



# AWSN



Work  
Re-engagement  
Program

HOSTED BY  AWSN

## Returning to Work After an Extended Leave

Created for:  
Female STEM  
Professionals



**A Planning  
Resource Guide  
Alberta: 2017**

---

Alicia Bjarnason PGeol. MA, Bitu Nikoukar BA, Heather Barnes BSc.

Funded by:



Status of Women  
Canada

Condition féminine  
Canada

Copyright 2017 by Alicia Bjarnason,  
Bita Nikoukar & Heather Barnes

### Property of AWSN

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means, including photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written permission of the publisher, except in the case of brief quotations embodied in critical reviews and certain other non-commercial uses permitted by copyright law. For permission requests, write to the publisher, addressed "Attention: Permissions AWSN President" at the address below.

AWSN  
3553 - 31 Street NW  
Calgary, AB T2L 2K7

[www.awsn.org](http://www.awsn.org)

### Ordering Information:

Quantity sales. Special discounts are available on quantity purchases by corporations, associations, and others. For details, contact the publisher at the address above.

### Authors:

Alicia Bjarnason, P.Geol. MA  
AWSN President &  
Work Re-engagement Program Director

Bita Nikoukar, BA  
Work Re-engagement Program  
Program Manager

Heather Barnes, BSc  
AWSN Science Writer

### Key AWSN Reviewers & Contributors:

Shoma Sinha, PhD.  
Research Professional

Samia Sarkar, PEng, MBA Manager,  
Sustainability Integration

Karen Sagar, PEng.  
AWSN Vice President

Anna Noga, PhD.  
Biochemistry

### Outside Reviewers:

Siew-Ying Tan, B.Com.  
Human Resources Professional

Roshanak Poran, BSc.  
Graphic Design and IT professional

Brian Palmer, CPC  
Senior Career Coach

### Design:

3ELM Consulting and Bita Nikoukar

# Navigating the Guide

<b>About the Guide</b>	<b>Page i</b>
<b>Acknowledgement</b>	<b>Page ii</b>
<b>Partners &amp; Sponsors</b>	<b>Page iii</b>
<hr/>	
<b>Section 1: Introduction</b>	<b>Page 1</b>
<b>Section 2: Background</b>	
AWSN (Alberta Women’s Science Network)	<b>Page 2</b>
AWSN Work Re-engagement Program	<b>Page 3</b>
<b>Section 3: Methodology</b>	<b>Page 4</b>
<b>Section 4: Barrier Themes and Leading Practices</b>	<b>Page 5</b>
Barrier 1 – Lack of Self Confidence	<b>Page 6</b>
Barrier 2 – Feeling Isolated	<b>Page 7</b>
Barrier 3– Finding Childcare / Elderly Care	<b>Page 8</b>
Barrier 4 – Outdated Work Experience	<b>Page 9</b>
Barrier 5 – Not Enough Work Experience	<b>Page 10</b>
Barrier 6 – Resume Writing and Interview Skills	<b>Page 11</b>
Barrier 7 – Access to Female Mentors	<b>Page 12</b>
Barrier 8 – Gate Keepers	<b>Page 13</b>
Barrier 9 – Under-employment and Over-qualification	<b>Page 14</b>
Barrier 10 – Non- Canadian Credentials	<b>Page 15</b>
Barrier 11 – Lack of Canadian Experience	<b>Page 16</b>
Barrier 12 – Cultural Barriers	<b>Page 17</b>
Barrier 13 – Skillsets are Underpaid	<b>Page 18</b>
<b>Section 5: Conclusion</b>	<b>Page 19</b>
<b>Section 6: Other Related and Useful Links</b>	<b>Page 20</b>
<b>Section 7: References</b>	<b>Page 21</b>
Bibliography	<b>Page 22</b>

## About the Guide:

### Working Towards the Increase of Economic Prosperity of Women Within our Greater Community



The “Returning to Work After an Extended Leave” guide was designed to assist female STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) professionals in Alberta who are considering returning to work after an extended (2+ years) leave.

