Inclusion is the Future of Work

2026 Symposium Session Descriptions

Version date: October 21, 2026

Date:	**Monday, October 26, 2026; Tuesday, October 27, 2026**
Format:	Hybrid (In-person/Online)
Registration:	https://vraie-idea.ca/idea-4dy-symposium-2026
Location:	Campbell Conference Facility Munk School of Global Affairs and Public Policy University of Toronto

Day 1 (October 26) – Partner Lightning Talks

Accessibility as a Business Strategy

Presenter

- Jeffrey Willbond, Chief AccessAbility Officer, March of Dimes, Canada

Description

Accessibility is not a compliance exercise; it is a driver of innovation, talent attraction, retention, and organizational resilience. The talk will discuss the following topics:

• Accessibility and workforce participation
• Benefits to employers and business
• Examples of systems-level change
• Future opportunities for Canadian workplaces

Supporting Learning Differences in Manufacturing

Presenter

- Sherene Mitchell, HerJourney Project Manager, Excellence in Manufacturing Consortium, Learning Differences Initiative

Description

Manufacturers across Canada are already employing workers with learning differences — often without knowing it. Research EMC conducted with Malatest, drawing on surveys of 566 manufacturing employers and 1,786 workers, found that while 25% of candidates in manufacturing self-identified as having a learning difference, most employ….yers reported participation rates below 10%, and only 22% had any formal support system in place. Half of workers with a learning difference hadn't disclosed it to their employer, largely out of concern about how supervisors, peers, or promotion prospects would be affected. The result is a workforce development gap hiding in plain sight — one that shows up in training outcomes, onboarding, retention, and day-to-day productivity, not just in inclusion metrics.

This talk covers what EMC has done to close that gap: practical, low-cost strategies employers can implement immediately to make training and onboarding more accessible (flexible training formats, supervisor check-ins, normalized accommodation conversations), and a direct-to-employee support model built with VLS Canada that lets workers access help through a simple screening tool (LDORI) and a learning strategist — without needing a formal diagnosis or employer disclosure first. It also highlights EMC's 5-part virtual training series for supervisors and managers, which connects that employee pathway to frontline capacity-building at scale. Attendees will leave with a clear, replicable framework for building more accessible, inclusive workplaces that strengthen retention and productivity — and practical starting points they can apply in their own organizations.

Building Inclusive Pathways to Employment: Youth-Focused Programming, Wraparound Supports and Future-Ready Skills

Presenter

- Mohamed Elmi, Executive Director, Diversity Institute, Toronto Metropolitan University

Description

As young people navigate an increasingly complex labour market, inclusive employment pathways require more than skills training alone. This lightning talk will explore how youth-focused programming, meaningful engagement, and tailored wraparound supports can help address barriers to employment, particularly for youth with disabilities and other equity-deserving groups.

Drawing on the Diversity Institute's experience developing and delivering programs such as Advanced Digital and Professional Training (ADaPT) and AiDaPT, the presentation will highlight promising practices in combining employer-informed training, mentorship, career development, and individualized supports to strengthen workforce readiness and employment outcomes. It will also consider the growing importance of digital and AI literacy across occupations and how accessible, responsible AI training can help prepare young people for changing workplace expectations. The session will emphasize practical approaches that employers, educators, and community organizations can adopt to create more inclusive and sustainable pathways to employment

Inclusive Workplaces: Accommodation by Design

Presenter

- Alison Staples, Chair of the Board, Human Resources Professional Association
- Rola Helou, CEO, Chartered Professionals for Human Resources
- Erin Sailer, Chair of the Board, Chartered Professionals for Human Resources

Description

Accommodating collaborators is a compliance issue. This workshop will explore how can human resource professionals can better accommodate individuals beyond compliance.

Day 1 (October 26) – IDEA 4DY Lightning Talks

Putting the Designing Inclusive Disability Career Fair Guide into Practice at YES

Presenter

- Dan Samosh, Assistant Professor, Employment Relations, Queen's University
- Sinead McCarthy, Vice President, Development, HR and Programs, Youth Employment Services (YES)

Description

This joint presentation will explore how the Designing Inclusive Disability Career Fair Guide can be used to build employer capacity for disability inclusion and translate research into practical recruitment approaches.

