

## **Five Methods for Improving Self-Identification of Aboriginal People**

### **REVISED**

Many organizations have found it a challenge to elicit full self-identification, particularly from Aboriginal employees, who may feel that in self-identifying, they may be exposing themselves to discrimination. Good communication is essential for achieving a good return and response rate. Helpful activities include holding information sessions, providing information through newsletters or email. Note: in all promotions and communications, it is important to remind employees that although they are free to choose whether or not they wish to self-identify, self-identification is strongly recommended in order to measure their workplace inclusion.

- 1. Promote self-identification as a source of higher employee engagement.** It is one thing to promote self-identification as important, but it is even more critical to explain why self-identification is important. When you are communicating the importance of self-identification, advise employees of the qualities that employment equity brings to a workplace; such as improved teamwork, the strength of more diverse perspectives and a broader understanding of cultural differences in the workplace, among customers and clients.
- 2. Emphasize that no one is treated differently as a consequence of self-identifying.** This should be absolutely true in your organization. It should be promoted accordingly.
- 3. Stress the confidentiality of self-identification.** To many employees, the very phrase “self-identify” seems to imply that self-identification is a public process. Technically, the action taken is quite private and remains wholly confidential. This should be stressed whenever self-identification is promoted and presented.
- 4. Build up to the date and make it an occasion to celebrate.** Historically the best results have been obtained using the “census day” approach. For companies subject to the Employment Equity Act, self-identification happens every year about the same time. If this year’s self-identification date is greeted with groans of annoyance and indifference, then it is time to turn that around and make the process a good time for all. Use posters, offer hospitality, rewards and other promotions to spark interest and excitement. Have people on hand who can answer questions on the process. After the initial survey, a repeated follow-up with non-respondents will help boost the response rate.
- 5. Enable a feedback mechanism for reasons people don’t self-identify.** A modest suggestion box can elicit anonymous feedback that can help establish why self-identification is low in an organization and what can be done about it.