

# Initiative on Open and Respectful Dialogue

IMPLEMENTATION GROUP  
FINAL REPORT







## INTRODUCTION

In November 2019 an event on the York Keele campus, hosted by a York student club, attracted protest led by another student group along with counter protests. In the aftermath of the event, York University President Rhonda Lenton established a Working Group co-chaired by Vice-President Equity, People and Culture, Sheila Cote-Meek, and Vice-Provost Students, Lucy Fromowitz. mandate was to review the event, including the actions by the hosting student club, protesters, counter-protesters and York University Administration's policies, preparedness, and response. President Lenton wanted to ensure that future events, properly balanced, open dialogue, and freedom of expression without repeating the problematic elements and behaviours of the November 2019 event.<sup>1</sup>

The Working Group was tasked with facilitating an independent external review, evaluating relevant policies and procedures, and making any necessary recommendations where needed. Further the Working Group would recommend any educational or engagement initiatives in support of open and respectful dialogue within the York community.

The independent external review was led by Thomas Cromwell (retired Justice of the Supreme Court of Canada) who delivered his review (the "[Cromwell Report](#)") on April 30, 2020. The Working Group prepared and delivered its [report in May 2020](#) and recommended that the President accept and adopt all the recommendations included in the "Cromwell Report". In addition, that Working Group made its own recommendations which complimented and supported the Cromwell Report recommendations.

President Lenton accepted the Working Group's report and recommendations (the "WG recommendations") including those set out in the Cromwell Report (the "CR recommendations"). President Lenton then created the Implementation Group (the "IG"), led by Vice-President Equity,

---

<sup>1</sup> Information about the Initiative on Open and Respectful Dialogue including communications to the committee can be found [here](#)



People and Culture, Sheila Cote-Meek, and Vice-Provost Students, Lucy Fromowitz, to oversee the implementation of the recommendations across the university. Their work was supported by York staff working in areas responsible for the policies/procedures/guidelines identified in the Cromwell Report and/or the Working Group Final Report.

Immediately following the events of November 2019, York University reiterated the four guiding principles which all groups and individual members of the York community are expected to follow. These principles were an important guide to the Implementation Group.

**WE RESPECT THE RIGHT TO FREE SPEECH AND THE FREE EXCHANGE OF IDEAS:** York is committed to the fundamental values of free expression, free inquiry and respect for genuine diversity of thought and opinion. It is the right of all community members and invited guests to express their views within the law and without fear of intimidation or harassment.

**SAFETY IS FUNDAMENTAL:** Every member of the York community must be and feel safe on our campuses. Students, faculty including contract faculty, and staff have the right to fully participate in all facets of university life without harassment, intimidation, threats, disruption or acts of violence.

**WE HAVE NO TOLERANCE FOR DISCRIMINATION:** Targeting any member of the York community based on their race, religion, national origin, or any other identified characteristic is unacceptable and will never be tolerated.

**WE ARE ALL RESPONSIBLE:** Every group and individual member of the York community must uphold these principles. There is a collective and individual responsibility to protect the rights of every member of the York community to a safe environment in which ideas can be freely exchanged.

The IG began its work in June 2020 and reported quarterly on its activities until the end of March 2022. Those reports, posted on the [President's Initiative on Open and Respectful Dialogue](#) webpage, provide valuable insight into the activities undertaken by York University to implement the CR and WG recommendations.

The work of the IG focused on addressing recommendations related to the following themes:

- community safety
- creating/revising/updating policies, procedures, regulations, and guidelines identified as being related to or having impacted the events of November 2019
- creating/revising/updating educational trainings and workshops to support free speech, and open and respectful dialogue

---

## COMMUNITY SAFETY

There are several recommendations related to Community Safety operating procedures which overlap and complement changes to the Temporary Use of University Space Regulation (TUUS). At the onset, the IWG was tasked to consider whether York should have some members of Community Safety trained and sworn in as special constables. It was determined that York would not proceed with this recommendation. The IG notes that York University is currently undertaking a [Security Services Review](#), which is also a commitment and action identified in the University's Action Plan on Black Inclusion, following consultations with members of York University's Black community. Central considerations to the review process will be anti-racism, justice, equity, diversity, and inclusion. The review will take a critical and holistic approach to enhancing safety and security at York to address real issues and concerns and establish an alternative security services model. While not directly related to the recommendations reviewed by the IG it is complementary and will have positive impacts on how security is deployed at future events, including events where protests are likely to take place.

