overall aspects and summary results are presented here. The purpose of this initial survey was exploratory, so we caution that no specific actions or possible individual equity issues were intended to be singled out.

- 1. Identity of the respondent.** Many respondents chose not to answer these questions, and at this early stage of our work it was likely unnecessary to include these questions. Still, increasing diversity in all areas is a key goal of REM and future work should design other ways of appreciating progress and highlighting any equity issues related to identity of individuals or groups. To avoid any risk of identifying respondents, these results are not included here but could be further (and very carefully) examined if necessary.
- 2. Experiences with EDI gaps in REM.** The largest share of respondents (67%) reported that they had noticed or experienced no (40%) or little social equity

gaps in REM, with only 9% reporting that they had ‘very much’ identified such issues, mainly in admissions. Upon careful deliberation, it is the opinion of the EDI Committee that this likely reflects a recognized need to increase diversity of individuals in REM rather than inequity within REM, as respondents would have already been part of the department and yet mostly did not indicate any subsequent issues in other areas. It is also not possible to directly separate between respondents having heard about/noticed versus directly experiencing social equity gaps. This issue was discussed with the REM Executive Committee and it was decided to use this less specific phrasing to encourage respondents to share any experiences in this first exercise.

3. Perspectives on key barriers and opportunities for advancing social equity.

One of the most mentioned barriers for advancing social equity goals was the historical lack of discussion on this topic. Several respondents noted that equity-related discussions can still be uncomfortable for some to have, and some may not be sure how to have them even when they do want to engage with the topic. As subsequently noted in responses, there is a clear opportunity to foster more open discussions by encouraging equity-related education and dialogue constantly and throughout different areas in REM (one-on-one, within labs, at the department level, etc.).

To paraphrase one response, social equity work is central to the mission of REM because our work is about engaging with resource users and with interdisciplinary perspectives on the environment. Equity, diversity and inclusion are essential aspects of this academic work and should therefore be reflected in our own relationships within the department.

Ongoing and future actions: Student experience, research excellence, community engagement, internal collaboration

Social equity (and individual concepts of equity, diversity, and inclusion) goals are now much more freely expressed throughout academic, public, and private institutions. However, we must be aware that the explicit adoption of social equity

goals has also engendered backlash. In academia, this mainly involves the argument that social equity goals can lead to the exclusion of individuals who are considered to be historically privileged on the basis of their identity, to the detriment of ‘merit-based’ selection. Individuals from historically marginalized identities who attain opportunities can themselves be negatively impacted by the perception that they were objectively less skilled or deserving and were selected because of their personal identity. These individuals may be furthermore pressured to act as public “faces” of institutional social equity goals. The REM strategy acknowledges and aims to transparently discuss how to avoid these risks.

To be clear, the assumption that social equity goals could lead to lower academic excellence within institutions runs contrary to evidence that increased diversity leads to better academic outcomes. This includes traditional metrics of academic success, but also improved wellness and belonging within academic units and the production of contextualized research that better informs community needs. However, these outcomes can indeed not be expected through a performative approach to social equity or one based purely on identity-based metrics.

Our REM Social Equity Strategy therefore adopts a guiding framework that follows our broader Strategic Plan and centers our department within a much broader context including community partners, academic research fields, the university as a whole, and respective sources of funding; these all influence equity goals and outcomes (Figure 1). The overall goal is for all REM members to feel welcomed and included.

