Building Communities of Practice for EDI & Outreach

Half-Day Symposium for the Canadian Association of Physicists (CAP) Congress

Wednesday May 29th, 8:30am-12:15pm.

(Image generated by Midjourney AI)

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Why Unconferencing, and why Communities of Practice?

What is an unconference experience?

Unconferencing is loosely a participant-driven meeting or event where the agenda is set by the attendees rather than predetermined by organizers. Unlike traditional conferences where sessions are pre-planned, unconferences emphasize the principles of self-organization, collaboration, and open dialogue (Billsberry et al. 2013; Budd et al. 2015; Ross et al. 2021).

Key principles for unconferencing can include:

- ***Participant-Driven*** *– Attendees propose session topics, discussions, workshops, or activities based on their interests, expertise, or questions. The agenda is typically created at the beginning of the event through a collaborative process such as open space technology or post-it-voting.*
- ***Flexibility and Adaptability*** *– Unconferences allow for spontaneous scheduling and adjustments to the agenda based on the interests and needs of participants. Sessions can be added, merged, or canceled as the event unfolds.*
- ***Informal Atmosphere*** *– Unconferences often take place in casual settings that encourage interaction and networking among participants. Formalities such as traditional presentation formats and strict schedules are minimized in favor of more relaxed and dynamic interactions.*
- ***Active Participation*** *– Attendees are encouraged to actively engage in sessions by sharing their experiences, asking questions, and contributing to discussions. The emphasis is on collaboration, peer learning, and knowledge sharing, instead of passive consumption of information.*

- ***Community Building*** *– Unconferences foster a sense of community among participants by creating opportunities for networking, relationship-building, and collaboration beyond the formal sessions. Attendees are encouraged to connect with like-minded individuals, share resources, and continue conversations beyond the event itself.)*
- ***Adjusting Our Expectations*** *– It's okay not to know exactly what attendees will want to talk about, or know the outcomes of the event. The key with an unconferencing event is to be prepared but flexible, and to ditch expectations while letting go of controlling the experience for others.*

What is a community of practice?

Utilized by several disciplines and cross-disciplinary networks, communities of practice are formed by people who engage in a process of collective learning in shared domains, professions, common interests, and passions. These folks come together to learn from one another, solve problems, and develop expertise in their area of interest.

Key principles for communities of practice can include:

- ***A Sense of Belonging*** *– Communities of practice are often characterized by a sense of belonging and identity among members. At the same time, we can celebrate diversity of experiences in these learnings.*
- ***Openness to Learning and Unlearning*** *– Learning in a community of practice can happen through both formal and informal means. Members share tacit knowledge, experiences, and insights through conversations, storytelling, mentoring, and collaborative problem solving.*
- ***Mutual Engagement*** *– communities of practice actively engage with one another and contribute to the collective learning of a community. Participation is voluntary, and members are*

motivated by a desire to learn, collaborate, and contribute to the community's goals.

- ***Shared Resources*** *– Communities of Practice share and create shared resources such as articles, case studies, tools, templates, and best (wise) practices to support the professional development and learning within a community.*
- ***Knowledge management, not knowledge keeping*** *– Communities of practice play a vital role in knowledge management, organizational learning, and professional development by facilitating an exchange of expertise, fostering innovation, and building social capital amongst members. This knowledge should be open, without barriers, and is not owned by anyone in the group (albeit credit and references are always needed to point to intellectual contributions).*
- ***Geography Matters*** *– Although there is a great desire to often immediately implement new and inspiring ideas, it is a best practice to ensure that you locate ideas/actions within specific geographic context and histories to appropriately bring others' ideas/experiences to your own space.*

What can physics learn from these frameworks?

The complexities of today's world require collaborative practices, cross- and intra-disciplinary thinking, and diverse experiences to create innovative and unique solutions to everyday, as well as extraordinary problems. Frameworks for unconferencing and communities of practice can complement each other effectively, leveraging the strengths of each approach to enhance learning, collaboration, and knowledge sharing within physics EDI and outreach practices. Beyond the overlaps of each framework expressed above, combining these frameworks can also:

- ***Cross-pollinate Ideas and Best (Wise) Practices*** *- Unconferencing brings together diverse individuals from different backgrounds and areas of expertise, creating opportunities for sharing of ideas and practices across multiple communities of practice. Participants can gain new perspectives, insights, and approaches by engaging with individuals from related fields or disciplines during unconference sessions.*
- ***Networking, Mentorship, and Community Building*** *– Unconferences and Communities of Practice provide valuable opportunities to build relationships, strengthen a sense of belonging within a community, and provides informal links for mentors and mentees.*
- ***Supporting Continuous Learning*** *– Both Unconferencing and Communities of Practice emphasize continuous learning and improvement. Participants are empowered to explore new ideas, experiment with innovative practices, and collectively solve (or attempt to solve) complex problems within their areas of interest.*

Unconference Rules

1. *Everyone is a participant.*
2. *All participants actively engage in activities.*
3. *Everyone has a role to play in making this a successful event.*
4. *There are a variety of session formats and types in which to participate. Find the one that fits you well, but be willing to explore other options and ideas! You can participate in many ways in this event!*
5. *Maintaining the schedule and being mindful of time is a sign of respect for participants and their contributions, so we all need to be thoughtful time-keepers.*

Unconference Roles and Responsibilities

Architects – Members of the sub-committee and additional co-collaborators who helped to create and implement the symposium.