In addressing the CR and WG recommendations directly, Community Safety engaged in a full review of its Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to address recommendations related to pre-event engagement with event and protest organizers, re-enforcing York's responsibility for safety during events and event risk assessments. The revised SOP was completed, and training was implemented for all staff to become familiar with the revised procedures.

In response to WG recommendations regarding the actions of specific individual(s) who attended the November 2019 event (WG Rec. 4 and 5) Community Safety prepared a Notice of Trespass under the Trespass to Property Act and will provide a copy to the individual should they return to campus, or a current location is obtained.





---

## POLICIES, PROCEDURES, REGULATIONS AND GUIDELINES

A key component of the CR and WG recommendations was the need for York University to review its policies, procedures, regulations, and guidelines that related to, or intersected with, the November 2019 event. In some cases, entirely new policies were drafted, in other cases comprehensive revisions were integrated and in others only minor adjustments were required. Policies, Regulations, Procedures and Guidelines are now in place that inform University decisions in a more comprehensive way, with a more developed policy infrastructure related to student events. The IG focused on the following:

- **Postering Guideline**
- **York University Student Club Recognition Rules**
- **Policy on Human Rights**
- **Temporary Use of University Space Policy and Procedures**
- **Presidential Regulation 4**

The quarterly reports provide details on the actions taken in relation to each policy. Highlights include:

- **Postering Policy and Procedures** (previously a guideline) was reviewed and revised. Community consultation was sought to elicit feedback on the draft policy and procedures. Development and delivery of training to community members was provided and is incorporated as part of the annual training for student clubs.
- **York University Student Club Recognition Rules** were reviewed and, where necessary, amended to strengthen student club accountability. Yearly student club leadership training was enhanced to support better engagement and understanding of the rules. The IG feels that the updated regulations provide greater clarity to students on how student governance is structured and what responsibilities they have to their constituents.
- **Human Right Policy** was drafted (replacing the decades old “Racism Policy”) and community consultation was sought to elicit feedback. An important inclusion in the policy are the procedures to address complaints.
- **Temporary Use of University Space (TUUS) Regulation (previously policy) and Guidelines (previously procedure)** were extensively reviewed and, where needed, redrafted to align with the CR and WG recommendations. Community consultation was also sought to elicit feedback on the revisions. The redrafted regulation was reviewed and adopted by the Board of Governors at its June 2022 meeting. The guidelines were approved by the Vice-President Finance and Administration. The IG believes that there are now better articulated event application and review processes, provision for increased engagement with applicants and increased transparency in application assessment and decision-making.
- **Regulation Regarding Student Organizations** (formerly Presidential Regulation 4) was also redrafted and open to a lengthy period of community consultation and feedback. The final version was passed by the Board of Governors in March 2022 with an implementation date of January 2023



---

## EDUCATION INITIATIVES

We have developed much deeper insights into how conflict can arise on our campuses, and we appreciate more than ever the importance of ongoing education and training around its prevention, and where necessary, resolution. Significant efforts have been made since the November 2019 event to engage in educational workshops and trainings in response to the CR and WG recommendations. Below is a summary of the work to date, ongoing collaborations, and future plans.

The Freedom of Expression Education Team, a collaboration between the Centre for Student Community & Leadership Development (SCLD), the Centre for Human Rights, Equity, and Inclusion (CHREI) and Division of Students communications staff, designed, developed, and launched a range of educational initiatives to aid students in event planning and to support their understanding about how to engage in discussions around freedom of expression. This team developed several educational workshops, videos, guides, and toolkits promoting strategies to navigate challenging conversations, emphasize the importance of respecting personhood during potentially polarizing conversations, and illustrate the principles and parameters of free expression at York University. Grounded in the university's commitments to respect the right to free speech and the free exchange of ideas, the education team worked to implement the recommendations made by independent reviewer, the Honourable Thomas A. Cromwell C.C., including developing educational resources for hosting successful events, programs promoting the cultivation of inclusive environments, how to engage in respectful dialogue, and understanding the principles and parameters of free expression at York University.

