

Who's Doing What for Employment Equity in the West Kootenay? Business, Government, Non-Profits, Co-operatives and Unions

Over the past four months, 22 research interviews were conducted with a diverse range of employers, human resource managers and union representatives in the region. The intention was to find out the best practices being used in terms of fair recruitment and hiring and supportive employment.

The interviewees included representatives of the federal and provincial governments, crown corporations, the college, school districts, health authorities, non-profit organizations involved in training and employment, major industry, small and medium-sized businesses, large and small co-ops, industrial and office unions, and professional associations. The business sectors represented included forestry, mining, manufacturing, high technology, utilities, tourism, publishing, financial services and food retailing.

Given the wide diversity of organizations interviewed, it is not surprising to find a wide range of approaches to human resources, employment and equity issues. The following summary tries to show how different types of organizations approach equity and fairness. Also, it presents a selection of the most innovative and supportive practices related to recruitment, hiring and retention of workers.

Overall Approaches to Equity

Federal government departments and federally-regulated corporations with more than 100 employees are compelled by legislation to approach equity by comparing the number of equity group members in the workplace versus the local population. They then set action plans to remedy any inequities. Provincial government ministries have formalized approaches to equity including equity advisors, action plans and mandatory training. Virtually all other organizations approach equity from the perspective of a commitment to fairness, with pro-active measures in some cases. A few organizations could be said to “embrace” equity throughout.¹

The most exciting overall approaches include:

- recognizing equity as an organizational value
- educating hiring teams and managers about diversity, equity and fair practices
- encouraging diversity or balance in senior roles and/or in the general workforce
- having a strong ethic around internal advancement and pro-active processes to support it
- developing and enforcing strong anti-harassment policies and conducting appropriate internal education about what they mean
- having strong collective agreement language around discrimination, harassment, pay equity, flexible work arrangements and parental/educational/eldercare leaves

¹ The Kootenay Country Food Co-op is one example worth mentioning because the organization runs on equity principles and practices that come from the shared values of staff, management and board members. The holistic approach meant that the Co-op had very few specific practices to deliberately promote equity.

- having consistent hiring practices developed with specific consideration of fairness and eliminating potential bias
- equity committees, designated equity contacts or other identifiable contacts that are responsible for making sure that equity happens
- having an organizational commitment and managerial approach that values staff and pro-actively supports their well-being
- having a strong commitment to staff development, including financial support where possible
- offering flexible work arrangements that allow workers to balance work and life
- offering work site or task modifications to accommodate people with disabilities
- getting involved in community activities related to equity or speaking up about equity

The following is *a sample of* the best practices of the interviewed organizations.²

Recruitment and Hiring

- 16 provincial government ministries are targeting recruitment at equity groups for auxiliary and co-op positions (two areas where the provincial government is hiring)
- Community Futures of Central Kootenay states on its job ads that it is a “fair/equal opportunity employer”
- A number of organizations have reviewed job qualifications with an intent to remove bias and make sure that job criteria apply specifically to the job requirements
- Kootenay Savings Credit Union ensures its hiring teams are aware of equity issues
- Community Futures makes sure it has a balance on its hiring teams
- Pacific Insight Electronics has a deliberate corporate objective of workforce balance
- Celgar and the Greater Trail Community Skills Centre utilize behaviorally-based interviews (considered to have some benefits regarding fairness)
- The Columbia Power Corporation informally encourages equity hire with its contractors
- Community Futures and Pacific Insight Electronics have employees who started with the organization through bridging programs

Promoting Awareness and Support for Equity

- The Greater Trail Community Skills Centre and Kootenay Boundary Community Health Services Society have equity/fairness as an organizational value
- The provincial Equal Opportunity Secretariat is targeting equity groups as a way to maintain government’s competitiveness as an employer
- Selkirk College has a human rights education coordinator, a First Nations advisor, a disability access coordinator and a Safer Campus initiative that conduct promotional activities
- United Steelworkers of America and the Selkirk College Faculty Association have educational flyers/posters on discrimination and harassment

² Note that the interviews were “theme-based” and did not necessarily obtain the same details for each organization. Consequently, there may be other organizations in the interview sample that have the same best practice as those listed.

