

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.



Vancity

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About Vancity

Vancity is a member-owned, community-based, full-service financial co-operative serving BC residents throughout fifty-nine (59) branches located in Metro Vancouver, the Fraser Valley, Squamish and Victoria. Major business activities include day-to-day banking, lending, business banking and investment advice and services. Vancity's vision guides the organization to consider how it earns profits in the first place, and to find ways to use all the organization's resources, people and capital to strengthen members wealth and well-being and to create large-scale positive impacts in the communities in which Vancity's members live and work.

Vancity's Diversity Mandate and Business Case

Within Vancity, both diversity and creating a "great place to work" are explicit organizational goals. According to Vancity:

Investing in and caring about our employees is not only the right thing to do, it's also in the best long term interests of employees, the community, and our organization. Employees who understand the value of their work, who are treated fairly and equitably, and who feel the connection between their jobs and their communities are the same employees who provide outstanding service to our members. Having a reputation for being a diverse and great place to work also helps us attract the best employees and those who share our values.¹

As stated above, building Vancity's reputation for being a diverse, welcoming and inclusive workplace can help Vancity attract the best talent. In addition, a diverse workforce can be an asset when working to provide a good member (client) experience for an increasingly diverse clientele.

Because diversity is an organizational priority, Vancity has been tracking data on employment diversity over time. Through tracking these measures as part of Vancity's regular accountability report, the organization has identified that Vancity has some consistent areas of strength as well as some areas of weakness. While Vancity has a high representation of women, visible minorities, and immigrants, there is limited representation from other groups. In particular, the data suggests that Aboriginal persons and people with disabilities are underrepresented within Vancity's workforce.

In response to this trend, Vancity made the decision to implement an intentional diversity employment strategy.

¹ Vancity. *Vancity 2006-07 Accountability Report*. Accessed at https://www.vancity.com/SharedContent/documents/MyMoney/AboutUs/WhoWeAre/AccountabilityReport/08-0553_AccRep_2007_D4_4.pdf

Vancity's Early Successes

While Vancity has just recently started implementing a diversity employment strategy, the organization has experienced some early successes as a result of its unique values and principles around diversity and inclusion and innovative HR practices.

As of January 2010, Vancity had been ranked number one for leadership diversity by Corporate Knights magazine for the third year in a row. The magazine's annual index of leadership diversity looks at the percentage of an organization's board and top three executives that are female and visible minorities. In 2010, Vancity topped the list with an overall score of sixty-nine (69) percent.²

High representation of women

Across the organization, sixty-seven percent (67%) of Vancity's employees are women. Vancity is also known as the only major financial institution in Canada to have both a female CEO and Board Chair. There are a number of factors that may have contributed to Vancity having a high level of female representation:

- A long-standing commitment to gender equity – Vancity was the first financial institution in Canada to allow women to obtain a mortgage without a male cosigner; and,
- Progressive HR policies around work-life balance – job sharing opportunities, a thirty-five (35) hour work week, excellent benefits, a policy of hiring people to work in locations close to home.

High representation of visible minorities and immigrants

Vancity also has a high level of representation among visible minorities, since 40% of Vancity employees identify as a visible minority. Of those who are visible minorities, half were born outside Canada (36% of all staff were born outside Canada). There are a few different policies that may have contributed to a high representation of visible minorities and immigrants across the organization:

² Vancity. (2010). *Hat trick for Vancity—Credit union ranked number one in leadership diversity for the third year*. Accessed at: <https://www.vancity.com/News/LeadershipDiversity/>



Vancity

- Vancity has a policy of hiring people to work at locations close to home; as a result, employees tend to reflect the diversity of the surrounding neighborhoods.
- Vancity has an active talent scout program which encourages staff to refer a friend or family member. Once people come to work at Vancity, they tend to tell their friends and family that it is a great place to work. As a result, once people from diverse backgrounds join the organization they start recruiting friends and family within their communities.
- Vancity leverages its current diversity by offering a financial literacy program with a heightened focus on newcomers, called Each One Teach One where staff go out into their community and teach financial literacy skills. This introduces newcomer communities to Vancity as a financial service provider and a potential employer.

Vancity's Recent Diversity Initiatives

In 2008, Vancity developed a diversity strategy that was incorporated into the organization's longer term directional plan and aligned with existing strategies and initiatives. Vancity is using this as an opportunity to build this into Vancity's overall talent management framework and to differentiate Vancity in its ability to attract, recruit, and retain talent. The strategy employs a four (4) phase approach:

1. Make diversity intentional;
2. Identify the barriers;
3. Remove the barriers; and,
4. Make diversity sustainable.

The Diversity in Action Team

To guide the process, Vancity assembled the Diversity in Action team comprised of fifteen (15) staff members and 5 advisors from key departments. All interested employees were invited apply to the committee during an application process. The advisors were drawn from areas (e.g., facilities, recruitment) which play a key role in creating an accessible, welcoming and inclusive workplace.

Employment Systems Review (ESR)

As a first step, an employment systems review was conducted to identify what some of the systemic barriers may be that would prevent Vancity from recruiting and retaining employees with disabilities and Aboriginal employees. The ESR identified that there were some barriers around access and attitudes, and Vancity has taken steps to address these barriers.

Diversity Training

To address attitudinal barriers, Vancity started to enhance its diversity training using a multi-pronged approach. First, Vancity provides training to all employees about human rights law, accommodations and creating a harassment-free workplace. Second, Vancity has developed conversation guides—one for managers managing managers, and another for managers managing frontline staff. Managers are expected to use these conversation guides with their teams and have a facilitated conversation about what a respectful and inclusive workplace looks like for them. Third, Vancity has been working with Safe Harbour to certify their branch locations. Fourth, representatives from the Diversity and Action Team regularly update their teams on the diversity strategy and ongoing activities.

Accessible Workplace Review

To address accessibility barriers, Vancity is in the process of hiring a consultant to conduct an Accessible Workplace Review to identify accessibility barriers in facilities, operational space, policies and procedures.

Gathering Metrics

Vancity is also currently looking into options to gather more detailed data on diversity across different levels of the organization. While the organization has data available from annual employment engagement surveys on the overall representation rates across the organization, there is a desire to access more detailed data in order to delve deeper into issues such as hiring and promotion ratios and pay rates across equity groups (Vancity currently measures and reports on gender pay ratios). The objective is to use the data to conduct regular workforce analysis, and the subsequent findings will guide the future direction of Vancity's diversity initiatives.



Vancity

Other initiatives

There are also a range of other initiatives that Vancity has undertaken in order to attract, retain talent from diverse backgrounds. Some other steps that Vancity has taken include:

- Participating in career fairs for people with disabilities, and Aboriginal communities; and,
- Sponsoring commemorative days, such as National Aboriginal Day or the International Day for Persons with Disabilities.

The Results

As mentioned earlier, Vancity's unique values and innovative HR practices have contributed to the organization having a high level of representation of women, visible minorities and immigrants.

Since Vancity is still in the early stages of implementing its current diversity strategy, it is too early to measure change in the recruitment and retention of people with disabilities and Aboriginal persons. Nevertheless, the diversity in action team has noted that there is an increased awareness within the organization around diversity, and the Safe Harbour training has already increased staff's awareness and sensitivity around workplace harassment.

Vancity's advice for others

When asked if Vancity has any advice for other organizations considering implementing similar diversity initiatives, the following advice was offered:

- Make a long term commitment. Quick wins are not something we can do in this field.
- Always take the time to celebrate where you have succeeded.
- Get your leaders buy in and support.
- Implement strategies that fit your organization's needs.
- Commit the required resources and investment.

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