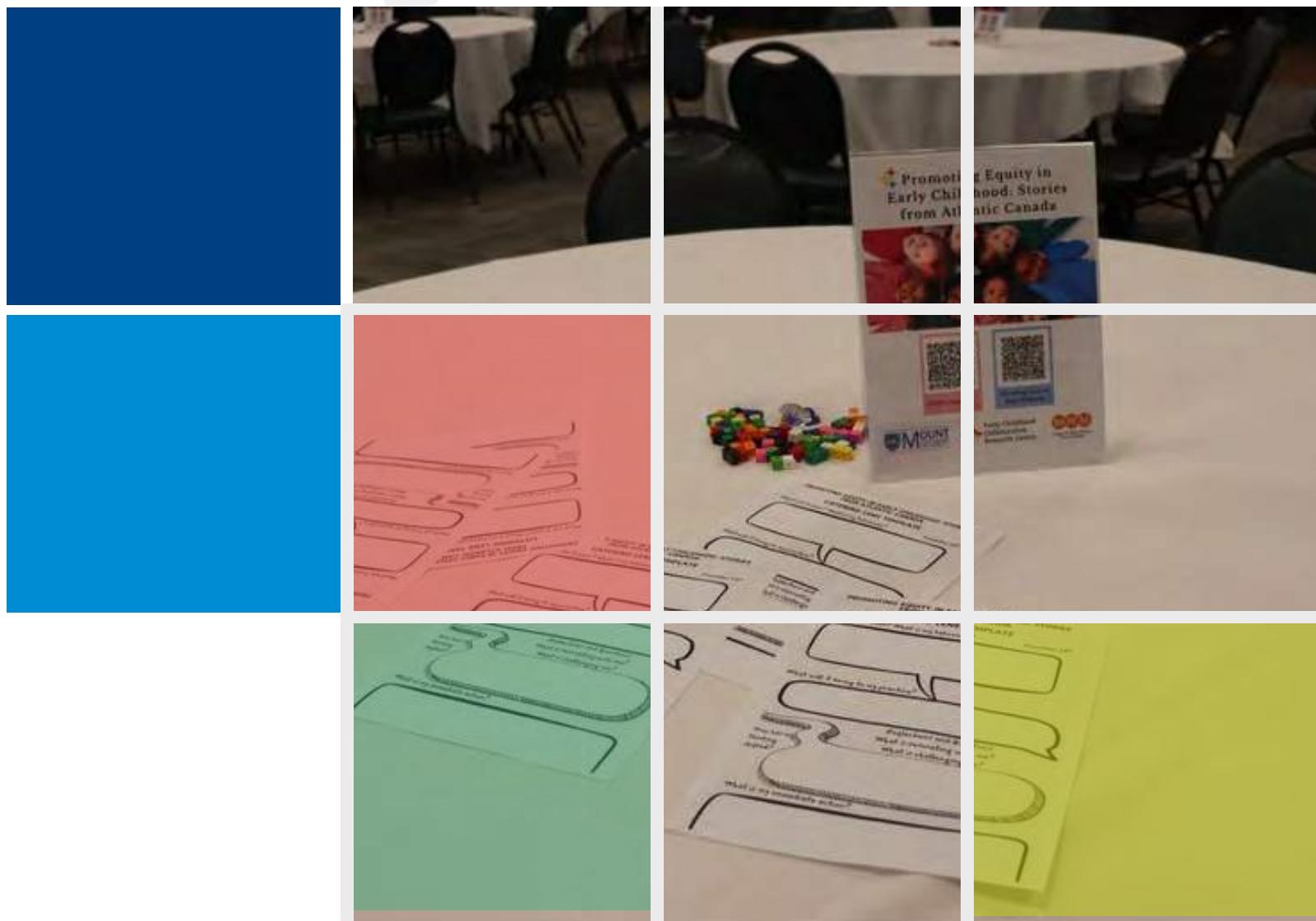


# Promoting Equity in Early Childhood: Building Atlantic Connections

## Summary Event Report November 2025

Prepared by the Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre:  
Jessie-Lee McIsaac, Jeannie Larson, Janice Osei - Essah, Abigail Patey,  
Hannah Cosman and Sarah Caldwell



# Land Acknowledgement

We, the Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre (ECCRC) team, acknowledge that the ECCRC at Mount Saint Vincent University is in Kjipuktuk, part of Mi'kma'ki, the unceded ancestral territory which remains the homeland of the Mi'kmaq Nation. This territory is covered by the Covenant Chain of Treaties of Peace and Friendship signed between 1725 and 1779. These treaties are affirmed by the Supreme Court of Canada and recognize Aboriginal Title.