SCLD and CHREI developed and implemented three new workshops, ““Dialogue Across Difference,” “Allyship and Inclusion,” and “The Ecology of Allyship.” The new workshops aim to support both an increased understanding of complex issues around identity and social location, as well as to enhance skills of promoting belonging, valuing difference, and communicating effectively. Specifically, the Allyship workshops are foundational and challenge participants to understand their own role in supporting change without reproducing the very power dynamics they purport to undo, whilst the Dialogue workshop scaffolds the foundational learning by providing participants with practical tools to engage in challenging conversations with compassion, equanimity, and an appreciation of the breadth of human experience. These workshops are included as part of the [REDI series through the Centre for Human Rights Equity and Inclusion](#) and an abbreviated peer-delivered version of the Dialogue Across Difference workshop was included in both 2021 and 2022 Orientation Week leader training and the newly-created Student Organizations Conference for elected student leaders of recognized student clubs at York University.

Alongside new workshops, an [Event Resource Website](#) and [Freedom of Expression for Student Organization Events Website](#) were developed to outline event planning best practices, support student event planners to better understand freedom of speech and expression at York University, what it is, what its limits are, and considerations for promising practices for a safe and accessible event experience. The [Event Resource Website](#) links to a variety of internal university event resources and includes a downloadable event index that supports the event planning process and provides information on common practices relating to areas such as accessibility, inclusivity, and risk management developed by SCLD. This critical resource emphasises personal and community safety and outlines common planning practices, reflects on different forms of protest, and outlines the limits regarding freedom of expression at York University. The Freedom of Expression for Student Organization Events Website



supports student event planners to better understand freedom of speech and expression at York University: what it is, what its limits are, and considerations for promising practices for a safe and accessible event experience. This website includes a downloadable guide to freedom of expression and includes four short videos that guides students through four key areas:

- a. Defining Freedom of Speech (Expression) at York University
- b. Limitations to Freedom of Expression at York University
- c. Offensive and Controversial Expression:
- d. The Right to Protest and the Limitation

With support from the Glendon translation team and the Division of Students communications staff, the [Freedom of Expression for Student Organization Events Website](#), Freedom of Expression Video Series, and visual guide to freedom of expression for student organization events are available to the York Community in English and French.

Finally, SCLD and CHREI developed interactive case studies that provide an in-depth exploration of community impact, proactive event planning, and considerations surrounding offensive expression at events. Tested in consultation with student leaders from the Social Association at York University (SAYU), and the [Student Representative Roundtable \(SRR\)](#) the case studies are used as pedagogical tools at for student leader development and was the culminating activity of the Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion stream of the [SPARK: Winter Leadership Summit](#) in February 2022. In May 2022, SCLD and CHREI co-presented about their work on the Guide to Freedom of Expression and Interactive Case Studies at the Canadian Association of College and University Student Services conference.

As part of our commitment to continual improvement, a multi-year plan outlining the schedule of workshops, case studies, communication campaigns, assessment, and review period for all event and freedom of expression resources is available through SCLD.

SCLD and CHREI's partnership in developing educational resources for student organizations will be introducing a plan to develop new education and compliance resources to support student organization understand and prepare for the [Regulation Regarding Student Organizations](#) to come into effect January 2023.





---

## CONCLUSION

While this report is the final report for the Implementation Group, it does not mean that the work will not continue. In fact, the resultant work will require continued attention and vigilance. With much of the CR and WG recommendations implemented, the work remains ongoing and as such transfers to operational teams upon the dissolution of the IG. The work of education with the student body is a continuous process, and so the IG sees this report and its dissolution not as an endpoint, but a reflection of the University's ongoing commitment to supporting open and respectful dialogues. The values of accountability and transparency can help us move forward as a community, and the IG sees this ongoing work in alignment to York's values, including decolonizing, equity, diversity and inclusion. We hope that we have laid the foundation for championing students' ability to embrace different perspectives and that our work has reinforced an understanding that through education and students learning across difference, this is how we will achieve the goals of the IG. The IG believes that there is reason to hope that students will now find it easier to know what is expected of their organizations moving forward.

The IG is thankful to all those who participated in helping to implement the recommendations from drafting policies, working through operational issues to designing and delivering educational workshops and trainings. Thank you to the community for participating in consultations over the past two years. The insights shared were invaluable and contributed to more thoughtful outcomes that reflect York's values.