The information and strategies used in this guide were designed through the combination of both primary and secondary data; combining firsthand consultations with academic research.

The AWSN Work Re-engagement Program consulted directly with professional STEM women from across Alberta that are on (or have been on) an extended professional leave, focusing on finding solutions to the barriers identified by these returning professional women on the quests for employment.

Alberta-made strategies and resources have been compiled to increase the level of success for those trying to re-enter the workforce. Although this guide was designed by and for female STEM professionals, the strategies suggested would work for any professional returning to work after an extended leave.

For more information and resources on this topic, please visit us online:

[AWSN Work Re-engagement Program](#)

# Acknowledgment

**T**he AWSN Work Re-engagement Program was developed through the dedication and generous contribution of our community partners. We thank all contributing parties that assisted in the success of this program, and we are grateful for their countless volunteer hours and hard work. This project has been supported by a multitude of community stakeholders (including non-profit STEM organizations, immigrant services agencies, staffing and recruitment agencies, professional associations, post-secondary institutions, industry partners, and municipal and provincial levels of governments). A special thank you to AWSN and the many AWSN volunteers and staff for their support, and for hosting this program.

# Partners



# Sponsors



# Section 1: Introduction

The first step in enabling the returnship<sup>1</sup> of professional women in STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics) is to understand the reasons behind the extended leaves. One assumption for why professional STEM women leave their professions is to become caregivers (such as child care, elderly care, critical illness care, disability care etc.). This may be the case in many instances, but it is not the only reason. The current culture within the Alberta STEM work environment can be a contributing factor to why many women choose to leave their professions; it is also one of the barriers preventing re-engagement.



Women make up almost half of the Canadian workforce (47.3% in 2016, 48% in 2011 - Statistics Canada). Yet within the STEM workforce, women are greatly underrepresented. Despite an increase in women with STEM degrees (Statistics Canada showed that in 2011- 39% of university graduates aged 25 to 34 had a STEM degree), the percentage of women working in the STEM fields has barely changed in almost 30 years. In 2011 only 21.9% of the STEM workforce was women, this compares to 20% in 1987 (Maclean's 2015). This has been known as the 'leaky pipeline'; despite more women entering the STEM profession, many continue to exit along the way (Weisgram & Deikman, 2014).

STEM workplaces are considered non-traditional work spaces for women; non-traditional careers being defined where women make up 25% or less of the working population (Perry-Sizemore & Maclaughlin, 2016). Across non-traditional workplaces, empirical evidence shows gender inequalities still exist (Nash, 2002), despite provincial and federal commitments to legislative change. At the top and bottom of the employment pyramid, women continue to lag behind men in terms of pay and authority, despite closing gender gaps in educational attainment and workplace seniorities (Nash, 2002; Williams et al, 2012). In Alberta, this is paired with a 2015 report from the Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives "The Best and Worst Places to be a Woman in Canada 2015" showing that Edmonton and Calgary are among the worst places for women to live in terms of

economic security, leadership, health, personal security and education (McInturff et al, 2015).

With the combination of these factors, many barriers still exist within the working environment for Alberta STEM women. When women make the decision to re-enter the workforce, they can face barriers both internally and externally. Research by Hoyle (2017) shows that employers can perceive professional women with career gaps to have 'lost skills' and 'diminished confidence'; these women can be labeled as 'too risky' to hire. For women with a STEM background, there are extra levels of barriers to overcome due to the technical nature of the industries that employ this demographic.

With these potential barriers facing them, what are the motivating factors for why women return to work? These can be as varied as the reasons for taking an extended leave in the first place. The return to work could include: returning to a career after being a primary caregiver, to gain financial independence, to provide more income for their family, or to learn new skills and meet new people. Each woman's motivations for returning will be unique to her and her situation, as well as what specific barriers she may have to overcome in re-engaging. The strategies presented in this guide are meant to assist female STEM professional in their quest for re-engagement in the hopes of increasing their level of success. The guide is an active document and includes space for notes and other resources that will be found during the process of the re-engagement journey.

