

September 2022 Gender Equity Thought Leaders' Forum

What we heard and key takeaways

Kendall Anderson, Calyssa Burke and Jaymes MacKinnon

Summary

On September 15, 2022, the Pembina Institute convened a thought leaders forum attended by 25 individuals (plus Pembina staff) representing industry, education, financial services, labour and government with an interest in gender, equity and energy planning. We gathered knowledge on the current context of gender equity in Alberta's energy sector and received valuable feedback on the recommendations identified in Pembina Institute's *Equitable Net-Zero* report. The insights and discussion offered key learnings and takeaways for Pembina and other government, industry and civil society groups working in energy policy and planning. The event served as a critical step in building a coalition of people across industry, education and government working to advance gender equity in Alberta's energy transition.

Forum objectives

1. Understand how the Pembina Institute and other actors in government, industry and civil society can begin to address the socio-economic elements of climate change and the energy transition
2. Connect individuals within Alberta who are working at the intersection of gender equity and energy
3. Generate feedback on the recommendations outlined in recent Pembina report *Equitable Net Zero*

Background

Canada's energy sector is one of the least gender equitable in the country. Not only are women and gender diverse people underrepresented but they often occupy lower-paid jobs. In Alberta where the oil and gas industry is most concentrated, women make a **41 per cent less than men**. As a result of this, the industry is one of the largest drivers of Canada's national wage gap.

Women experience many systemic barriers which hamper their ability to fully participate in the energy workforce. These barriers include systemic issues such as gender biases that impact their ability to be seen as viable candidates for promotions and societal expectations that impact their ability to commit as much time to work as men. Specifically, our research shows a lack of access to opportunity, inability to advance due to lack of training and mentorship, and industry cultures that perpetuate harassment, discrimination and sometimes physical harm against women and gender-diverse people.

In response to these findings, in 2022, analysts from the Pembina Institute convened a series of conversations with hundreds of women representing dozens of organizations — both in the traditional oil and gas sector as well as in the burgeoning renewables field — in Alberta. From those conversations, the Pembina Institute gleaned ten actions to dismantle existing obstacles to participation.

Figure 1. Ten policy recommendations from *Equitable Net-zero report*

Policy recommendations	
Net-zero education and training	
1	Improve access to net-zero related training, certification and education for women.
2	Invest in a range of mechanisms to enable women to access jobs and opportunities at all stages of their careers in the energy sector.
Supportive energy sector workplaces	
3	Provide part-time, virtual and/or flexible work arrangements in the energy sector that offer access to benefits and do not impede the ability to advance.
4	Invest in affordable, accessible childcare that responds to the needs of parents in the energy sector.
5	Invest in, support and promote gender-neutral parental leave policies and supports in energy sector workplaces
Culture and leadership development in energy sector environments	
6	Set quotas or targets to increase representation of women and gender-diverse people in the energy sector, especially in leadership — a 30% target is the minimum; 50% is the goal.
7	Provide holistic, intersectional, and gender-transformative leadership development for men who lead within the energy sector.
8	Create trauma-informed processes for reporting, responding to and preventing violence and harassment on energy sector worksites and in office environments.
Data transparency and use within the energy sector	

9	Increase data collection and improve data transparency within the energy sector.
10	Ensure data collection and use within the energy sector are ethical.

Reflections on recommendations

The discussion at the event focused on personal reflections and experiences and brainstorming potential solutions. * Note-taking cannot always capture the nuances of conversation. The event was not recorded and note-taking was not uniform. As such, the observations in this report cannot fully reflect the wealth of knowledge-transfer that occurred in the room.