We continue to learn about the historical and current colonial systems of violence which contribute to the violence and harm perpetuated against Indigenous people. We continually reflect, discuss, implement, and share our actions toward truth and reconciliation.

We pay respect to the knowledge embedded in the Mi'kmaw custodians of the lands and waters and to the Elders, past, present, and future.



This is a photo of the Shubenacadie River. The Mi'kmaw have traversed the Shubenacadie River and the lakes to its south as a major transport route since time immemorial.

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# BACKGROUND

## About the Project

This project builds upon ongoing work led by Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac at the Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre (ECCRC) at Mount Saint Vincent University (MSVU). The ECCRC engages families, as well as policy and practice partners, in research to enhance early childhood well-being. Since the establishment of the ECCRC in 2018, several knowledge mobilization activities have taken place that have contributed to this work.

- ★ **2018:** An event between Nova Scotia researchers, policymakers, and practitioners with an emphasis on storytelling was held to promote collective learning, strengthen future research partnerships, and support programming and policy.
- ★ **2019:** An in-person seminar series for Nova Scotia early childhood educators focused on bridging the research-to-policy gap was held at MSVU.
- ★ **2021:** Five virtual seminars to share current progress in early childhood data collection across Atlantic Canada was held, followed by a meeting with policymakers to identify the next steps.
- ★ **2023:** An in-person, two-day workshop which focused on building and sustaining connections that expand our network, clarify research focus, and ensure alignment with the goals of the Canada-Wide Early Learning and Child Care agreements was held in Halifax.



Throughout this project, opportunities were created for early childhood professionals across Atlantic Canada to collectively come together to learn and share their knowledge related to equity in early childhood, including:

- A three-part virtual storytelling series in May and June (2023). Each session within this series focused on a central theme related to equity. Storytellers with expertise in each of these areas, shared their knowledge and current work they are engaged in, to promote and sustain equity in early childhood.





# 2023 VIRTUAL STORYTELLING

An in-person two day event in Halifax in October 2023 to provide further opportunities for early childhood professionals to connect, share, and learn with each other (local practice tours, fireside chat, planning workshop).



**Above image: This graphic, by Rachel Derrah, illustrates a summary of the conversations had over the two days of the in-person events.**

An in-person planning event was held providing an opportunity for early childhood professionals from Atlantic Canada to come together in Kjipuktuk (Halifax), Nova Scotia. This event included a full-day planning event and a local practice tour to three child care centres;

1. MSVU Child Study Centre,
2. YWCA Early Learning Centre
3. East Preston Daycare Centre and Family Resource Centre.

All three child care centres have been identified as child care centres that foster early learning environments that are diverse, inclusive and accessible.

# 2025 IN-PERSON FALL EVENTS

## DAY 1: FIRESIDE CHAT

### About the 2025 Fireside Chat:

To continue with the powerful theme of storytelling, a Fireside Chat was held at Mount Saint Vincent University on November 24th, 2025.

Four storytellers, from across Atlantic Canada, all early childhood educators, shared their work related to equity in early childhood. They defined what equity means to them in their field, how they identify inequity in their respective classrooms and how they respond to such inequity and how they measure success. They also discussed some barriers and gaps in terms of their needs as educators to achieve equity for children and families.

The storytellers were Alison Johnson (NL), Shannon Nevers (NB), Donntayia Jones (NS) and Navneet Kaur (PEI).

The fireside chat was moderated by Moashella Shortte, who is a mother, educator, author, and advocate currently serving as Faculty for Africentric Learning Option of the Adult Learning Program at Akerley and in support of the Africentric ECE programs both at Akerley and eCampus.

The recording of the Fireside Chat can be viewed [here](#).