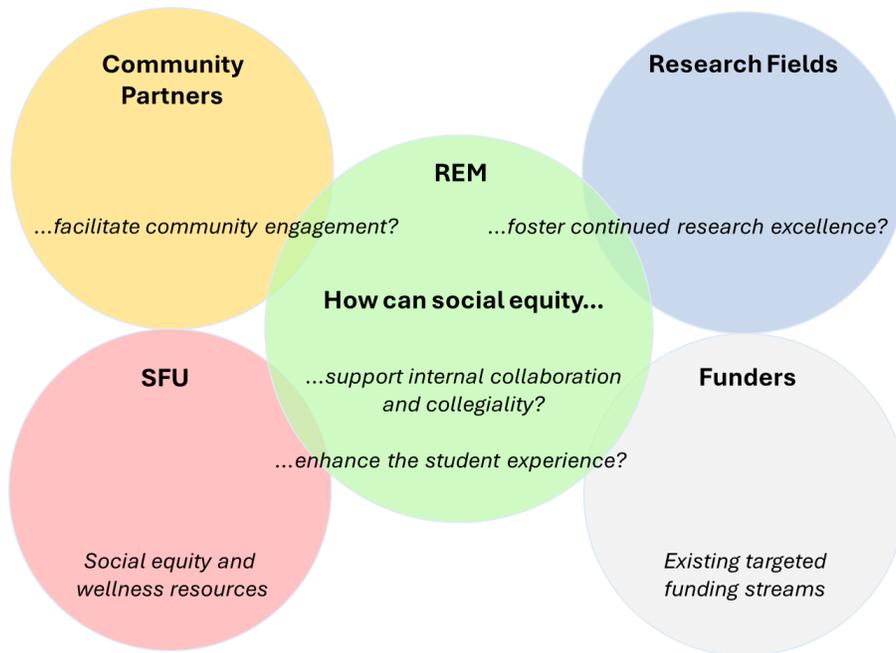


Figure 1. Guiding framework for considering ongoing and future actions to support social equity in REM. Questions in italics cut across key corresponding actors, but we propose that all actors must work together on all areas.

We note that pursuing social equity goals can be done for fundamental reasons—they are the right thing to do—and/or instrumental reasons—we benefit by doing them. These different reasons often lead to similar actions, but we acknowledge that this may not necessarily be the case; this is something that should be considered in any of our proposed actions.

With this in mind, and taking an admittedly instrumental approach to possible actions to be undertaken by REM at this stage, we guide our discussion by posing four questions: How can social equity enhance the student experience? How can social equity foster continued research excellence? How can social equity facilitate community engagement? How can social equity support internal collaboration and collegiality?

Proposed actions were informed by EDI Committee discussions, individual engagement with REM members, and the most recent REM Strategic Plan discussions. These are listed below under approximate corresponding themes, though there are of course many overlaps and these are not intended to be siloed.

How can social equity enhance the student experience?

- Add social equity content to REM website. This can include this strategy plan and communication of EDI committee participation opportunities and REM EDI initiatives for students, but also a broader list of actions already taken within REM, FENV, and SFU. This includes, for example, existing scholarships, need-based accommodations and how to access them, etc.
- Promote available social equity training and cultural exchange opportunities (or help create them, if necessary) for REM members. This could include making a social equity training Canvas module mandatory for incoming students, and promoting student events surrounding diverse holidays and celebrations.
- Adopting specific admission requirements for Indigenous and other marginalized student groups. This should be carefully discussed within a broader equity-focused review of our admissions process to make sure that we have optional resources in place to mitigate more specific equity challenges (such as individual's different levels of past learning/working opportunities) to set any student up for academic success. In some cases barriers may be known but outside the purview of REM, which will require liaising with other offices.
- Monitoring demographics of new applicants, enrolled students, and faculty (but without targeting any kind of 'quotas' thereof).
- Continued reflection and sharing of decolonizing curriculum. Related to this, we could encourage that required readings in REM courses include diverse voices and ways of knowing.
- Create avenues for regular wellness check-ins for students outside of the traditional academic supervisor hierarchy. A challenge here is to establish this in a way that there are meaningful options for addressing issues if they arise.

How can social equity foster continued research excellence?

- Continue to highlight diversity elements in future job ads and make sure they are promoted among diverse organizations so that they know that their constituents are encouraged for SFU/REM positions.
- Undertake a dedicated effort to identify research funding sources that can specifically align better with equity-focused research and more diverse partnerships and researchers. These can include Canadian funders, but also external ones that may help with international research collaborations.