- **Recommendations geared towards net-zero job training and education seemed to be both less controversial and less important to advocate on behalf of for participants.** There was an overall sense that setting up education pathways for young women to enter and thrive within STEM fields has been the area where there's been the most financial and cultural momentum regarding gender equity. The feeling is that we need to turn our attention to what happens to those people once they graduate.
- **It is in workplace policy and culture where change has not yet been made.** Participants felt most strongly about recommendations that touched upon aspects of employee retention, such as flexibility, peer support and psychological/physical safety. There is consensus that while inroads have been made, energy adjacent fields like the trades and engineering remain in environments that are often hostile to women. Without plans in place to protect and retain marginalized employees, efforts being poured into pushing them into postsecondary STEM programs will fail when they enter into workplaces designed for demographically homogenous employees.

Key event takeaways

- **In organizations, EDI is siloed—and that needs to change.** Participants expressed that equity, diversity and inclusion (EDI) work has been siloed into Human Resources departments within the energy sector, having little impact on day-to-day operations and workplace culture across complex organizations. There's an interest in breaking down these barriers and expanding our understanding of how EDI can be integrated into wider work around health and safety – a important cultural touchstone for the industry.
- **There's no silver bullet solution to gender inequality.** It's unsurprising that in a room containing a wide spectrum of experiences and perspectives, a wide range of recommendations floated to the surface rather than a convergence on one or two solutions. This inability to “solve” this problem aligned with Pembina's research into the issue—the consensus in the literature is that this is a decades-long, all-of-society

problem prevalent in all industries but with particular “stickiness” in oil and gas because of its unique workplace. Participants continued to express the struggle to determine policy priorities when it comes to culture-wide “people problems” without clear technical fixes. Articulating the problem and identifying solutions within organizations, as well as being willing to have difficult conversations in unwelcome spaces, will start organizations and governments on the right road. But leadership is sorely needed to get these conversations started.

- **Organizations, governments and leaders need to embrace complexity.** Gender inequity, much like climate change, is a complex socioeconomic issue. As such, the avenues available to address it are equally as varied, interconnected and dynamic as the problem. Participants expressed that in addressing barriers to women’s full participation in energy, difficult but necessary changes must be made to systems—and that companies, utilities, government, workers and civil society must be part of the solutions. As a place to start, they articulated the need for mechanisms to enable women to access jobs and on-the-job training; affordable care for children and others to take the responsibility off women; and gender-neutral parental leave.

Lessons learned and next steps

The advice and feedback we received from the conversations solidified the importance of integrating diversity, equity and inclusion into energy policy and planning work. Pembina, as one of many key actors in the ecosystem has a role to play in advocating for an equitable and inclusive net-zero society and working towards solutions that aim to ready workplaces in a new energy economy.

As a result of the discussions had during this forum, we will advocate for:

1. Data that is disaggregated by background (including race, lived experience, disability and more), leadership level achieved and retention. This was a high priority for participants. For Pembina that means exploring ways to uncover information that will lead to positive outcomes for gender diverse people.
2. Providing training and education opportunities for all genders, and with programming that is tailored to diverse genders.
3. Creating flexible and safe workplaces, that are both physically safe but also psychologically and culturally safe.
4. Supporting intersectional gender diverse leadership, including mentorship, sponsorship or funding opportunities that support that goal.
5. **More insight from the renewables industry.** Despite attempts to recruit a balance between representatives from government, education, traditional energy and renewables, we had far fewer representatives from renewables than from the traditional energy

sector. Thus, the insights derived from these conversations are likely skewed towards the needs of the oil and gas sector. Most importantly, we didn't effectively gather knowledge on some of the unique gender-based challenges within renewables.

6. **More insight from First Nations stakeholders.** Our conversation lacked representatives from First Nations stakeholders involved in energy systems change.

Appendix: Organizations in Attendance

We would like to give our appreciation to the attendees for sharing their thoughts, experiences and advice with Pembina. Attendees represented Alberta Innovates, Alberta Regional Council of Carpenters, Bow Valley College, Calgary Women in Energy, CCWEST, CN, Inter Pipeline, IUOE Local 955, Mount Royal University, Radicle, Shell Canada, Siksika Nation, Solar Alberta, Suncor, TD Bank, Women and Gender Equality Canada, Women's Centre Calgary, Women's Advocacy Voice of Edmonton, and YW Calgary.