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Employment Equity for *Women*

...still
matters



Canada

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Introduction

Women now make up half of the workforce in the federal Public Service of Canada. Today women are present, to some degree, in virtually every type of job in the federal Public Service.

However, women are only one quarter of the Executive Category; they make up the majority of people hired in term positions; and they are concentrated in many traditionally female support roles.

This booklet brings together a number of concrete suggestions designed to improve the participation of women in all groups and at all levels of the federal Public Service.

These suggestions are grouped in four main areas, as follows:

- recruitment and selection
- career development and advancement
- organizational culture
- supportive employment policies and practices

The Consultation Committee on Employment Equity for Women identified this project as a priority, and the booklet was developed with the assistance of the Intervention Fund of the Employment Equity Positive Measures Program (EEPMP).

How to Use This Booklet

The suggestions outlined below are intended for managers, Human Resources professionals and employees.

Managers can use these suggestions when doing the following:

- conducting career counselling sessions with employees;
- conducting performance review discussions with employees;
- holding staff meetings;
- assisting staff in the development of training plans, human resources plans or employment equity plans;
- selecting new employees, including students and persons being considered for term positions.

Human resources professionals can use these suggestions when doing the following:

- holding employee orientation sessions;
- conducting career counselling workshops;
- designing supervisory or management training workshops;
- delivering workshops on employment equity or managing diversity;
- conducting performance review workshops;

- developing departmental training plans, human resources plans and departmental employment equity plans;
- advising managers on hiring and promoting employees, including students and persons being considered for term positions.

Employees can use these suggestions when doing the following:

- participating in their performance reviews or identifying professional development aspirations;
- having regular discussions with managers;
- participating in staff meetings to increase awareness among peers;
- participating in union meetings;
- attending meetings of advisory groups for women;
- attending brown bag lunches;
- having informal discussions.

Recruitment and Selection

Hiring practices can influence whether or not qualified women obtain employment, and even whether or not qualified women will be interested in working for a particular employer.

If women are disproportionately recruited for term, seasonal or part-time positions, this can have a negative effect on both the pay and benefits they receive and their career progression.

An equitable working environment ensures that recruitment and selection practices are barrier-free in terms of recruitment, screening, interviewing and selection.

Here are some specific suggestions to ensure women are successfully recruited for positions within the federal Public Service.

Ideas for Managers

- Use summer employment and internship programs as training and work experience mechanisms for women, as well as part of a longer-term recruitment strategy.
- Use co-operative programs at high schools, colleges, and universities to attract female candidates, especially those in science and technology.
- Participate in career fairs and job shadowing projects for female high school students.
- Ensure that selection boards are composed of both women and men.

Ideas for Human Resources Professionals

- Develop an outreach strategy and partnerships with community-based agencies – especially in regional offices – to identify qualified female applicants for external vacancies.
- Contact women's groups and professional associations across the country – especially those involved with women in non-traditional occupations and groups representing Aboriginal women, visible minority women and women with disabilities – to ensure that their members are aware of your organization as a potential employer.
- Set up scholarship programs directed towards women in non-traditional occupations and other occupations where there is a low representation of women in your organization, in order to increase the number of women available for employment in these occupations.
- Explore mechanisms for recruiting women into non-traditional occupations by establishing partnerships with associations and public and private organizations which have women's committees, or with colleges and universities that have women's programs, especially in the scientific and engineering fields.
- Organize workshops and information sessions for managers about barrier-free recruitment and selection practices, including questions that should and shouldn't be asked in an interview.

Career Development and Advancement

An equitable working environment for women means ensuring that employers base career development and advancement on merit; that all interested candidates are given equal consideration; and that all employees are aware of – and understand – what options are available to them.

Here are some suggestions on how to promote access to career development and advancement opportunities for women.

Ideas for Managers

- Support continuing education for women through tuition reimbursement and time off during working hours to prepare for assignments and exams.
- Provide opportunities for women to network with employees at higher levels in the organization.
- Provide opportunities for female employees to acquire line management experience.
- Offer female employees a variety of professional development options such as formal courses, seminars and on-line self-paced learning.
- Emphasize experiential learning and on-the-job learning through rotations, assignments, and project work to broaden the scope and breadth of experience.
- Encourage female employees to think about development and cross-functional career moves that will broaden their skills and possibly result in obtaining a “non-traditional” job.

- Sponsor short-term assignments where staff can apply to go on secondment for periods of up to six months (e.g. maternity leave replacements, language training replacements).
- Appoint women to key strategic positions in central agencies and in line and operational positions in departments. This could include rotational assignments through key central agencies to help women move through executive positions and develop the skills required for senior management jobs.