Topics will include preparing employers and candidates, considering accessibility in event planning and interview processes, and creating opportunities for candidates to demonstrate their skills. The session will connect these practical applications to the Symposium's focus on proactive workplace systems. It will highlight the role of collaboration between researchers, employment service providers and employers in embedding disability inclusion into everyday recruitment. Participants will leave with a practical resource and ideas for applying it within their own career fairs, interview sessions and employer partnerships.

EDIA training for transformation through IDEA

Presenter

- Karen Harlos, Lead, Equity, Diversity, Inclusion and Accessibility Professor, Department of Business, University of Winnipeg

Description

This talk will be a brief overview of three EDIA training modules developed by IDEA: EDIA Foundations, EDIA for Researchers, and EDIA for Workplace Disability Inclusion.

Developing a Workplace Benefits Guidance Tool for Employers and Other Workplace Parties

Presenter

- Ashvene Sureshkumar, PhD, Research Associate, IDEA 4DY; Postdoctoral Researcher, Holland Bloorview Kids Rehabilitation Hospital, Bloorview Research Institute

Description

This presentation will introduce an evidence-informed guidance tool: 'Workplace Benefits Guidance Tool for Employers and Other Workplace Parties', developed to support employers and other workplace parties in creating more inclusive workplaces for persons with disabilities. It will provide an overview of the research and co-design process used to develop the tool, highlight its key features and recommendations, and demonstrate how organizations can apply practical strategies across the employment journey. Areas of focus include improving access to workplace benefits, fostering open communication, engaging with community supports, and adapting workplace practices to support more inclusive and responsive workplace benefit practices.

Integrating Accessibility into Inclusion, Diversity and Equity Policy, Practice and Workplace Design for Small and Medium Sized Enterprises

Presenter

- Shannon Killip, PhD, Postdoctoral Associate, Employment Support Systems, IDEA, Institute for Work and Health

Description

This study explores how inclusion, diversity, equity and accessibility are being considered in policies, procedures and workplace design for small and medium sized Canadian businesses. We are currently performing a qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with workers with disabilities and business leaders from small and medium sized business in Canada. The findings of this study will be used to inform a toolkit which will provide actionable strategies from implementing accessibility and inclusive

design into EDI policies and procedures for small and medium sized businesses. I will be presenting the preliminary findings from the first 5 interviews, focusing on current policies and practices, feedback about these policies and practices and what improvements can be made.

Day 1 (October 26) – Workshops

Building a Workplace Accessibility Supports System That Works

Location: Main Room

Date: Monday, October 26, 2026 | 2:30 - 3:30 p.m.

Presenters

- Dilshan Fernando, Research Associate, IDEA; Accessibility and Equity Officer, University of Guelph
- Peter Field, Research Associate, IDEA; Associate, IDEA-STEM
- Matt Freeman, Assistant Clinical Professor, School of Rehabilitation Science, McMaster University
- Andy Livingston, President & CEO, Dexterity Consulting

Description

Most organizations have a workplace accommodation policy. Few have an accessibility supports system. The difference shows up in the details: a request stalled because the cost hits a manager's budget, inconsistent information, instructions, and expectation, medical note barriers for simple adjustments, lack of safety to disclose one's disability. In this applied case study, participants act as the Accessibility Supports Team at a unionized, federally regulated employer where accommodations take months to close and workers have stopped disclosing. Using the ASC Employment Implementation Guide, teams take stock, set priorities, decide what to pilot, and define how they will know it worked.

Workshop outcomes

Participants will be able to:

1. Diagnose the gap between a duty to accommodate policy and an accessibility supports system.
2. Prioritize a one-cycle plan within real limits of budget, collective agreements and leadership attention.
3. Design core levers: a central accommodation fund, Yes by Default with minimal disclosure, and portable supports.

4. Measure whether workers' experience actually changed, not just whether policies were written.

Inclusive collective bargaining language

Location: 108N

Date: Monday, October 26, 2026 | 2:30 - 3:30 p.m.