## Why does it matter?

A critical need exists in society for greater participation of women in STEM professions to ensure a diverse future workforce with varied perspectives, questions, approaches, practices and interpretations (Steinke, 2013). Researchers have linked diversity to innovative capabilities; firms with more balanced gender composition are more likely to be innovative (Østergaard et al, 2011) and more profitable (Williams et al, 2014).

Alberta's economic prosperity is tied to the resource and energy sector as well as technology, where a large portion of STEM professionals work in Canada. With a current push for technological change in all STEM sectors in Alberta and Canada, diversity is needed now more than ever. This can and should include professional STEM women with a career gap.

<sup>1</sup>An [internship](#)-like program for experienced workers seeking to re-enter the workforce after an extended period, particularly in a new line of work.

## Section 2 : Background



AWSN is an Alberta non-profit organization that was established in 1993. AWSN's mission is to enable a culture of diversity and inclusivity through STEM Programs. The goal of the organization is to influence the greater community to promote a cultural change that will allow all to participate to their full capacity in STEM. AWSN acts as a platform that initiates and supports Alberta programs, partners and stakeholders who amplify, magnify or accelerate systemic and social change within the greater community. AWSN is aware of the intersection of gender, age, nationality and education and that these factors are a part of an individual's identity and shape their social interaction. As a greater network, AWSN supports programming with the intent to cover the full spectrum of this intersection.

The idea for AWSN's Work Re-engagement Program was ignited after working in partnership with Women in APEGA (WinAPEGA). In 2013, WinAPEGA wrote a resource guide called [Managing Transitions](#)<sup>2</sup> to support professionals and companies in navigating a short professional leave (for example, a 1-year parental leave or professional sabbatical).



The Managing Transitions document was well received and has now been adopted by Engineers Canada.

AWSN was interested in supporting professional STEM women in Alberta who have a longer career gap (2+ years). AWSN recognized that this demographic of STEM professionals usually do not return to the same place of employment, or may never have worked in Alberta or Canada before their extended leave. Along with AWSN, BESTT (Bridge for Engineering, Science and Technology Talent) helped launch this initiative. In March 2015 AWSN obtained the Status of Women Canada grant to host the Work Re-engagement Program to help tackle this topic. The program is part of an initiative by Status of Women Canada to improve Canadian women's economic prosperity.

<sup>2</sup>Managing Transitions: Before, During and After Leave



## Work Re-engagement Program

HOSTED BY  AWSN

### **Mission:**

- A. To identify barriers preventing female STEM professionals with career gaps from re-entering the workforce through needs assessment and partnership.
- B. To develop 'Leading Practices' as resource guides for both STEM women and employers that will ignite an on-going cultural change in the workplace.

### **Vision:**

To create an influential model with lasting impact on Human Resources and Organizational policies that will empower professional STEM women for greater success in their careers.



The AWSN Work Re-engagement Program is committed to empowering female STEM professionals to return to their careers and achieve success. To assist in this goal, "Returning to Workforce After an Extended Leave" is created as a resource guide for female STEM professionals and their potential employers. Although this document, together with the "On-ramping Guide for Employers", also prepared by the AWSN Work Re-engagement Program, seeks to enhance diversity and inclusion initiatives to generate an ongoing cultural change in the workplace; resulting in sustainable and equitable successes for both Alberta companies and female STEM professionals.

A leading researcher on the topic of Return-ship is Carol F. Cohen, CEO and Co-Founder of iRelaunch. Her [TED Talk](#) on this subject clearly provides tips on how to get back to work after a career break.



## Section 3: Methodology



The AWSN Work Re-engagement program started in March 2015 after AWSN received a three-year grant from Status of Women Canada. The program team has worked with a multitude of community partners (including non-profit STEM organizations, immigrant services agencies, staffing and recruitment agencies, professional associations, post-secondary institutions, industry partners, and both municipal and provincial levels of governments) to design Alberta-specific strategies to increase the level of success for STEM women attempting to re-enter the work force.

This guide was designed using both primary and secondary data. The team traveled around Alberta to speak directly to professional STEM women who have been or are on extended leave.