Ideas for Human Resources Professionals

- Keep managers informed about future career opportunities so that they can provide career counselling to women interested in career advancement and/or enrichment.
- Establish and use job bridging programs to enable women who have demonstrated potential but who may lack the necessary qualifications and experience to move to higher level jobs (e.g. programs to enable interested support staff to make the transition to entry-level positions, or officer-level women to make the transition to supervisory and management positions).
- Sponsor coaching and mentoring programs for women, including the use of role models.
- Provide managers with the training on how to mentor employees effectively.
- Establish an interdepartmental inventory of individuals who wish to be considered for assignments that managers can use to match individuals to the requirements of available positions.

- Use the performance review process as a mechanism for creating inventories of women who have demonstrated potential and who are interested in advancement.
- Indicate the criteria that are used for promotion and advancement decisions.
- Establish an accelerated management trainee program for high-potential women.
- Ensure that regional and district offices have equitable access for women to all training and development programs and information.

Ideas for Employees

- Tell your supervisor about your career goals and aspirations.
- Suggest opportunities for on-the-job training, including job rotation.
- Establish informal networks and support systems in your workplace.
- Volunteer to be a role model to other women.
- Demonstrate interest in developmental assignments, including participation on task forces, working groups, special project teams and stretch assignments.
- Participate in the development of an individual training plan as part of the performance assessment process with your supervisor.

Organizational Culture

Organizational cultures favourable to women include policies and programs that address the attitudes and behaviour of employees toward their female colleagues. They also include specific practical issues of concern to women such as alternative work arrangements, family leave arrangements, child care and the physical work environment.

Other indicators of an equitable working environment for women include the number of discrimination and harassment complaints filed, the number of employees requesting and receiving family leave and alternative work arrangements, and the number of resignations.

The following are some steps that can be taken to foster a favourable organizational culture for women.

Ideas for Managers

- Enlist the active support of the most senior managers in the organization.
- Brief employees about what is and is not appropriate behaviour in the workplace, as well as the unspoken norms and customs.
- Sponsor education sessions with existing employees before designated group members are hired into their areas of work.
- Make sure women and men on your staff are consulted to the same extent about work issues.
- Make sure women are given recognition for their ideas.

Ideas for Human Resources Professionals

- Enlist the active support of senior managers in the organization.
- Establish mechanisms that enable employees to make suggestions for improving the effectiveness of the organization and the quality of their work life.
- Use surveys and exit interviews to determine issues of concern to women.
- Communicate harassment and anti-racism policies, along with clear procedures for developing complaints, and provide support mechanisms for complainants.
- Provide managers with sensitization training in employment equity issues and cultural diversity.

Ideas for Employees

- Establish interdepartmental working groups to exchange information about policies and practices that benefit women.
- Raise issues with your bargaining agents that could be considered in collective agreements.
- Organize brainstorming sessions about ways to improve the organizational culture for women and then forward ideas to your supervisor or human resources section.

Supportive Employment Policies and Practices

Studies have also shown that employers who recognize the benefits of employment equity for women also, in general, recognize that certain supportive policies and programs are required to assist in creating an equitable working environment for women.

A 1999 study conducted by the Centre for Research and Education on Women and Work, at Carleton University in Ottawa, reported that career success and life success are closely intertwined for public service employees and that certain issues were more problematic for women in the Public Service than for men. This finding underlines the importance of access to alternative work arrangements and other issues related to balance between work and family responsibilities.

Here are some examples of supportive employment policies and practices.

Ideas for Managers

- Provide opportunity for flexible hours and modified job duties.
- Offer opportunity to work reduced hours or to share a job.
- Arrange for formal and informal communications channels to elicit feedback.

Ideas for Human Resources Professionals

- Apply human resources policies in a manner that fairly recognizes the contemporary family-related responsibilities of all employees.
- Consider the following when planning out-of-town conferences or training: accessibility to transportation; the safety factor; availability of phones for people with family responsibilities; on-site childcare; and childcare or other family care expense allowances for those with family responsibilities.
- Provide relocation assistance that acknowledges dual-career families, such as consulting services for the “trailing spouse” and “buddy systems” to link families and help them during their orientation to a new community.

Ideas for Employees

- Share information about departmental policies with other women.
- Contribute articles to departmental newsletters highlighting examples of supportive employment policies and practices.
- Tell your manager or human resources section about the need for new or revised supportive measures for women.
- Give your manager ideas on how supportive measures can be balanced with operational requirements.
- Tell your managers and colleagues about women’s success stories.

Other Resources

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