Presenters

- Jennifer Harmer, Special Projects Lead, IDEA 4DY; PhD Candidate, Centre for Industrial Relations & Human Resources, University of Toronto
- Or Shay, Post-doctoral Researcher, IDEA 4DY
- Emmanuelle Lopez-Bastos, National Coordinator, Human Rights, Equity and Diversity, UFCW Canada
- Laura Peña, National Representative, UFCW Canada
- Kelly McDermott, Director Legal Services, Solicitors and Prosecutions, Regional Municipality of Durham

Description

This interactive workshop engages participants in a conversation about how the collective bargaining process may be used to strengthen workplace accessibility. Presenters will share employer and employee perspectives to help generate ideas on key issues. Attendees will have the opportunity to work independently or in small groups to offer feedback from their own expertise/perspective on the matter. The IDEA 4DY team will use this information to help inform potential next steps to advance this collaborative work.

A Systems Approach to Building Organizational Capacity for Disability Employment Inclusion

Location: 208N

Date: Monday, October 26, 2026 | 2:30 - 3:30 p.m.

Presenter

- Jenny Hope, Director of Development and Capacity Building, Ontario Disability Employment Network (ODEN)

Description

No organization builds a disability-inclusive employment system in isolation. Sustainable change requires a connected ecosystem of shared responsibility, strong relationships, and cross-sector resources.

In this highly interactive workshop, participants will tackle real-world disability employment challenges using a systems-thinking lens. Working in small groups, attendees will apply a Plant, Grow, Nurture mindset to analyze the issues facing employers, service providers, job seekers, and communities. Together, they will identify the exact foundational tools needed to start (Plant), the partnerships required to scale (Grow), and the collaborative pathways needed to sustain momentum (Nurture).

Through shared learning, participants will contribute their collective expertise to co-create a live resource bank highlighting the strengths, connections, and opportunities that exist across the sector.

Workshop Outcome:

Participants will leave with a practical ecosystem map of cross-sector resources, supports, and collaborative pathways designed to strengthen organizational capacity and advance disability-inclusive employment in their own communities.

From Awareness to Action: Implementing Accessible and Equitable AI in Employment

Location: Online

Date: Monday, October 26, 2026 | 2:30 - 3:30 p.m.

Presenters

- Lisa Liskovoi, Senior Inclusive Designer, Digital Accessibility Consultant, Inclusive Design Research Centre (IDRC), OCAD University

Description

Artificial intelligence is increasingly being used in recruitment, workplace accommodations, employee support and everyday work tasks, creating both opportunities and risks for disability inclusion. This interactive workshop is designed for employers, HR professionals, disability inclusion practitioners, technology developers and researchers who are involved in selecting, implementing or overseeing workplace AI systems. Through small-group discussions, participants will explore realistic scenarios involving AI-powered hiring, accommodation-management tools and generative AI workplace assistants, identifying implementation challenges, trust-building measures and practical actions employers can take. Drawing on the recently developed Canadian standard for Accessible and Equitable Artificial Intelligence Systems (ASC 6.2), the workshop will connect participant insights to emerging good practices for accessible and equitable AI adoption. Participants will leave with practical considerations and recommendations that can help organizations build capacity for disability-inclusive AI implementation while preparing for the next generation of workplace technologies.

Workshop objectives

- Explore practical challenges involved in implementing artificial intelligence fairly and accessibly in employment contexts.
- Consider what employers can do to build trust, accessibility, equity and accountability into workplace AI implementation.
- Apply their experience and perspectives to scenarios involving AI-powered recruitment, workplace accommodations and generative AI assistants.
- Learn how their recommendations connect with ASC 6.2, Accessible and Equitable Artificial Intelligence Systems.
- Identify emerging workplace issues that may require additional guidance, research or standards development.

Day 2 (October 27) – Workshops

Practical Tools to Support People Living with Chronic Health Conditions in the Workplace

Location: 208N

Date: Tuesday, October 27, 2026 | 11:30 a.m – 12:30 p.m.

Presenters

- Monique A.M. Gignac, PhD, Scientific Director & Senior Scientist, Institute for Work & Health; Professor, Dalla Lana School of Public Health, University of Toronto

Description

This interactive workshop explores two key aspects of workplace disability inclusion: disclosure and accommodation planning. Participants will examine why decisions about disclosing a disability, particularly chronic or episodic and non-visible conditions, can be challenging and learn about practical approaches to support informed decision-making. The session will introduce the DCIDE (Decision-Support for Communicating about Invisible Disabilities that are Episodic) tool as a resource for navigating disclosure conversations. Participants will also explore strategies for workplace support and accommodation planning, including the use of the Job Demands and Accommodation Planning Tool (JDAPT) to help identify job demands, support needs, and effective workplace accommodations.

