



**Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion**

Success stories

BC Hydro

A Canadian case study in diversity and inclusion

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BC Hydro: A Canadian success story in diversity and inclusion

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Encouraging women's advancement through leadership networks

BC Hydro is a provincial Crown corporation with a purpose to safely provide reliable, affordable, clean electricity throughout British Columbia. The organization's workforce is engineering- and trades-dominated, employing 5,500 people across the province, about 30% of whom are women. Since 2014, the company has been led by a woman, Jessica McDonald.

Diversity at BC Hydro is about understanding, recognizing and valuing the differences that make each employee unique, and strengthening an inclusive workplace. The organization started their diversity initiatives in 1991, and began tracking diversity and reporting on it in 1995. There is a corporate commitment to developing a diverse workforce that represents the communities in the province that the company serves. In 2007, the organization set a 10-year goal to have its workforce fully representative of the diversity of the BC labour market by 2017.

Setting the stage for launch of the Women's Network in 2004, diversity in BC Hydro's workforce was growing and grassroots efforts emerged to build support for the company's new communities. The Women's Network was the first to be started by employees who wanted to get to know their colleagues, followed by a multicultural network, and in 2012, another network was formed by and for Aboriginal employees.

Start at the beginning

When the Women's Network secured the sponsorship of BC Hydro's Diversity Program, the process of planning started with considering what the women in the organization might need. A mandate was developed for the network with two key themes:

1. Help the company identify barriers to women's success.
2. Develop initiatives for networking, learning and development to support women in being their personal and professional best.

The network has grown to about 500 women over the years, with programming that has evolved to keep up with the interests of members working in 95 offices across the province.

The group has seen growth beyond the confines of the company as well. In 2011, the program expanded outside BC Hydro to partner with women's groups from other organizations. The resulting para-network extended in 2014 to include TELUS, BC Hydro, LifeLabs, McCarthy Tetrault LLP, SAP, Sodexo Canada and Vancity. Its annual event with enhanced networking opportunities, ***Bringing Women Together***, sees executives from each of the companies participating with speakers discussing timely topics. This year's theme, *Bringing Women Together: Let's Elevate Gender-Balanced Leadership*, drew a larger audience than ever.

Develop organizational structure

As BC Hydro's Women's Network matured from its early days, its membership became more diverse and it needed more structure to serve its members well. An executive team was created to formalize the network's purpose, govern programs and to be the interface to the diversity program sponsor. The executive team was charged with bringing new opportunities for members to build skills, gain exposure and work with colleagues from across the company.

A large executive team was decided on as the best way for the network to be productive while accommodating the schedules of team members who needed the flexibility to contribute as their availability would allow. The Women's Network's executive team of nine – with positions for Chair, Vice-Chair, Treasurer, Coordinator, Sponsorship & Promotions, Anchor Event Lead, Communications, Membership Coordinator, Membership Community – are all volunteer roles. The commitment the women make to take time from their jobs is paired with agreements with their managers for mutual benefits, as the development and networking opportunities are significant.

Develop events that women want

The network uses a variety of information channels to inform programming. In response to the *2015 BC Hydro Employee Survey*, which identified that career development was a key concern for all employees, the Women's Network developed programs to support women in thinking about, investing in and taking control of their careers.

As many women's networks have found, it can be difficult to meet the range of women's needs that vary across a large organization and over the career of each person. What engages a young woman starting her career differs dramatically from the programming that interests a seasoned manager. The network has paid attention to developing different types of events through the year to address the age demographics of its membership.

Two key anchoring events

As a foundation for the Women's Network programming, two key events were developed to support the women of BC Hydro, organizational goals and the other network programs.

1. BC Hydro Power Summit (125-175 participants), an internal development and networking conference.
2. BC Hydro Executive Panel (150 -200 participants), an opportunity for members to participate in an interactive question and answer session with leadership at BC Hydro.

Additional programs for women

Coffee corners: These lunchtime networking events were designed to give members a chance to meet senior leaders in a relaxed setting and meet colleagues from across the organization.

Lean In Circles: A meeting series inspired by Sheryl Sandberg's book, [Lean In](#), these peer mentoring and discussion groups connect women with others in similar jobs. The objective of Lean In Circles at BC Hydro has been to discuss issues and collaborate on strategies for managing them. Educational materials and discussion guides on the [Lean In website](#) are shared.