Guides – Invited and volunteer co-facilitators helping to lead areas/tables of the unconferencing event. These folks are champions of EDI in their spaces and are open to sharing about their experiences to initiate the discussion.

Quills – Note-takers.

Nomads – People in the room who are actively participating, co-constructing, and joining the discussions.

The Proposal – A Half-Day Symposium

Building Communities of Practice for EDI and Outreach

Website CAP Congress 2024 Symposia Day: https://cap.ca/congress-conference/2024-cap-congress/2024-symposia-day/

Abstract: We welcome you to join a unique symposium, where we will break from convention with an unconferencing style to explore Building Communities of Practice for Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) and Outreach in Physics. This event invites students, postdocs, faculty, and professionals alike to exchange insights, showcase best (and wise) practices, and celebrate grassroots EDI efforts within the physics community. Through participant-driven facilitated discussions, we will co-create an agenda that shares resources and fosters connections, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity. With discussions covering

strategies for EDI initiatives, decolonization efforts, reaching under-served communities, and impactful outreach and informal education, this symposium offers a space to learn, inspire, and connect as we work towards a more equitable and diverse future in Canadian physics.

Organizers: Organizers: John Donohue (jdonohue@uwaterloo.ca), Carolyn Sealfon (carolyn.sealfon@ronininstitute.org), Alexandra Pedersen (alexandra.pedersen@mcdonaldinstitute.ca); Mark Richardson (mark.richardson@mcdonaldinstitute.ca)

[Please note, that this document is only covering the half-day portion of the symposium day focused in the morning on EDI. However, the abstract encompasses the Outreach portion of the afternoon as well.]

The Half-Day EDI Sub-Committee

- *John Donphue (DPE, CAP, University of Waterloo)*
- *Juliette Mammei (DGEP, CAP, University of Manitoba)*
- *Christine Kraus (DGEP, CAP, SNOLAB)*
- *Alexandra Pedersen (Co-Chair, McDonald Institute)*
- *Mark Richardson (McDondald Institute, DPE)*
- *Carolyn Sealfon (Co-Chair, DGEP, CAP)*

Goals and Objectives for the EDI Half-Day

- *Facilitate knowledge sharing and exchange of information, resources, and ideas.*
- *Start to generate actionable strategies and solutions to EDI issues in the community.*
- *Build connections and networks for a community of practice.*
- *Inspire commitment and accountability.*
- *Raise awareness and understanding of EDI in physics.*

Proposed Facilitation of the EDI Symposium

Wednesday May 29, 2024

Homework for registrants included in pre-event Survey here: https://forms.office.com/r/a60bMVHxWQ (please complete this survey by end of day Friday May 24).

8:30am – 10:15am – Part 1 (105min)

Total Number of Participants (Nomads): 32 + Organizers (8)

Number of Co-Facilitators (Guides): 8 (one per table)

Number of Note-takers (Quills): 8 (one per table)

Room Setup – PAALS (Physics and Astronomy Active Learning) room PAB-327; 8 Tables, 4 chairs.

[Please note, this room may become loud as people are discussing. Organizers are arranging an overflow space to help reduce the volume.]

Conversation Café and Big Questions Generator

Conversation Cafés enables collaborative dialogue, knowledge sharing, problem solving, and action planning through small group tables. Unconference participants will sit at one of eight conversation areas/tables. Each conversation area/table will be identified by a theme and have at least one co-facilitator who has experience with this topic and is willing to facilitate thoughts and questions to generate discussion. Ideas, discussions, and resources are documented at the table.

AND

Big Questions Generator offers a passive, but highly interactive format to help the Guides set the agenda for Part 2 of the half-day symposium. Using either flipcharts or an online platform (Thought Exchange?), EDI questions will be posed around the room and post-it notes will be made for participants to respond.

Agenda (loosely) Part 1

Introductions (10min): An Architect (Sub-Committee) introduces the Guides and explains the format of the day's event.

Café and Big Questions (80 min): Every 10 minutes, participants will be invited to switch tables or move to the Big Questions Generator boards around the room. As this is an unconferencing event, if a participant wants to stay longer in one area/table, they are welcome to do so. However, moving around the room to meet new people and have different conversations will always be encouraged. (See the Unconferencing Rule #5).

Debrief and transition to Break (15min): An Architect will summarize what they saw happening in the room and invite the Quills and Guides to submit their notes to Architects. Big Questions will also be taken down for organizers to thematically analyze during the break to set the format for the second section. Everyone is invited to

continue the conversations over the break and be back promptly for the start of Part 2.