When Conversations Transform Us: Fostering Inclusive Mentorships that Strengthen Social Capital

Location: Room 108N

Date: Tuesday, October 27, 2026 | 11:30 a.m – 12:30 p.m.

Presenters

- Joanna Goode, Executive Director, Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE)
- Erica Ruth Kelly, Director of Learning and Development, Canadian Association for Supported Employment (CASE)

Description

This interactive workshop explores the following question: what if career pathways could start with meaningful human connection rather than a job posting? How do we support others in building those connections through inclusive mentorships that strengthen social capital? In this workshop, we will share how CASE delved into these questions through MentorAbility Canada, a national initiative built on a supported employment foundation that promotes the recruitment, employment, and retention of persons experiencing disability. Based on what we learned through this successful initiative, along with facilitated group discussion, we will share concrete tools you can begin implementing in your work to continue championing the benefits of inclusive workplaces.

Workshop outcomes

Participants will be able to:

- Understand the multi-faceted benefits of mentoring to strengthen inclusive workplace practices
- Explore how to support building social capital for persons experiencing disability
- Learn the concrete steps you can take to foster inclusive mentorship as part of your HR and DEIA practice

Building Safe Workplaces for Indigenous Women & Two Spirited People

Location: Main Room

Date: Tuesday, October 27, 2026 | 11:30 a.m – 12:30 p.m.

Presenters

- Valerie Vanderwyk, Indigenous Skills Employment Apprenticeship and Development
- Amanda Klarer, Keepers of the Circle

Description

What does safety in the workplace really mean?

Workplace safety goes beyond physical safety. True safety includes cultural safety, psychological and emotional safety, social safety, gender

safety, freedom from harassment and discrimination, and the ability to bring your whole self to work.

Keepers of the Circle and Indigenous Skills, Employment, Apprenticeship and Development (ISEAD) are two Indigenous organizations working together to develop a practical guide for creating safer workplaces for Indigenous women and Two-Spirit people in the trades. We believe that safety is something we build collectively and that workplaces designed to be safer and more inclusive for those who face the greatest barriers can create better workplaces for everyone.

This interactive session is open to everyone. Participants are invited to join us in active discussion and exploration of what workplace safety means, what gets in the way of safety, and what employers, supervisors, co-workers, unions, training organizations and workers can do to strengthen it.

Your experiences, ideas and perspectives will help inform the development of the Safe Workplaces Toolkit.

Building a Workplace Accessibility Supports System That Works

Location: Online

Date: Tuesday, October 27, 2026 | 11:30 a.m – 12:30 p.m.

Presenters

- Dilshan Fernando, Research Associate, IDEA; Accessibility and Equity Officer, University of Guelph
- Peter Field, Research Associate, IDEA; Associate, IDEA-STEM
- Matt Freeman, Assistant Clinical Professor, School of Rehabilitation Science, McMaster University
- Andy Livingston, President & CEO, Dexterity Consulting

Description

Most organizations have a workplace accommodation policy. Few have an accessibility supports system. The difference shows up in the details: a request stalled because the cost hits a manager's budget, inconsistent information, instructions, and expectation, medical note barriers for simple

adjustments, lack of safety to disclose one's disability. In this applied case study, participants act as the Accessibility Supports Team at a unionized, federally regulated employer where accommodations take months to close and workers have stopped disclosing. Using the ASC Employment Implementation Guide, teams take stock, set priorities, decide what to pilot, and define how they will know it worked.

Workshop outcomes

Participants will be able to:

5. **Diagnose** the gap between a duty to accommodate policy and an accessibility supports system.
6. **Prioritize** a one-cycle plan within real limits of budget, collective agreements and leadership attention.
7. **Design** core levers: a central accommodation fund, Yes by Default with minimal disclosure, and portable supports.
8. **Measure** whether workers' experience actually changed, not just whether policies were written.

Beyond Accommodation: Unlocking Talent Through Inclusive Design

Location: Online

Date: Tuesday, October 27, 2026 | 11:30 a.m – 12:30 p.m.