- Continue to evaluate and reflect on our hiring and TPC criteria, particularly with respect to departmental “fit,” how we define research excellence within REM, and our expectations of scholarship and research involving Indigenous Peoples and other specific groups (as is commonly advertised in hiring plans).
- Consider diversity in our Adjunct Faculty nominations and create a space for new Adjunct Faculty to introduce themselves to all of REM either in person or virtually.
- Continue to make honorariums available for guest speakers from marginalized groups. This may be helped by creating a joint REM fund and make these honoraria standard and default to address the possibility of guests who may not feel empowered to ask for compensation.
- Promote local-based research and local partnerships at REM more widely through SFU channels. This could include the Equity Compass office itself, in collaboration with FENV communications and outreach.
- Continue to build social equity modules and considerations into REM courses and associated graduate research goals.

How can social equity support community engagement?

- Incorporate more descriptive TPC content re: recognition for community engaged research and also with traditionally excluded populations
- Direct outreach, relationship building with First Nations
- Indigenous advisory council?
- Reach out to organizations in the community that are already working in this space and create partnerships where REM can address research and education-related needs.
- Bring in social equity experts from the community as guest speakers (with honorarium) for classes , talks, etc.
- This could include integrating EDI considerations in group projects involving community partners.

How can social equity help internal collaboration and collegiality?

- Create social equity training opportunities and expand and promote REM Canvas social equity page with more resources (see above for related actions).
- Establish more formal guidelines for the EDI Committee, including a REM undergraduate student representative.

- Deploy REM social equity survey every 2 years, and design this accordingly to monitor key trends but make space for new questions and themes as necessary.
- Create more spaces for faculty and inter-lab engagement. This can be seminar series, weekly coffee breaks, or more informal sessions. These could potentially be linked to diverse holidays or celebrations (see above).
- Build from REM 698 experience to have more ongoing joint trips for faculty, students, and staff to interact. This could be done by helping promote existing student initiatives.
- Create or engage with existing mentorship programs for students, staff, and faculty to provide supportive space. This may overlap well with existing models of cross-departmental mentorship.
- Engage with existing inter-departmental learning opportunities regarding social equity such as sharing best practices in research, committees, teaching, finances, virtual meetings, admissions, committee creation and guidelines, and faculty renewal. This could be integrated with the duties of EDI Committee members.

Social equity and wellness resources for students, staff, and faculty

As part of the formal process of adopting social equity goals within REM, we first identified existing university resources related to social equity and wellness for students, staff, and faculty. Three key resources are listed here with descriptions paraphrased from their own sites. More resources and further information can be found through SFU's office for Organizational Health and dedicated sites on Wellness (<https://www.sfu.ca/human-resources/rtw-dm/health-promotion.html>) and Mental Health (https://www.sfu.ca/human-resources/rtw-dm/Mental_Health_Information.html).

The SFU Equity Office is dedicated to promoting, leading, coordinating, and supporting efforts to transform the SFU experience through integrating progressive people practices that centre equity. This involves turning the university's values of equity and belonging into tangible actions as outlined in the Equity Compass. <https://www.sfu.ca/edi/about.html#equity-compass>

The Centre for Accessible Learning (CAL) facilitates disability-related accommodations and support to create a fair and equitable academic experience

for students with disabilities at SFU. We work with students, instructors and other units on campus to explore ways to remove disability-related barriers in all aspects of university life. <https://www.sfu.ca/students/accessible-learning.html>

Employee and Family Assistance Plan provides confidential, professional assistance and counselling for employees, their spouses and dependents. The University retains the services of an external program provider, Homewood Health, who are staffed with certified counsellors and registered coaches. <https://www.sfu.ca/human-resources/efap.html>

Two-year benchmarks

- REM website includes a site for EDI-related progress, resources, and goals.
- Internal process for responding to social equity-related issues is agreed upon and communicated to all REM members.
- In collaboration with SFU EDI office, REM is able to assess our specific progress on the five Equity Compass goals and corresponding indicators.
- Updated surveys on social equity in REM are deployed every two years as a check-in and used to inform subsequent strategy and actions.