



## **AWSN Work Re-engagement Program - Identifying Barriers and Solutions for STEM Women with Career Gaps and supplying Alberta STEM Companies with resources on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion**

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### **Summary**

AWSN Work Re-engagement Program - Identifying Barriers and Solutions for STEM Women with Career Gaps and supplying Alberta STEM Companies with resources on Equity, Diversity and Inclusion

### **Introduction**

The AWSN Work Re-engagement Program began in March 2015 after AWSN received a Status of Women Canada grant. The intent of the program was to build off the Managing Transitions Document Women in APEGA created, that was later adopted by Engineers Canada and Geoscientists Canada. This document was designed to support employers and employees who were managing a short-term leave such as maternity leaves, sabbaticals. The intention was to retain employees whom would leave for up to a year and would return to the same company. But it came to our attention that when women, in particular, leave the workforce for greater than a year, their re-entry is not as successful. This is especially an issue for those re-entering male-dominated sectors such as STEM – Science, Technology, Engineering and Math.

The question we asked were:

- How do women re-enter the workforce after an extended leave (2+ years)?
- What barriers do they face, and what resources do they need?
- Also, are Alberta STEM companies receptive to hiring this demographic?

The 1st part of the grant focused on answering these questions. After an ethics review, we embarked on a 2-year journey travelling around Alberta.

### **Theory and/or Method**

Through this process we the program connected with 160 community organizations, companies and associations in Alberta, 21 of which formed our advisory committee. We engaged with over 75 Alberta STEM women through focus groups to understand their barriers to re-engaging and the resources they may need to find success. Along the way, these potential re-engagers have benefited from our program.

- We have empowered over 80% of these women to find a network and/or mentors to help them on their journey
- 25 returners have support us through volunteer hours, enhance their resumes
- Encouragingly, 10 returners have found employment through the networks/connections we have created

We also interviewed 11 STEM employers within the province to help understand current styles of D/I policies.

### **Examples**

The final year of the program consisted of creating two outputs in the form of Guides to be used as tools:

- One for Returning Women called Returning to Work After an Extended Leave
- One for Companies to enhance their Diversity and Inclusion initiatives with the intent to adjust current cultures to include this group called On-Ramping Guild for Employers – A Planning Resource Guide

The first document for returning women is intended to be a guide that will help them on their journey back into the workforce. This document can be found on our website: <http://wrprogram.ca/female-stem/>

The second document for Alberta STEM companies is a fresh, innovative and valuable perspective on how to further recruit, retain and contribute to the success of professional STEM women in Alberta. This document is

intended for those in a more HR related role. For some STEM companies, there may not be an HR person and we hope this document will help.

## **Conclusions**

Though the Status of Women Canada grant is coming to a close, the AWSN Work Re-engagement Program has been working closely with other groups on future phases to this program. In partnership with CCDI (Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion) and YWE (Young Women in Energy) we hope to facilitate:

- Seminar on Gender Diversity within the working environment
- Roundtable discussions with companies to identify which strategies in the On-Ramping Guide are key to their own successful On-ramping of STEM women, and
- Workshop to help implement these key strategies.

For more information on our program and future initiative, please sign up on our website: <http://wrprogram.ca/>

## **Acknowledgements**

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