

# WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT PRINCIPLES

NOVEMBER 2020

## WEPS IN ACTION



PRINCIPLE 1

**Establish high-level corporate  
leadership for gender equality**

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## CASE STUDY: GOWLING WLG EMBRACING DIVERSITY AND INCLUSION IN THE LEGAL SECTOR

### CONTEXT

Gowling WLG is an international law firm based in Canada and the United Kingdom. It employs 1,400 lawyers and about 1,000 support staff in 19 countries.

It was founded in 1887 and actively encourages diversity and inclusion. A company spokesperson said: "Not only does this allow us to attract and retain the best talent, it also helps us attract and retain great clients, who know that motivated and engaged people produce higher quality work, approach problems with creativity and ingenuity, and will go the distance to help them succeed."

The company introduced its diversity and inclusion plan in June 2015, with initiatives implemented to line up with the Women's Empowerment Principles (WEPs) and their gender equality action plan. Four years later, in August 2019, Gowling WLG signed the WEPs, signaling its determination to remain on track with its goals.

The spokesperson added: "We are committed to creating a better, more inclusive workplace for our people, while providing superior service to our clients."

### ACTIONS







The diversity and inclusion plan sprang from a survey the company commissioned from the Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion in 2015. Some 1,500 staff across Canada volunteered to talk about their views of the company culture, identifying specific areas of focus for the plan.

The survey, plus the results from focus groups and interviews, provided Gowling WLG with an important baseline – discovering what they were doing well and where they needed to concentrate their efforts. As the data was anonymous, employees were empowered to be honest about their differing experiences. Soon after, the firm established a diversity and inclusion council to work on its strategic plan, with the company CEO as council Chair.

A spokesperson for Gowling WLG said: "We found that the approval process is smoother because there is an alignment with the top of the company."

Other members of the council include the company's national director of human resources, the national diversity and inclusion manager and representatives from each of their offices. The council recently completed an extensive review of their recruitment and retention practices and is implementing its recommendations. The company allocates a specific budget for these initiatives that is reviewed annually.

## Current Initiatives

Canadian Centre for Gender & Sexual Diversity (CCGSD)	2016-present	Gowling WLG is partnering with the CCGSD to provide pro bono commissioning and notary services for trans and non-binary individuals who wish to change their gender markers on their identification.	 PRINCIPLE 6
Diversonomics	2016-present	A podcast that features discussions with leaders at the forefront of an international push to make the legal profession – and the broader business community – more welcoming, inclusive and diverse. The podcast is in its fourth season.	 PRINCIPLE 6
Native Law Centre (NLC) summer programme	2016-2019	Gowling WLG is a strong proponent of, and donor to, the NLC. The eight-week programme helps prepare indigenous students for a career in law by giving them the opportunity to study first-year property law before they enter law school. It includes writing workshops, mentorship and a supportive and collaborative classroom environment. Indigenous customary law and traditions are also significant features of the programme.	 PRINCIPLE 6
Women Get on Board (WGOB)	2017-present	Gowling WLG is a proud national strategic partner of WGOB, an organization that helps connect and promote women to corporate boards. It has partnered with WGOB to host a series of events for clients, including a cross-Canada “roadshow” client seminar on the topic of “Assessing the risks: Directors and officers’ liability insurances and indemnities.”	 PRINCIPLE 6
Gowling WLG Realizing Opportunities for Women (GROW)	2017-present	Founded in Toronto and active in several offices across Canada, GROW promotes greater recognition and understanding of issues facing women in the workplace. Through networking events, GROW enables women to connect with mentors and build relationships that enhance their professional and personal lives.	 PRINCIPLE 4
Unconscious bias training	2015-present	Several professionals and staff have attended a “Train the Trainer” programme for unconscious bias. Following this, they rolled out a training programme across their Canadian offices, raising awareness of how common forms of bias can shape our thoughts and actions, and the impact that bias can have on others. Gowling WLG hires external trainers to provide online and in-person content. Currently, 50 per cent to 75 per cent of the firm (depending on the office) has completed unconscious bias training, with a target of 100 per cent.	 PRINCIPLE 4

The council meets regularly online and in person on an annual basis. Each member of the council has a particular role. Local office representatives liaise with local committees and report their findings. There are three working groups within the committee: recruitment, retention and communication.


Since the creation of their gender equality action plan, Gowling WLG has enacted several initiatives which are also explained on their corporate website.

## GOALS

- Recruiting and retaining diverse talent.
- Increasing the number of women partners.
- Effective mentoring and affinity groups for women employees through the GROW network.
- Appropriate support for caregiving roles through parental leaves and other methods.
- Intersectional analysis and support for diversity.


## TARGETS

- Recruiting and hiring from as diverse a women candidate pool as possible.
- Improving retention numbers.
- Advancing more women into partnership – the 2020 goal of 30 per cent female partners has been met, with the aim now of reaching 32 per cent in 2021.



PRINCIPLE 2


- Unconscious bias training for 100 per cent of employees.



PRINCIPLE 4


## KPIs

- Percentage of women partners.
- Percentage of diversely identified partners in terms of race, sexuality, indigenous heritage.
- Use of agile work arrangements.



PRINCIPLE 2

- Percentage of employees trained in unconscious bias.










PRINCIPLE 4


Progress is monitored regularly through surveys, with the collaboration of the diversity and inclusion manager, the executive leadership team and the council.


## How the WEPs Secretariat can support


Gowling WLG is interested in professional development programmes, such as webinars about topics relevant to the legal services sector, and diversity and inclusion in general. They would also appreciate


networking events related to responsible business conduct and regular mentorship check-ins with members of the WEPs Secretariat.

- Principle 1  Establish high-level corporate leadership for gender equality.
- Principle 2  Treat all women and men fairly at work– respect and support human rights and nondiscrimination.
- Principle 3  Ensure the health, safety and well-being of all women and men workers.
- Principle 4  Promote education, training and professional development for women.
- Principle 5  Implement enterprise development, supply chain and marketing practices that empower women.
- Principle 6  Promote equality through community initiatives and advocacy.
- Principle 7  Measure and publicly report on progress to achieve gender equality.

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