Presenters

- Emile Tompa, Executive Director, IDEA; Senior Scientist, Institute for Work & Health (IWH)
- Rebecca Gewurtz, Director, IDEA; Associate Professor, School of Rehabilitation Science, McMaster University
- Alec Farquhar, Strategic Advisor, IDEA

Description

Persons with disabilities represent a substantial and often underutilized pool of talent. Yet many employers continue to struggle with recruiting, hiring, retaining, and advancing workers with disabilities. Too often, efforts to improve accessibility and inclusion focus on individual accommodations

rather than addressing the organizational systems and practices that create barriers in the first place.

This interactive workshop introduces inclusive design as a strategic approach to building employer capacity for disability inclusion. Drawing on the social model of disability, human rights principles, and systems thinking, participants will explore how employers can move beyond reactive accommodation to proactively embed accessibility and inclusion into organizational policies, processes, and practices. The workshop emphasizes building disability confidence and developing organizational capabilities that make inclusion an integral and sustainable part of how workplaces operate.

Through practical examples and facilitated discussion, participants will examine how inclusive design can be applied across the employment experience, from recruitment and onboarding to workplace supports, career development, and advancement. They will explore opportunities to identify and remove systemic barriers, strengthen inclusive workplace cultures, and incorporate accessibility and inclusion into organizational planning and continual improvement processes.

Participants will leave with a practical understanding of how inclusive design can help employers tap into a broader pool of talent, create workplaces where persons with disabilities can thrive, and identify opportunities to initiate meaningful organizational change.

The session will be organized around a central question – how can employers move beyond individual accommodation to systematically design workplaces that attract, retain, and develop the talents of persons with disabilities?

The workshop is organized around three interconnected themes:

1. Rethinking disability inclusion: Why inclusive design represents a shift in how we understand and address barriers to employment.
2. Inclusive design in practice: How employers can redesign recruitment, onboarding, workplace supports, and career development.
3. Building organizational capacity: How employers can move from individual initiatives to sustainable, organization-wide change.

Day 2 (October 27) – Partner Lightning Talks

You Don’t Have to Do It Alone: Building Employer Confidence, Capacity, and Inclusive Hiring

Presenters

- Anna Nelson, Director of Employment Supports Team, LiveWorkPlay
- Darren Bailey, Senior Human Resources Advisor, Health Canada and the Public Health Agency of Canada
- Neil Butts, Director of Culinary Programs, Kinaxis
- Jennifer Broad, Employer Partnerships and Workplace Inclusion Specialist, LiveWorkPlay

Lightning Talk Description

You don't have to do it alone. Through employer stories from Kinaxis and Health Canada, this session explores how inclusive hiring becomes possible when employers are supported to build confidence, capacity, and practical experience. Participants will hear how partnerships can help move workplaces from good intentions to sustainable, proactive inclusion.

Pathways to EmployABILITY Program: Supporting Students with Disabilities in the Workplace

Presenters

- Joel Cummings, Workplace Accommodation Specialist, Toro Group of Companies
- Maria Liberatore, Itinerant Work Experience Teacher, York Catholic District School Board

Lightning Talk Description

Learn about the The Pathways to EmployAbility Program (PEP), which offers students with disabilities a work experience class where they can learn pre-employment skills such as professionalism in the workplace, health and safety and sector specific training modules and practice these skills within their schools. Once students display job readiness, work experience teachers work with local businesses and community partners to prepare them for work experience placements in their communities. Pedestrian safety skills and transit training is provided in PEP, so students

and their support workers can safely attend placements with the goal of developing independence both travelling and working at their placement. Through a Ministry of Education grant, the YCDSB partnered with Toro Group to provide work placements focused on manufacturing and trades, supporting students with disabilities who are interested in developing the skills needed to succeed in this pathway.

Supporting Apprentices with Disabilities During the Apprentice Journey

Presenters

- Emily Arrowsmith, Director of Research and Programs, Canadian Apprenticeship Forum

Lightning Talk Description

This presentation will share practical learning resources and workplace practices from employers that help apprentices with disabilities develop their skills and progress in their apprenticeship training.

Mentoring: A solution that centers relationships as a conduit to inclusion and workforce readiness

Presenters

- Tracy Luca-Huger, MA, Executive Director, Mentor Canada

Lightning Talk Description

This lightning talk will highlight key Canadian research findings for youth ages 18-30 in Canada and the impact of mentoring and mentors in their employment journeys and well-being. It will focus on critical supports and skills development that training and education programs alone cannot provide.