- The Ministry of Women's Equality has a poster on violence in the workplace
- The Greater Trail Community Skills Centre and Selkirk College offer diversity courses to the public in conjunction with the Trail and District Multicultural Society

Harassment Policies and Codes of Conduct

- All government agencies have harassment policies
- West Kootenay Power invested in a new, strong harassment policy last year
- The staff at Community Futures of Central Kootenay developed its harassment policy
- There is a Standard of Conduct for provincial public service employees
- West Kootenay Power has a Code of Conduct including a "no discrimination" clause
- Pacific Insight Electronics has an informal Rule #1 for staff to "treat others the way you'd like to be treated yourself". The rule is consistently communicated and acted on by management.

Equity-related Training

- Some provincial ministries have local training teams to address harassment and reasonable accommodation – the Ministry of Forests is one example locally
- United Steelworkers of America has a 2 day program called "Women in Steel" covering women's issues related to employment, the union and society
- United Steelworkers of America has an in-house trainer (based in Kimberley) who addresses harassment issues in a format suitable for industrial and/or office workers
- The Kootenay Boundary Community Health Services Society and Greater Trail Community Health Council offer training for employees on violence in the workplace
- Selkirk College's human right education coordinator provides training on harassment, diversity, human rights and duty to accommodate
- West Kootenay Power has provided anti-harassment training for its exempt staff
- Prestige Inn has conducted staff education re. harassment and workplace violence

Equity Language in Collective Agreements

- Most collective agreements contain some equity language, most commonly clauses prohibiting discrimination and harassment
- Some health sector agreements also contains language on pay equity and parental leaves
- There is strong equity language in the Columbia Hydro Constructors – Allied Hydro Council collective agreement governing Columbia Power Corporation projects

Flexible Work Agreements

- Almost all employers offer some forms of flexible work arrangements to accommodate employee preferences. The most common of these are the 9 day fortnight, flexible work hours and flexible start times
- Almost all employees at HRDC are on some kind of flexible work schedule
- Job sharing exists in the Ministry of Forests, Kootenay Savings, West Kootenay Power and ICBC
- Pennywise enables staff to set their own hours as long as deadlines are met and the work gets done

Pay Equity

- Many employers have been able to remedy pay and job classification inequities through a provincial pay equity program
- Resolution of a federal pay equity case means that clerks will get a retroactive pay increase for the years from 1985 to 1999
- ICBC has an educational package on pay equity including a work position questionnaire based on the “amended Deloitte and Touche” system of gender neutral job classifications

Staff Development and Career Counselling

- Quite a few employers contribute financially to staff development. In some cases, it is very formalized as with the School District and government agencies.
- Some small and medium-sized businesses and non-profits pay for employee development. This includes Pacific Insight Electronics, Pennywise, Kootenay Savings and the Greater Trail Community Skills Centre.
- Celgar and Cominco are encouraging the development of a Process Operator Program at Selkirk College so that future job candidates will have had consistent training

Employee Empowerment and Recognition

- Kootenay Savings and the KBCHSS have programs that recognize staff for good ideas that assist the organization
- Pennywise has a family, team-style approach that includes a high degree of employee and team autonomy as well as regular fun activities that generate good will

Staff Health and Wellness

- Many employers have Employee and Family Assistance Programs that enable employees to access counselling services etc. in a respectful and anonymous way
- Kootenay Savings has lifestyle response team that has several programs including wellness, healthy lifestyle incentives, stress management and ergonomics training
- West Kootenay Power contributes a fixed amount for the wellness activities of its employees (subject to certain restrictions)
- The Greater Trail Community Health Council has an ergonomics team on site, including training and developing a lifting technique called “Backcheck”

Accommodation of People with Disabilities

- Many employers have made worksite modifications such as chairs, desks, keyboards, rest areas, ramps and physical renovations
- Cominco has a “modified work centre” for people with long term disabilities
- United Steelworkers of America has strong language in its collective agreement with Cominco regarding accommodation of disabilities
- Pacific Insight Electronics has set up work task specializations tailored to people with disabilities
- Celgar’s new mill accommodates wheelchairs throughout

Ongoing Structures and Committees

- Provincial government ministries have a Nelson Region Equity Outreach and Recruitment Committee
- HRDC has an Employment Equity Committee
- ICBC has a Diversity Focal Point position regionally
- Most companies manage equity issues through their human resources managers
- Selkirk College Faculty Association has a Status of Women Committee
- Selkirk College has a President's Advisory Committee on Human Rights

Success Stories about Careers and Workplace Culture

There are many success stories related to women's careers in the region. The following list mentions a few particularly notable highlights.