Taking the Stage: Facilitated by senior leaders within the organization, this training program was developed to teach women to speak with courage and confidence so they can be seen and heard as leaders. Delivered in partnership with BC Hydro's Training and Development team, the initiative is designed to build leadership communication skills for women.

Bringing Women Together: Timed to align with International Women's Day, this event provides members with an opportunity to network with colleagues from outside the company. It's become a valuable opportunity for women in the networks of eight partnering organizations to mix and network, and hear from leading speakers on topics that are relevant to them.

The continuous attention to developing responsive programming that connects women across BC Hydro has increased employee awareness of the network and helped its membership grow.

Reach out and be relevant to women

To build awareness for the Women's Network, Susan Hancock shares her communications expertise with the team's volunteers on the monthly newsletter, adding value as a learning experience for all. The newsletter promotes educational opportunities, professional development and networking events, as well as events outside the organization that might be relevant for readers. Each issue has a different theme, with each theme supported by a message from the chair and profiles about women whose accomplishments and leadership qualities might inspire others.

Subscription and click-through rates of the newsletter are reviewed to hone content, and the communications team also looks for other opportunities and communication channels to spread news of the network.

Tactics that made a difference

Reflecting on her experience with the network, Susan Hancock identified three tactics that have helped the Women's Network succeed, that other organizations could bring to their own planning.

Link to your organizational strategy

For BC Hydro, the sponsorship from their Diversity Program has linked the Women's Network to a key organizational objective – building a representational workforce – and has ensured that the group's focus is aligned with the company's direction.

Get organized

Leadership found it's important to have a plan and be consistent with what the network is trying to achieve so recommend measuring and reporting on the group's progress. Being able to show the accomplishments of employee groups is critical for leadership to understand the value that it and its initiatives bring to the organization.

Be willing to stretch

This group has seen how getting involved in supporting employee networks is a valuable opportunity to add experience and new career skills to the resumé.

Susan shared that her own responsibility to the Women's Network has allowed her to explore leadership skills she has been able to apply to her own career. She found that organizing a team of five volunteers supporting communications for the group has brought valuable experience that she might not have gained within her existing role.

The organizational impact of the Women's Network

The leadership of the BC Hydro Women's Network reports that the group's impact has been primarily seen to be in the engagement, development and success of its members. Additionally, it has played a valuable role in helping the organization better understand and remove any barriers that are preventing talented women from being as successful as they can be. The initiatives of the network have sent a signal to women at BC Hydro, and those in the labour market, that it is a company committed to creating a culture where women can excel.

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The Success story initiative

There is astonishingly little published that shines a light on diversity and inclusion successes in Canada, though there are many, across a wide range of organizations. Case studies referenced by trainers and leadership tend to be reporting on different countries, cultures, political and economic settings.

The goal of this initiative is to support diversity and inclusion leadership with stories that are relevant to what's happening now, here in Canada. By sharing their stories, we celebrate the successes of Canadian organizations while contributing to learning for everyone that cares about diversity and inclusion.

The employers who have developed initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion as priorities in the workplace are responding to an increasingly competitive economy that's responsive to the diversity of employees – and the country. We are grateful to those who have participated in interviews.

This series of case studies will be published monthly through 2016. Subscribing to our monthly newsletter at ccdi.ca will keep you updated with the latest case studies, which will all be posted online at ccdi.ca/successstories. For more information, contact mail@ccdi.ca.

The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

The CCDI has a mission to help the organizations we work with be inclusive, free of prejudice and discrimination – and to generate the awareness, dialogue and action for people to recognize diversity as an asset and not an obstacle. Through the research, reports and toolkits we develop and our workshops, events and workplace consultations, we're helping Canadian employers understand their diversity, plan for it and create inclusion.

CCDI's leadership has a proven model that's cultivated trust as an impartial third party. Our expertise is focused on the topics of inclusion that are relevant in Canada now and the regional differences that shape diversity.

A charitable organization that thinks like a business, we have created a niche with our innovative research technology and data analysis that brings a deeper understanding of Canadian diversity demographics and mindsets at any given moment.

CCDI is grateful for the support of Employer Partners across Canada. For enquiries, contact Susan Rogers, Chief Client Officer, Susan.Rogers@ccdi.ca or (416) 968-6520, ext 103.

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