*Image above: Storytellers sharing their stories and engaging in conversation with the audience.*

*(From left to right: Alison Johnson, Navneet Kaur, Donntayia Jones, Shannon Nevers and our moderator, Moashella Shortte)*



**Moashella Shortte**  
Moderator



**Alison Johnson**  
NL Storyteller



**Shannon Nevers**  
NB Storyteller



**Donntayia Jones**  
NS Storyteller



**Navneet Kaur**  
PEI Storyteller

## PHOTOS FROM THE 2025 FIRESIDE CHAT



*Dr. Jessie-Lee McIsaac introducing the storytellers at the start of the fireside chat*



*Opening remarks from Dr. Joël  
Dickinson, MSVU President*



## *Interactions on stage*



## *Elder Charlotte Bernard giving an opening Blessing*



*Louise Lyman, graphic facilitator, listening to the stories and capturing them visually*



### *Final graphic from the conversations*

# FIRESIDE CHAT SURVEY RESPONSES

We asked participants at the Fireside Chat to complete a survey to share their learnings and provide feedback on the event. Below are a few response from the survey.

## Why were you interested in attending this Fireside Chat?

“

I was interested to hear how others working in the sector are doing with anti-oppression work.

“

To hear from folks in different provinces. It was eye opening to see how different the sector is across provinces.

“

I attended because I desire to learn more about childhood studies

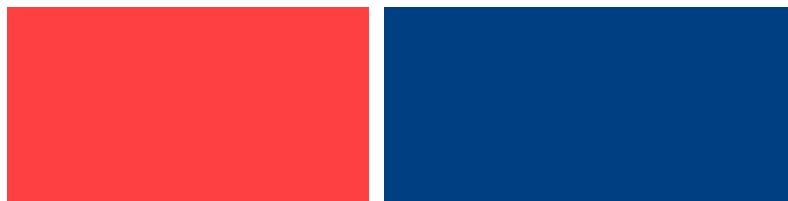
“

An opportunity to connect with the sector and better understand their needs and perspectives on equity.

## What is one word you would use to describe the fireside chat?

Insightful  
Passionate  
Reflective

Informative  
Inspiring  
Educating



# DAY 2: NETWORK BUILDING WORKSHOP

## About the Network Building and Planning Workshop:

The workshop was held in-person at Mount Saint Vincent University and virtually with representation from across Atlantic Canada; New Brunswick (5), Prince Edward Island (7), Nova Scotia (14), Newfoundland (5), and 5 other guests came from outside of Atlantic Canada (British Columbia and Ontario).

The purpose of this workshop was to continue building connections across the network, learn what is happening in early childhood research, policy and practice across Atlantic Canada and beyond, and intentionally continue the conversation and ongoing efforts in promoting equity in early childhood. The team also aimed to identify opportunities for collaboration based on their mutual interests and to identify next steps together.

The attendees of the workshop included:

- Academics in the area of early learning and child care
- Early childhood education practitioners
- Policy makers
- Organizations focused on early childhood such as early intervention, public health, and family resource centres.

This allowed for rich conversations on ways to effectively promote equity in early childhood and build meaningful connections across Atlantic Canada.

We had four major activities that guided the conversation for the day:

1. Tour through Atlantic Canada and Beyond
2. Open space brainstorm
3. Gallery Walk: Building ideas for Atlantic Symposium
4. Sharing Back and Group Discussion



## Open space brainstorm



## Sharing Back and Group Discussion



# TOUR THROUGH ATLANTIC CANADA AND BEYOND



This first activity offered participants the opportunity to share a 5-minute lightning talk in response to the following questions:

- *What's going on related to equity for them or in their organization?*
- *What is an area of equity you and your organization would like to further explore?*

In total, we had 17 hub members across research, policy and practice share about their work related to equity both in person and virtually.

## ⚡ Five Minute Lightning Talks ⚡

Research	Policy	Practice
Early Childhood Collaborative Research Centre	NS Public Health	Department of Child and Youth Study
Dalhousie University	NS Dept Education and Early Childhood Development	MSVU Child Study Centre
University of New Brunswick	NB Dept Education and Early Childhood Development	NS Community College
Memorial University	PEI Dept Education and Early Years	Nova Scotia Early Childhood Development Intervention Services
Jimmy Pratt Foundation		Association of Early Childhood Educators (NL)
McMaster University/University of British Columbia		Early Childhood Development Association of PEI
Atkinson Centre for Society and Child Development		

# OPEN SPACE BRAINSTORM

## Topics Identified for Open Space

Post-secondary education focused on Mi'kmaw learning

Bridging the gap between policy, research and practice

Disability affirming early learning practices

Early learning services on gender diversity practices

Experiences of Newcomer educators/families/children

Children's own experiences/perspectives (voices)

Participants had the opportunity to choose the conversation to take part in. These conversations were facilitated by ECCRC team members and allowed for participants to collectively have a in-depth conversation about each area of interest.



