

March 5, 2001

Wally C. Penner
Director, Community & Regional Affairs
Columbia Power Corporation
1125 – 4th Street
Castlegar, B.C.
V1N 2A8

Dear Wally:

I am writing to request that the Columbia Power Corporation provide \$10,000 in funding for a cutting edge pilot project for workforce transition and equity integration in construction and major industry in the West Kootenays. The intent of the pilot project is to establish a Labour and Equity Facilitator to coordinate and support multi-stakeholder collaboration and action to resolve equity issues and support smooth workforce transition in trades and industrial employment.

The project offers significant benefits to the Columbia Basin Hydro Projects in terms of off-site support for equity including coordination of a multi-stakeholder Equity Integration Committee. Support such as facilitated problem solving, information sharing and strategizing would be based out of a “neutral” regional venue, Selkirk College. This will increase opportunities to resolve some systemic equity and labour force integration issues away from specific work sites.

The project is a timely response to regional stakeholders’ commitments to averting a crisis in skilled labour in trades and plant process occupations. As you know, workforce turnover in trades and industrial employment is expected to be 40% over the next ten years.

On February 9 of this year, regional stakeholders from industry, labour, training institutions, government and equity groups, including the Women’s Association, discussed their concerns at a meeting convened by the Columbia Basin Trust. At the meeting, there was a high level of agreement about key issues and an overall acceptance of equity as part of the solution to workforce transition. Indeed, it is unlikely that major employers and unions will be able to achieve smooth workforce turnover without reaching out to women, First Nations and other traditionally underrepresented groups. Youth are also underrepresented in our trades and industrial workforce, as many employers haven’t done much hiring over the past decade (or two). At the February 9 meeting, stakeholders agreed that we need to move from agreements in principle to collective action. Coordination of collaborative actions will be key.

We have started to identify some collaborative strategies such as a regional Equity Integration Committee. With coordination support from the Labour and Equity Facilitator, the Committee will help build a culture of support for new workforce entrants, pro-actively including equity group members. Actions may include information sharing, problem solving, outreach and promotion of trades training and apprenticeship (enhancing regional take-up of provincial initiatives), advocacy for equity group concerns and implementing workforce integration.

Stakeholder acceptance of equity and willingness to act has been long sought objective of women's organizations including ourselves and Kootenay WITT (Women in Trades and Technology). The Women's Association is spearheading advocacy to secure infrastructural and funding support for the pilot project. To date, Selkirk College has agreed to host the Facilitator position and provide in-kind support valued at over \$4,000 for the pilot project year. We will be approaching industry, labour, training and economic development stakeholders for partner funding. Early support from CPC is key to the concept of a government, industry, labour, education partnership.

We feel that the pilot project has the appropriate infrastructural and organizational support being housed at Selkirk College. The College has an active Trades and Technology Department and has initiated a funding request for a Women in Trades and Technology (WITT) course.

Again, please let me express how important this will be for the future of our trades and industrial workforce in the West Kootenays. \$10,000 contributed to this Labour and Equity Facilitation pilot project will be an investment that generates significant future returns including a healthy workforce and a vibrant economy in our region. I look forward to receiving your support for this project.

Yours truly,

Ruth Beck
Employment Equity Project Coordinator

cc. Hon. Ed Conroy
Selkirk College