

# diversity is working

SPARC BC's *Diversity is Working* project provides seventeen (17) case studies of Lower Mainland organizations that have taken steps to make their workplaces more welcoming and inclusive for employees with diverse backgrounds. The purpose of the case studies is to celebrate successes in workplace diversity by highlighting best practices.

The set of case studies includes examples from organizations with small Human Resources departments to larger organizations with large Human Resources departments and designated diversity managers. The case studies are also drawn from a range of different sectors including businesses, non-profit organizations and government institutions. Some of the organizations being profiled have been implementing diversity and employment equity initiatives for decades while others have started to look at diversity in recent years.

Because of the diverse range of organizations being profiled, there are relevant best practices for any organization that is working to make their workplace more welcoming and inclusive of people from diverse backgrounds. Refer to the adjacent diagram for a list of participating organizations.

The following pieces of information are provided in each organization's case study:

- diversity business case or mandate for diversity;
- diversity initiatives and results; and,
- advice for other organizations considering undertaking similar work.



**SAFEWAY** 

Safeway is one of North America's largest supermarket chains. The company's subsidiary, Canada Safeway, has 224 stores located throughout Canada with seventy-five (75) of those stores located in British Columbia.

# Canada Safeway



## About Safeway

Safeway Inc. is a Fortune 500 company and is North America's second largest supermarket chain with 1,694 stores located throughout the United States and Canada. The company's subsidiary, Canada Safeway, has 224 stores located throughout Canada with seventy-five (75) of those stores located in British Columbia.

## Safeway's Business Case for Diversity

Safeway has developed a strong business case for diversity, where fostering a diverse workforce is an integral business strategy and a core company value. According to the company website, diversity and inclusion are the foundation of the company's success. In addition, Steve Burd, Chief Executive Officer of Safeway Inc., has also stated that: "by recognizing and celebrating our differences, we embrace our collective talents and use our contributions to create a more successful company."<sup>1</sup>

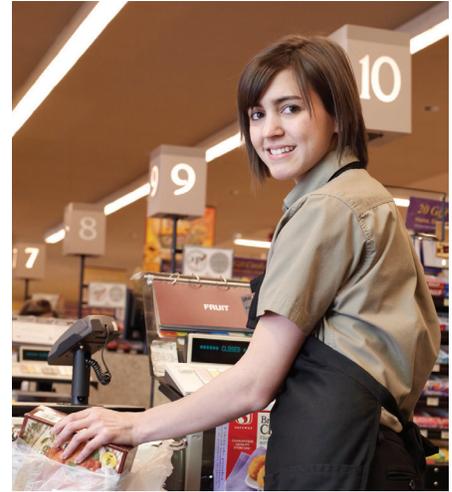
<sup>1</sup> Safeway Inc. *The Foundation of our Success*. Accessed March 26th, 2012 at <http://www.careersatsafeway.com/why-work-for-us/diversity>

There are three (3) main reasons why Safeway Inc. considers diversity to be important for its business and the bottom line. First, fostering a diverse workforce which reflects the surrounding community creates a much more welcoming and inclusive customer service experience for local residents. If customers come into the store and see people who look like them, share their culture, and speak their language, they are likely to feel more comfortable and at ease shopping at Safeway.

Second, a diverse workforce helps to stimulate innovation within an organization. Research and past company experience has shown Safeway that if you have a team where everyone is very similar it can stifle creative group decision-making because team members share similar experiences and perspectives. This leads to 'group think' where team members are less likely to challenge one another's assumptions and suggest new ideas. In contrast, if you create a diverse team where people come from different backgrounds it brings new ideas to the table, and diverse teams are more likely to innovate. This has the potential to translate into improved organizational and financial performance for the business.

Third, if an organization is not inclusive in its hiring and promotional opportunities, the organization is overlooking an underutilized talent pool. As Cliff Yeo of Canada Safeway, stated: "You have to take your blinders off, and look at what people have to offer." As a result of this open-minded outlook, Safeway has successfully recruited excellent new staff and managers who may have been overlooked otherwise due to a limited understanding of diversity and inclusion. For instance, now that Safeway has an increased understanding of the abilities and needs of people with disabilities, they have recently hired people who are blind and deaf into management roles who are excelling in their new leadership positions.

# Canada Safeway



## Safeway's Diversity Initiatives

### Recruitment

One of the challenges that Canada Safeway initially faced when working to increase staff diversity was that they were receiving a relatively small number of job applications from some under-represented groups. Safeway expanded their talent pool by reaching out to the community and connecting with community organizations and experts. Safeway partnered with service providers and organizations that brought qualified job candidates to Safeway. Some of the organizations that Canada Safeway has worked with included MOSAIC, Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB), Progressive Intercultural Community Services (PICS), and Aboriginal Community Employment Services (ACCESS). These organizations supported Safeway in increasing its applicant pool and recruiting strong candidates from those communities. Some recruitment strategies that Safeway participated in included:

- Participating in job fairs;
- Providing work experience opportunities for people with developmental disabilities;
- Partnering on an ACCESS Essential Skills training program where ACCESS trained a group of their clients who lacked some Essential Skills on the Essential skills that are needed to work at Safeway; and,
- Participating in trade talks.