# OPEN SPACE BRAINSTORM

## Highlights Shared from the Open Space Discussions

Mi'kmaw voices have to be included to involve local tradition and knowledge within curriculum and spaces.

To bridge-the-gap between research, policy, and practice mutual commitment, interest, and respect is needed across all partners with consistent communication.

Creating welcoming spaces for all children and not focusing on deficits. This could look like an invitation of: *"Welcome we've been waiting for you."*

Engaging children in discussions about gender diversity can help them develop a deeper understanding and awareness.

Relationship building is an essential component in supporting newcomer families to ensure they receive supports that meet their needs.

Understanding 'why' we incorporate children's voices helps us more effectively gather and embed them in research and practices.



# BUILDING IDEAS FOR ATLANTIC SYMPOSIUM: GALLERY WALK AND ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

Participants took part in a gallery walk to brainstorm details of “*what, when/where, who, why, how*” for a possible broader Atlantic Equity Symposium. Participants were encouraged to add their ideas on flipcharts in the room (or to a virtual whiteboard online) to ask questions and/or provide suggestions.

## **WHAT? - What makes this event unique? How can we build upon existing provincial events?**

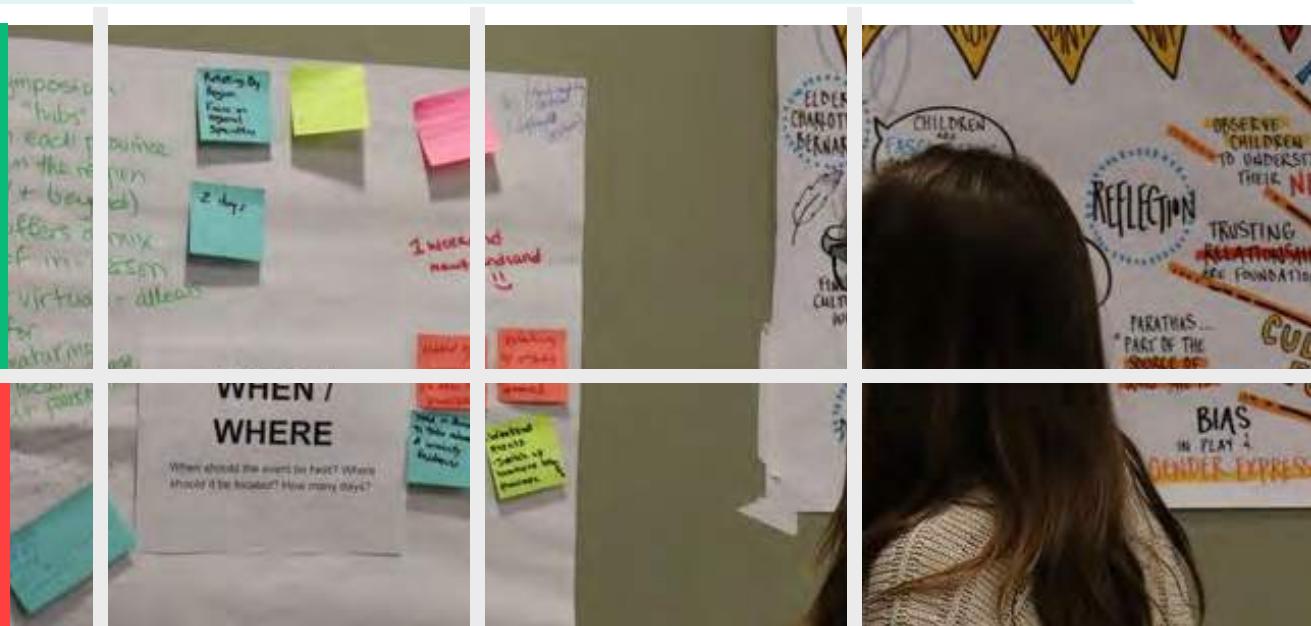
These face-to-face opportunities provide spaces for networking and aligning practices with other Atlantic provinces. This brings unique voices together through a collaborative approach to strengthen the network and build ideas on how to move forward. We can continue to build on these events by having different provinces host similar events to continue to grow as a network to include unique voices within these conversations.