Potential Conversation Café Table Topics

- *EDI Department or Collaboration Committee Efforts*
- *Education and Outreach EDI Initiatives*
- *Creating Inclusive Conferences and Events*
- *Advancing Sexual and Gender Diversity in Physics*
- *Accessibility and Physics*
- *Advancing Black Excellence in Physics*
- *Advancing Indigenous Science and Indigenous Physicists*
- *Equitable hiring at all levels of Physics (i.e., undergraduate summer research, Masters/PhD positions, postdocs, etc.)*
- *Mental Wellbeing in Academia and Beyond*
- *Internationalization*

Big Questions Generator prompts could include:

- *What is an EDI resource that you feel everyone should read/engage with (i.e., can be a book, article, activity, tool, etc.)?*
- *What are some of the biggest challenges or barriers to achieving equity, diversity, and inclusion in our organization / community / profession?*
- *How can we ensure that our initiatives for promoting equity, diversity, and inclusion are inclusive and accessible to all members of our community?*
- *What strategies have been effective in promoting diversity and inclusion in other organizations or communities, and how can we adapt them to fit our geography/context?*
- *What role can leadership play in fostering a culture of equity, diversity, and inclusion, and how can we hold leaders accountable for their commitments to EDI?*

- *What are some common misconceptions or myths about equity, diversity, and inclusion, and how can we address them effectively?*
- *How can physics respectfully engage better with Indigenous Science and Indigenous scientists*
- *How can we create spaces that are safe, welcoming, and inclusive for individuals from marginalized or underrepresented groups?*
- *What steps can we take to address implicit bias and promote conscious inclusion in our decision-making processes, policies, and practices?*
- *How can we support the professional development and advancement of individuals from underrepresented groups within our organization/community/profession?*
- *What resources, training programs, or support networks are needed to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion effectively?*
- *How can we measure and evaluate the impact of our efforts to promote equity, diversity, and inclusion, and what metrics or indicators should we use to track progress?*
- ***What questions have not yet been asked that need to be discussion in a EDI in Physics community of practice?***

Roles and Responsibilities for Part 1

Architects – Members of the sub-committee who will help to co-lead the morning symposium and offer guidance to participants during an unconferencing session.

Guides – Invited EDI practitioners and EDI leaders in Physics who are actively working on EDI issues, research, and opportunities. These folks will be embedded at tables and will stay at their respective table for the duration of Part 1 (if there is more than one Guide at the table, of course, we welcome members to take a break and move around the room).

Quills – Note-takers and co-facilitators. These folks are volunteers who will stay with a table and Guide(s) based on a theme. The Quills help to document and capture EDI thinking and will work with some of the Architects who will help with co-facilitating the entire morning event.

Nomads – Participants in the session who will move around the Conversation Café tables and will participate in the Big Questions Generator with their experiences and ideas.

BREAK – 10:15am -10:45am – (30min)

Architects will sit down and look at the notes from the Quills, as well as the responses to the Big Questions Generators. A thematic analysis of both activities will offer the subjects for each area/table after the break. Additional themes related to Education and Outreach can be carried forward to the second half-day symposium (and will be announced to participants coming back from the break).

10:45am-12:15pm Part 2 – (90min)

Home Room is an activity that enables all participants connect with one another in smaller group discussion by sharing their responses to the themes emergent from Part 1's activities (both the Conversation Café, and Big Questions Generator boards). These smaller focused discussions at one area/table enable participants to hear and share multiple perspectives and to critically reflect on what they are learning and questions that they are thinking about. A Quill will be stationed at each area/table to document learnings from the discussion. There is no set number of people who can join one table, but again, Nomads will be asked to spread themselves out. A set of icebreaker questions will be added to the Home Room area/tables to help facilitate discussion.

Agenda (loosely) Part 2

Introductions (10min): An Architect (Sub-Committee) shared what happened over the break to condense the dynamic discussions into new themes for further inquiry at new "Home Room" area/tables.

Home Room Discussion (25 min): Nomads (everyone) chose an area/table that interests them and invests in the discussion of that table. A Quill takes notes.

Home Room Debrief (50min): The Home Room groups will also lead the closing unconference half-day on EDI. A speaker from each area/table will be nominated to share back with the whole room the highlights of their discussion. Emphasis on learnings as a community of practice and next steps forward

Closing of EDI Half-Day (5min): Summary and gratitude to all those who organized, facilitated, and participated. Next steps for the afternoon session outlined.

Home Room icebreaker questions:

- *Is the theme of our area/table something that intersects with my department?*
- *Do you know of any resources or professional development support that have helped you with this topic you would like to share with others?*
- *Do you have personal experience that you feel is relevant to share?*
- *What questions or uncertainties do you have about this theme that you hope to explore further?*
- *How do you think different perspective and experiences might shape our understanding of this theme?*
- *Can you think of any current activities, initiatives, or studies that illustrate aspects of this theme?*
- *What do you think are the potential implication(s) or consequence(s) (positive, neutral, negative, and for whom?) of this theme for physics, collaborators, partners, or society?*
- *How might exploration of this theme contribute to new insights, discoveries, or solutions?*