- Selkirk College is about to have its first female president
- The proportion of female service delivery managers at HRDC has increased from 20% to about 65% between 1990 and 2000
- Cominco has a female senior manager, the Manager of Metallurgy
- Pacific Insight Electronics has employed a woman who was 65 years old when hired
- Pacific Insight Electronics, Community Futures, Columbia Power Corporation, Cominco, Pennywise and the Greater Trail Community Skills Centre have female employees who have advanced significantly inside the organization. Examples are:
 - Started on the phones, now runs an automated accounting system
 - Started with no experience, now runs a weekly newspaper in manager's absence
 - Started in assaying and moved up into management
 - Started in hourly production work, now runs the firm's Quality Program
 - Started in clerical work, now conducting business training

In terms of an improved workplace culture, here are a few comments that stand out:

- In Cominco, for the last 15 years there's been a visibility of women that indicates that career opportunities exist the same as for men. The research division is multi-cultural. There is a good rapport between young female engineers/co-op students and older male plant workers.
- In provincial ministries, there has been a definite improvement and increased awareness of what's reasonable, appropriate, dignified and respectful.
- School District #8 reports big changes over 30 years. There was unequal pay and now people don't even think about differences due to gender. Big gains were made in the late 70's and early '80s.
- In Celgar, the impact of women on the plant is visible in things like respectful tone and language in worker meetings.

Appendix 1 - Organizations/Businesses Interviewed by Sector

1. Human Resources Development Canada	Government	75 employees
2. Nelson Region Employment Equity Outreach And Recruitment Committee (PSERC)	Government	
• Ministry of Forests		
• Ministry of Environment		
• Energy and Mines		
• Advanced Education		
• Transportation and Highways		
• Others		
3. Columbia Power Corporation	Crown Corp. – hydro	10 employees
4. Insurance Corporation of B.C.	Crown Corp. – insurance	100
5. Selkirk College	College	400
6. School District # 8 (Kootenay Lake)	School district	800
7. Greater Trail Community Health Council	Health authority	1000
8. Kootenay Boundary Community Health Services Society	Health authority	206
9. Community Futures Development Corporation Of Central Kootenay	Business/financial svcs.	13
10. Greater Trail Community Skills Centre	Employmt./training svcs.	7
11. Cominco	Metals manufacturing	1850
12. Celgar	Pulp mill	420
13. West Kootenay Power	Utility	400
14. Pacific Insight Electronics	Technology	200
15. Prestige Lakeside Resort	Tourism	75
16. Pennywise	Publishing	10
17. Kootenay Savings Credit Union	Financial services	198
18. Kootenay Country Store Co-op	Food retail	34
19. United Steelworkers of America, Local 480	Industrial union	1470
20. United Steelworkers of America, Local 9705	Office/technical union	550
21. Selkirk College Faculty Association	Professional association	140
22. Office & Professional Employees Intl. Union	Office/professional union	100•

• refers to ICBC in the West and East Kootenays

Appendix 2 - Needs Identified by Employers, Managers and Unions

Networking and Information Sharing

- Requested by provincial ministries, HRDC, Community Futures, Kootenay Savings, the Greater Trail Community Skills Centre, West Kootenay Power and ICBC

Harassment Trainer suitable for Industrial Workplace

- Requested by Cominco, Columbia Power Corporation (West Kootenay Power and Celgar may be interested)
- Note: United Steelworkers District 3 has such a trainer, located in Kimberley

Other Training/Education Programs

- Process Operator Program at Selkirk College requested by Celgar
- High level speaker on equity and diversity issues e.g. Trevor Wilson, TWI, Toronto

Resources

- “Guidelines for Hiring a Diverse Workforce”
- Best practices and business case information
- Resources for library
- Information on behavioral interviewing
- Community Futures, Selkirk College, Cominco, Greater Trail Community Skills Centre

Assistance with attracting/finding qualified equity candidates

- Columbia Power Corporation, HRDC, Greater Trail Community Health Council (for male nurses)

Other Specific Questions

- Contact organizations in the region re. visible minorities requested by Ministry of Forests and HRDC
- How to introduce harassment training to organizations that need it, requested by GTCSC

Sample Resources Obtained for Purposes of Sharing

- Equity action plans
- Collective agreement clauses on harassment, discrimination, pay equity, parental/educational/eldercare leaves, hiring, training
- Directory of equity organizations
- Harassment policies of government and private sector
- Codes of Conduct
- Pamphlets/posters on harassment and workplace violence
- Pay equity binder