## **WHEN/WHERE? - When should the event be held? Where should it be located? How many days?**

Having a different province host a yearly or bi-yearly workshop.

## **WHO? - How do we support participation across research, policy, and practice? How do we support virtual participation? Who should present?**

We need the combined voices of families, ECEs, policy makers, advocacy groups, faculty, and researchers to ensure participation and the audience includes diverse perspectives.



# BUILDING IDEAS FOR ATLANTIC SYMPOSIUM: GALLERY WALK AND ROUND TABLE DISCUSSION

## WHY? - What's the equity theme that is connecting the work?

“Connecting, understanding, and learning from each other” to understand what our equity lens is. Equity is not one definitive topic but rather a continues evolving conversation that changes based on the needs of the children and educators we are supporting.

## HOW? - How do we support engagement and connection across sectors and regions?

Holding similar events like this will work well to ensure engagement and connection across sectors and regions. The emphasis was on ensuring organic conversations could continue to provide opportunities to gain knowledge on the experiences of people attending these workshops.



# DAY 3: RESEARCH GRANT PLANNING

## About the Research Grant Planning:

A half day grant planning workshop was held to identify next steps and possible additional funding. Network members agreed that research grant funding would be important to:

Put ideas into actions

To support and strengthen practice in early learning

Be properly resourced for change

We heard a research presentation by Cecilia Carrea, Research Grant Officer at Mount Saint Vincent University to provide more information on the different types of grants and grant applications.

This session was followed by hub members brainstorming in small groups of goals and activities focused on the following questions:

- What are our short and long-term goals?
- What actions will help to achieve these goals?
- What funding opportunities should we explore?



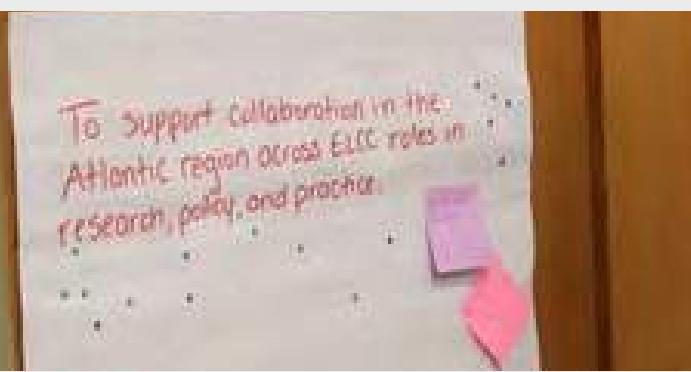
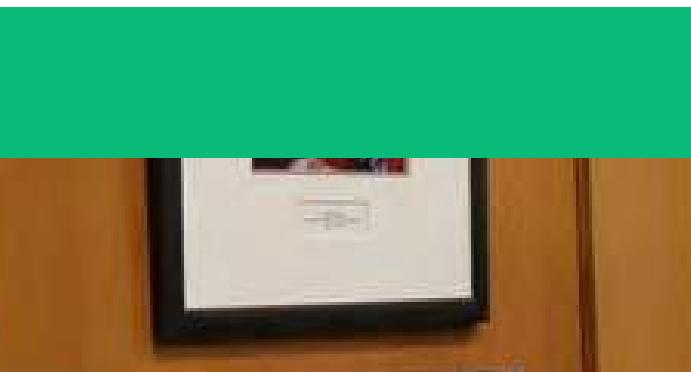
# SHARED PURPOSE

**Dotmocracy:** Attendees were given sticker dots to participate in a ‘Dotmocracy’ to understand if the overarching goals are still aligned. Participants were asked to indicate whether they feel the overarching goals were aligned by either choosing a Green Dot for “still aligning with the goals” and Red Dot for “no longer in alignment with the goals”. The vast majority of participants agreed with the goals and offered additional considerations for clarification and expansion.

To share and leverage relevant equity research and resources to build knowledge and skills.

To inform the implementation of equity practices in ELCC settings across the Atlantic region.

To support collaboration in the Atlantic region across ELCC roles in research, policy, and practice.