Five focus groups were held across Alberta in Edmonton, Calgary, Lethbridge, Grande Prairie, and Fort Saskatchewan. At the focus groups, participating STEM women filled out surveys and discussed their experiences with the barriers they face in attempting to re-enter the workforce.

Alberta female STEM professionals, with similar experiences who are now employed, were also invited to participate in the planning, execution and analysis of the data gathered for this program. This document and the “On-ramping Guide for Employers” are written with the information gathered from this process.

This research process was designed based on [Gender Based Analysis](#).

## Section 4: Barrier Themes & Strategies



**T**he decision to return to work after an extended leave can be daunting and often women seeking to re-engage into the workforce are faced with many barriers. The next sections include the key barriers identified through the primary and secondary research, as well as solutions and resources.

# Barrier 1: Lack of Self Confidence

*“Professional women with a career gap can experience a diminished confidence when trying to re-engage” (Hoyle, 2017).*

*“I am not confident to return to the workforce. Technology is progressing quickly and it is hard for me to match myself with that.”  
- Participant in Calgary, a Chemist*

## SOLUTION:

- Join groups/clubs that motivate and encourage leadership and communication skills (e.g. a STEM related women's group, Toastmasters).
- Volunteer where you can learn new skills and have leadership opportunities. Excelling in a volunteer position can boost your self-confidence.
- Hire a career coach to assist with creating steps forward for your career.
- Find a mentor (this can be done through professional organizations or professional women's group)
- Search for STEM events and place them on your calendar. Attend the events to network and meet new people.
- Use social media to connect with others and to keep up to date with current news within your field. You may have a stronger network than you think.
- Enroll in a short-term training course or a program to update your skills, or learn new skills.
- Participate in personal development workshops and trainings to update your leadership and communication skills.
- Perform a self assessment to reacquaint yourself with your experiences, successes, assets and skillsets.
- Openly list your sabbatical time on your resume; capture a list of skills that you gained as a result of your leave as well as any supporting actions/evidence.

## KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ [AVE Network](#)
- ◆ [GeoWomen](#)
- ◆ [Chic Geek](#)
- ◆ [WISER](#)
- ◆ [MentorUP Alberta](#)
- ◆ [Assessing You: The First Step in Career Planning](#)
- ◆ [Toastmasters in Edmonton, Calgary, other locations](#)
- ◆ [Actuality Coaching & Consulting Facebook](#)
- ◆ [Government of Alberta Training to Work](#)
- ◆ [Calgary Career Counselling & Careers Under Construction](#)
- ◆ [International Coach Federation in Calgary and Edmonton](#)
- ◆ [JobLinks Employment Centre](#)
- ◆ [Volunteer Alberta](#)
- ◆ [Programs offered by the United Way in Calgary, Edmonton, Fort McMurray, Lethbridge and South Western Alberta, Central Alberta, North-west Alberta, and South Eastern Alberta.](#)

## Barrier 2: Feeling Isolated

*"STEM women on career breaks can feel distant from their academic/discipline peers while on leave; those with care responsibilities can find their ties to professional communities lessen, as opposed to other personal networks" (Mavriplis et al, 2010).*

### SOLUTION:

- Get to know other STEM women in your greater community.
- Join professional women's organizations and attend Professional Networking events e.g. AWSN, Calgary APEGA Branch Networking nights, MentorUP, AveNetwork and others.
- Become familiar with social media and connect with others in your field.
- Search for volunteer work in your field of study or through community organizations where you can meet other peers in STEM.
- Search for STEM events and place them on your calendar. Attend the events to network and meet new people.
- Read relevant material to help you stay up to date with changes in procedures and technology.
- Keep in touch with former peers, managers, contacts, etc.
- Make a point of getting together regularly with past colleagues, even if it is just as friends for coffee.
- If you are new to Canada, seek newcomer support.