Canada Safeway has discovered that once the workforce in their stores became more diverse and they developed a reputation for being welcoming and inclusive, they started to receive a greater number of applicants from diverse backgrounds.

Canada Safeway has also found that it is very valuable to be an active participant in cultural events and festivals. They follow the advice that was provided to them by an immigrant service provider:

*"If you really want to get involved with a community, you need to get into a community. They need to see your face and shake your hand. No phone calls or E-mails. These are people who are new to Canada and they want to see you face to face. Communities don't just want Safeway to sponsor an event and provide food. They want to see you there."*

In situations where Safeway found that they did not have sufficient expertise in house, they have made a deliberate effort to learn from experts. One area where they had limited understanding was around people who are blind, and people who are deaf. They contacted the Canadian National Institute for the Blind (CNIB) and were invited to participate in a tour where CNIB shared information about what technology was available for people with limited vision, and what it is like for an employee who is blind in the workplace.

They also contacted the Western Institute for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing, and organized a learning event in collaboration with the Institute. The local diversity team looked into how many people they currently had employed at Canada Safeway who were deaf. They identified about a dozen (12) employees. These employees were invited, along with their store managers and HR representatives, to participate in an afternoon learning session. The employees and managers started off the session meeting as a group where they talked about the learning objectives for the afternoon. They were then split into two groups. The employees who were deaf were in one group, where they had an afternoon of learning about conflict management, while the managers went into a different room and were provided disability awareness training. The two groups then came back together as one group and shared what they learned. Canada Safeway reports that the result was phenomenal. Not only did it increase the manager and staff awareness and knowledge, but also it created a new social network for employees who previously thought they were the only person who worked at Safeway that was deaf.

# Canada Safeway



## ***Improving retention by creating a welcoming and inclusive workplace***

Safeway has intentionally fostered a welcoming and inclusive workplace by making diversity and inclusion a part of company culture and everything that the organization does. Diversity and workplace inclusion are a topic at most manager meetings all the way through the organization, and every manager throughout the company goes to a mandatory full day workshop on diversity and inclusion.

One way that Safeway promotes diversity is by supporting diversity boards throughout the province. Across BC there are five (5) Safeway districts, and each district has its own diversity board that is comprised of managers and employees. Each individual diversity board creates their own mandate for that year and develops a plan for how they are going to achieve their goals. Store recruiters serve as a bridge between the diversity boards and the individual stores that they work with. The recruiters are responsible for implementing the diversity initiatives at the individual store level, and providing training to staff around diversity.

Diversity and inclusion is also a topic of conversation at the management-union accommodation committee, which meets four or five times a year to discuss accommodations for employees with disabilities. Safeway reports that many of the accommodations are very easy to accomplish, and include interventions such as providing sit-stand-stools for people who have difficulty standing for long periods of time, or bringing a whiteboard into the bakery for an employee who is deaf.

### ***Leadership development***

Safeway has an extensive mentorship program where everyone (regardless of what level they work at) is being mentored by someone, and is also a mentor for someone else. Even employees who have worked at Safeway for over thirty years have a mentor. This is part of Safeway being a learning organization which is always looking to improve and innovate.

Safeway also supports the Retail Leadership Development program which prepares employees for becoming store managers. As part of this program, the division manager meets with leadership development program participants twice a year. The open and transparent management development plan provides every mentee with over 200 items that managers should know. Individual participants regularly meet with their mentor and discuss the plan and what area they are going to focus on for the next 2-3 weeks. Safeway also supports its own chapters of Toastmasters which meet weekly and are a pre-requisite for admission into the leadership program.

Previously, Safeway had very few women who were working in management positions, which led Safeway to look into why this was the case and what could be done to improve it. Safeway found that women and men generally have different networking styles. There is now a women's networking group to encourage more women to pursue management. The mentorship program has been very successful and the number of female managers has grown substantially. Safeway found that success grows success. Once women start to see people like themselves in management, they are more likely to realize that they have what it takes to become a store manager.

### **Safeway's Results**

Safeway has found that the organization has developed a sense of pride for its work in the areas of diversity and inclusion. The organization's diversity initiatives have grown and expanded dramatically over time and have been widely embraced by managers and front line staff.

Because diversity is considered a core value for the business, fostering a diverse and inclusive work environment is an expectation. As a result, it is tracked and managed. The performance of Safeway store managers are measured on store diversity and their achievements. In addition, representatives from Safeway's head office in California travel to Canada to audit diversity initiatives in Canada.



# Canada Safeway

Not surprisingly, Safeway reports that they have noticed an increase in representation across various groups over time. Across BC, visible minorities now comprise 26% of employees, 27% of assistant managers, and 11% of store managers. Females comprise 58% of Safeway employees, 29% of assistant store managers, and 13% of store managers. Approximately 5% of Safeway employees are people with disabilities. Across BC, 5% of staff are Aboriginal, with 8% of Aboriginal persons in assistant store manager or store manager positions.

## Safeway's Advice for Other Organizations

- Start with the experts. There are so many great organizations out there and if you don't ask the questions, you are never going to find out the answers. Don't be fearful of difficult questions. Sometimes those uncomfortable conversations are the starting point.
- This work is rewarding. We have given presentations and have people stand up and applaud.
- It is about giving back and becoming a leader in the communities that you serve.

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