# HIGHLIGHTS FROM SMALL GROUP DISCUSSIONS FROM NETWORK MEMBERS

## What are our short and long-term goals?

### Short term goals:

- Leveraging equity research
- Building collective capacity
- Fostering collaboration across research, policy, and practice

### Long term goals:

- Maintaining our momentum
- Moving ideas into effective action
- Creating an Atlantic ELCC resources

## What actions will help to achieve these goals?

- Develop a knowledge mobilization toolkit: fact sheets, lightning talks, and equity resources
- Co-constructing equity resources with sector stakeholders
- Involve educators, researchers, and other professionals across the Atlantic provinces
- Continue to collaborate and build our community

## What funding opportunities should we explore?

- Similar workshops to support policy, practice, and research
- Framing storytelling and community of practice events as data collection and research could enable research-focused funding.



## Highlights from discussion:

### ***What's most valuable to you and your organization?***

**Consistency across provinces:** Whether in equity practices, resources access, or training opportunities.

**ECE's as researchers:** This can be supported using a top-bottom approach.

**Co-constructed equity resources:** Reflecting families, educators, and children's voices

**Amplifying the voices of children, educators, and families:** This ensures their experiences shape the work.

**Cross-sector collaboration:** Including educators, researchers, policymakers, health, and post-secondary institutions. This brings diverse perspectives.

**Community involvement is important for Mi'kmaq communities:** Including voices from diverse cultural backgrounds



## Highlights from discussion:

### ***What's the priority over the next year for the network?***

**Creating consistent opportunities for connection:**  
Communities of practices, check-ins, and mentorship pathways.

**Strengthening cross-provincial collaboration:**  
Reduce duplication of work and to “work smarter not harder”

**Sharing equity resources:**  
Co-constructed, credible, accessible, and evidence based.

**Not losing momentum:**  
Continuing to strengthen relationships across the Atlantic region.

## Highlights from question: ***What do you have the capacity to contribute?***



**Providing sector expertise:** lived experiences, organizational perspectives, and professional insights into equity practices.

**Mentoring or supporting small groups:** Specifically experienced practitioners can guide students or new members.

**Engaging in community practice:** Cross sector conversations and virtual gatherings.

**Participating in knowledge mobilization:**  
This involves discussions, validation, interpretation, and shared resources.

**Contributing to collaborative research:** Including sharing data, participating in studies, assisting in framing methodologies, and shaping research questions.

**Student involvement:**  
Including gathering resources, supporting OER development, and contributing to the sustainability of the work.

# EVENT FEEDBACK

## Participant Feedback:

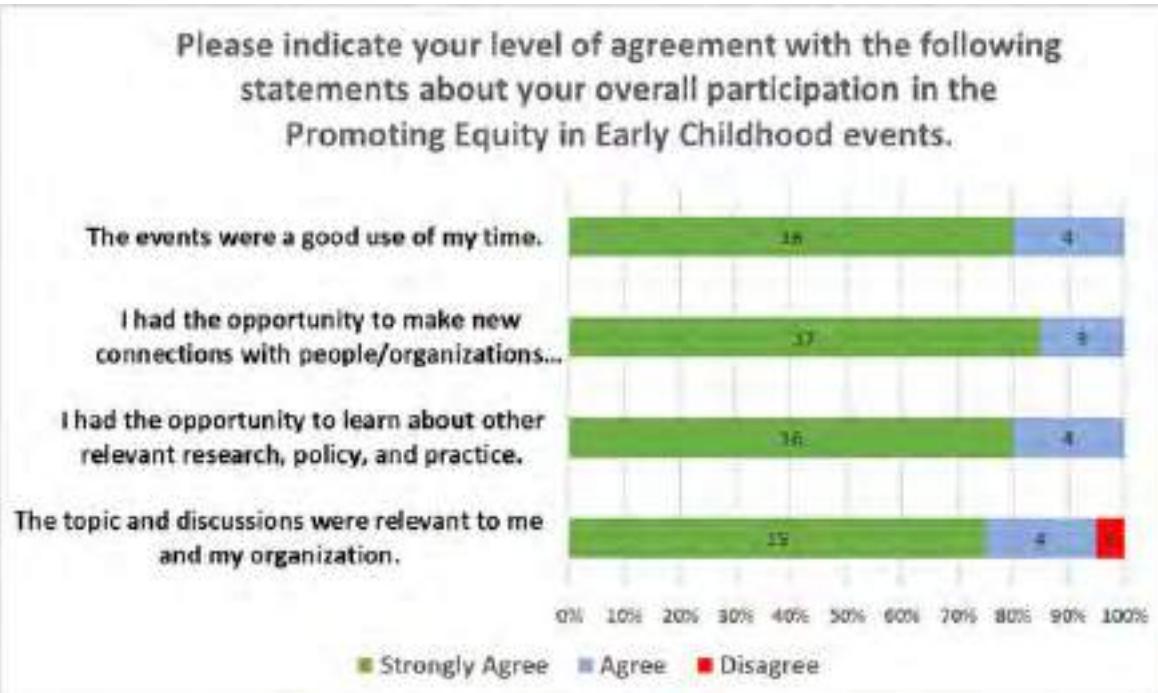
Following the in-person series of events, participants were encouraged to complete a survey to help inform future events. Approximately 60% of Network Members responded to the post survey (n=20). Participants indicated that they were satisfied with all of the components of the events (i.e., Fireside Chat, Planning workshops).