*"Not having the right network and connections makes you feel isolated."  
- Participant in Calgary, an Agriculture Engineer*

### KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ CIWA (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)
- ◆ Social media: [LinkedIn](#), [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [Instagram](#) and others.
- ◆ APEGA Networking events
- ◆ Brew Your Network
- ◆ Calgary Women in Energy
- ◆ Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology
- ◆ Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
- ◆ Cultural integration academy
- ◆ Associations Canadienne française de l'Alberta
- ◆ Immigrant Services Calgary
- ◆ MentorUP Alberta
- ◆ AVE Network
- ◆ WISER (Women in Science, Engineering, and Research)

## Barrier 3: Finding Child Care/Elderly Care

*"Child care is expensive, after paying for child care, I will take little home." - Participant in Fort Saskatchewan, a Chemical Technologist.*

*"The challenge with current subsidy programs is that my husband makes too much money for the family to be eligible." -Participant in Calgary, a Biologist*

### SOLUTION:

- Look into Alberta's Child Care Subsidy and Programs to determine if your family is eligible. Usually this type of subsidised programs provide financial assistance to eligible lower income families needing childcare.
- Connect with AWSN and become a member to take advantage of the Kids and Company membership.
- Research companies that are known to have Flexible Work Arrangements and that support employees with care responsibilities.
- Contact [Caregivers Alberta](#) for information on Elderly Care.
- Contact your local government to discuss your concerns around care giving and advocate for change.

### KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ [Child Care Subsidy](#)
- ◆ [AWSN Kids and Company Information](#) – they also have resources for Elderly Care
- ◆ Information on labour laws and parental rights: [Ministry of Labour](#)
- ◆ Attend an Employer Expectations Workshop at [Careers Under Construction](#)
- ◆ [Alberta Works Child Support Services](#)
- ◆ Financial planning with [Money Mentors](#)
- ◆ [Caregivers Alberta](#)



# Barrier 4: Outdated Work Experience

*"I am trying to upgrade and learn new skills related to my field, I want to be ready to return." - Participant in Calgary, an Electrical Engineer*

*"Another barrier is the perception of 'lost years'. When women return to work, their years of experience gets debited toward progression to a higher level role." - STEM Participant in Calgary*

## SOLUTION:

- Contact your professional organization to update your professional status and see if you need to re-register or update your credentials.
- Attend free workshops from technical groups and corporations: e.g. Chic Geek, Geoscout or others.
- Enroll in re-training or upgrading programs; sign up for a short courses to upgrade your skills or to change your career direction.
- Research your field to see if there are any opportunities for further designations.
- Explore options for transition programs
- Volunteer at an executive- or board-level to gain leadership experience.
- Contact community organizations for what other resources are available for re-engaging into workforce: non-profit organizations, immigrant services, serving agencies, and/or employment agencies.
- For promoting yourself, explore different resume styles, e.g. skill based rather than chronologically.
- Be realistic in your expectations - if you take a x number of year s break, you will be x number years behind your colleagues and shouldn't expect to be at the same level as those who have not taken a break.
- Set up a Sole proprietor consultant company (See Key Resources)

## KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ Professional Associations. For example [APEGA](#), [ASPB](#) or visit [Alberta Industries](#) for a more comprehensive list
- ◆ [Start-up Workshops](#) - Alberta Women Entrepreneurs (AWE)
- ◆ [Careers Under Construction](#)
- ◆ [United Way - Women's Leadership Council](#)
- ◆ [Chic Geek](#)
- ◆ [Geoscout](#)
- ◆ [SAIT \(Southern Alberta Institute of Technology\)](#)
- ◆ Government Services such as [Employment, Training and Career Services Directory](#), [Service Alberta](#), and [Alberta Works](#)
- ◆ [NAIT \(Northern Alberta Institute of Technology\)](#)
- ◆ Some government resources to set up your Sole proprietor company: Register a [sole proprietorship](#); [Corporate Paralegals \(Arvic\)](#); [Workers' Compensation Board \(WCB\)](#)- Alberta, [Alberta Small Business Resources](#)
- ◆ [WinSETT Centre](#)

## Barrier 5: Not Enough Experience

*"To balance work/life I had to work part-time in positions that were more flexible. Now I am competing with people with years of steady experience."*