Overall, participants agreed or strongly agreed that the events allowed them to learn about other relevant research, policy and practice in early childhood. Almost all participants noted that the topics and discussions were relevant to their organization.

The networking and conversations throughout the entire event were incredibly enriching. I'm excited to see what's next and what part I can play in supporting the movement.

It was a great opportunity to actually build strong connections and listen to the experiences and ideas of people from different networks across the Atlantic hub and beyond.

The research grants presentation was particularly helpful.



**Suggestions from the Survey Moving Forward:**

Some of the suggestions shared in the post-event survey to help us improve future events included:

**Have the opportunity to have educators voices present at the workshops.**



**Have more days dedicated to workshops.**

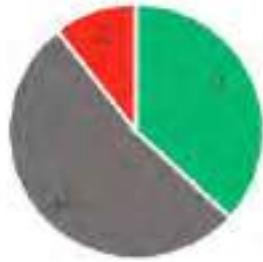


**Offer more focused discussions on specific aspects of inequity in early childhood, such as newcomer experiences and gender diversity.**



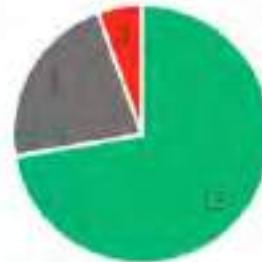
All survey respondents expressed interest in participating in the next Promoting Equity in Early Childhood network meeting in 2026, and several indicated they could contribute to the Partnership Development Grant.

Do you want to be part of a Partnership Development Grant (PDG) writing meeting in 2026?



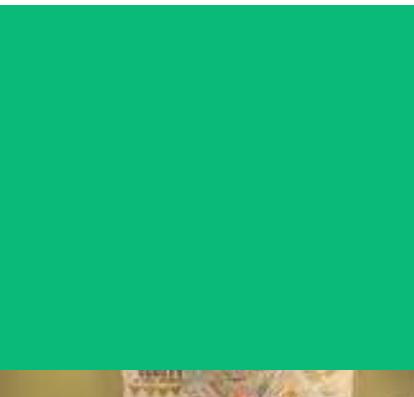
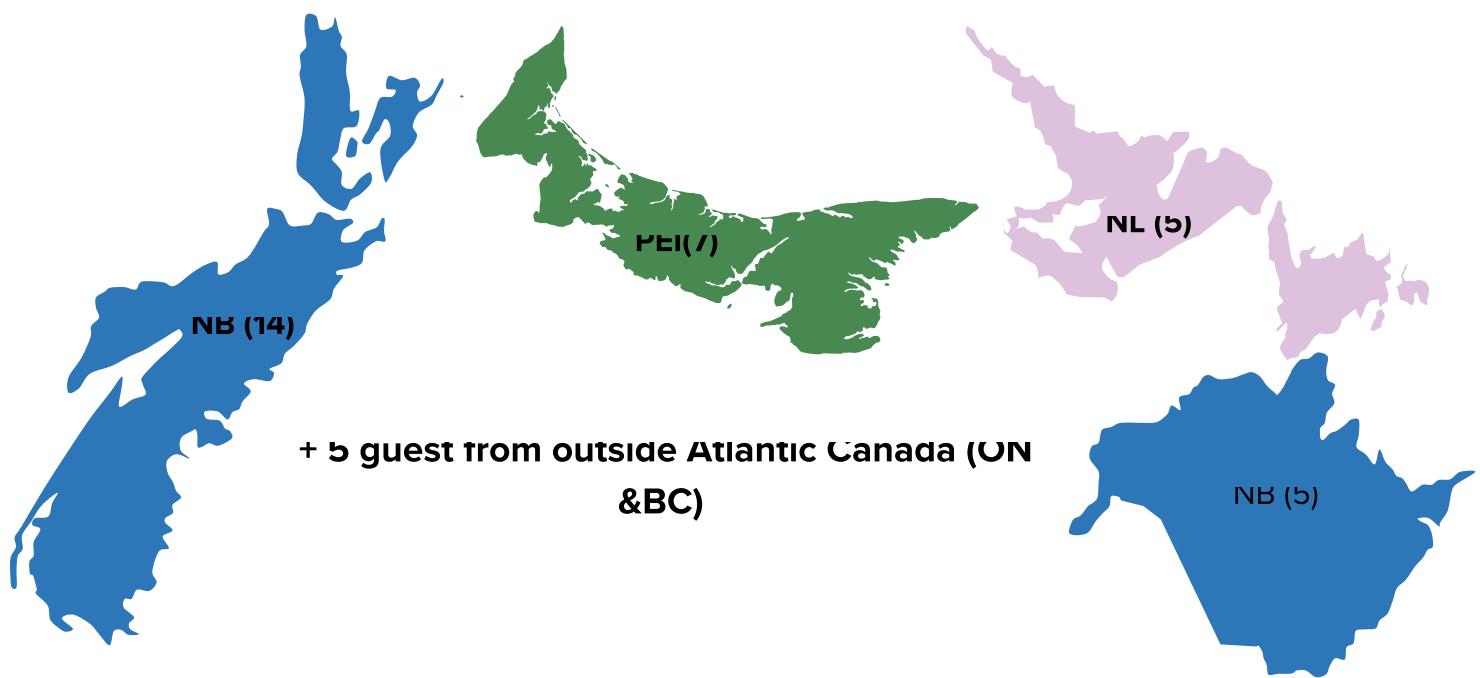
■ Yes ■ Maybe ■ No

Do you think that you and your organization might be able to participate in future research grant applications?



■ Yes ■ Unsure ■ No

# GEOGRAPHIC REPRESENTATION OF PARTNERS AND PARTICIPANTS



# FINAL GRAPHIC

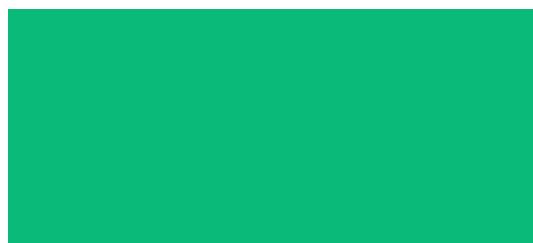
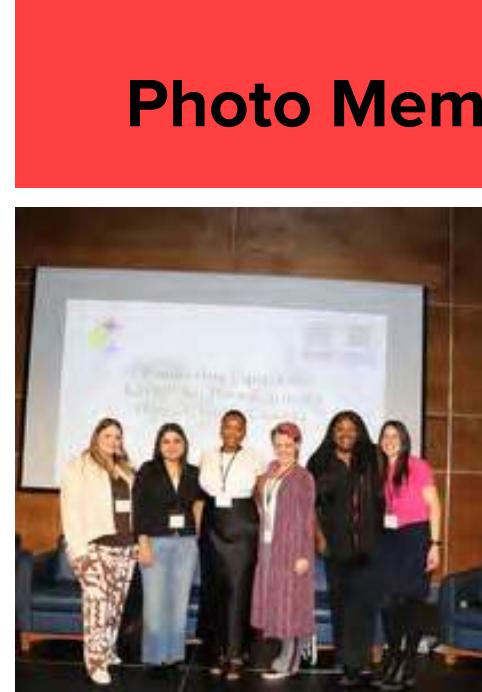


## THANK YOU TO OUR FUNDERS, PARTNERS AND ALL THOSE WHO JOINED US!

This work has been made possible with funding from the Margaret and Wallace McCain Family Foundation and through ongoing collaboration with a number of partners from across Atlantic Canada and beyond. We thank each and everyone of you who are committed to this work and supported the various aspects of this project.



## Photo Memories



# Questions? Ideas?

## Find out more and contact us!

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Promoting Equity  
in Early Childhood