*- Participant in Calgary, a Mechanical Engineer*

*"The problem I am finding is that I am not at a managerial level. I only had 5 years of experience before I left to start a family. Going back now, I would be in an entry level position."*

*- Participant in Fort Saskatchewan, a Chemical Technologist*

### SOLUTION:

- Volunteer somewhere you are: learning new skills, have leadership opportunities, gain work experience, help bridge a work gap, and finding connections for references.
- Volunteer with Professional Organizations such as AWSN, CSPG, SPE and others.
- Attend/volunteer or present at conferences.
- Don't get discouraged; be prepared to start at a lower level and work your way up.
- Change your Perception of STEM – STEM offers many transferable skills.



### KEY RESOURCES:

**Volunteer with professional organizations such as:**

- ◆ [AWSN \(Alberta Women's Science Network\)](#)
- ◆ [CSPG \(Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists\)](#)
- ◆ [SPE \(Society of Petroleum Engineers\)](#)
- ◆ [APEGA \(The Association of Professional Engineers and Geologists of Alberta\)](#)

## Barrier 6: Resume & Interview Skills

*"I need to find assistance to help me write my resume and cover letter, and I need help to try to explain my work absences."*

*- Participant in Grande Prairie, an Instrumentation Engineering Technologist*

*"My interview skills need improvement since English is my second language." - Participant in Calgary, an Agriculture Engineer*

*"Looking for a job is a full time job." - Participant in Calgary, an Electrical Engineer*

### SOLUTION:

- Attend resume building workshops and update your resume: Include volunteer work, community involvement, training courses, and self-learning. Overall, sell your time off.
- Remember that care giving, voluntary work and other forms of unpaid labour may also involve management, finances, communication, and other skill sets.
- Attend workshops to help build your cover letter.
- Explain your professional goals in your cover letter.
- Attend a workshop to practice interview skills.
- Research typical HR related interview questions and prepare yourself ahead of time for the interview.
- Practice interview skills with a friend, family member and a mentor.



### KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ [University of Calgary Career Counselling](#)
- ◆ [MentorUP Alberta](#)
- ◆ [Mount Royal Career Counselling](#)
- ◆ [University of Alberta Career Counselling](#)
- ◆ [Counselling/consulting with Derrick Shirley](#)
- ◆ [The Write Harle](#)
- ◆ [Glass Door](#)
- ◆ [Resources with Results](#)
- ◆ [Calgary Career Counselling](#)
- ◆ [Careers Under Construction](#)
- ◆ [JobLinks Employment Centre in Lethbridge](#)
- ◆ [Immigrant Services Calgary](#)
- ◆ [Government of Alberta 'Look for Work'](#)
- ◆ [Article on Monster: Curriculum Vitae versus Resume: What's the Difference?](#)

## Barrier 7: Access to Female Mentors

*"When I was working I only had male mentors and they taught me to act like them. When I did, it backfired on me."*

*- Participant in Calgary, a Biologist*

*"I have 3 mentors and all are men."*  
*- Participant in Calgary, an Electrical Engineer*

*"I could not find a female mentor in my field."*  
*- Participant in Calgary, an Architect*

### SOLUTION:

- Join a professional women's organization, many offer female mentorship.
- Specifically request a female mentor through various programs, such as professional organizations, alumni support groups and others.
- Join LinkedIn and connect with women who have the same background as you and contact them.



### KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ AWSN supported programs such as AVE Network, MentorUP Alberta
- ◆ Brew Your Network
- ◆ Calgary Women in Energy
- ◆ Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology
- ◆ WISER
- ◆ WinSETT Centre
- ◆ APEGA Mentoring Program
- ◆ Canadian business chicks – Boss Chicks Authentic Mentorship Program
- ◆ CRIEC/BVC Mentorship Program
- ◆ Immigrant Services Calgary
- ◆ LilithPro
- ◆ Young Women in Energy
- ◆ Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council (ERIEC)

## Barrier 8: Gate Keepers

*"Even though I am considered a Senior professional, I have a hard time landing interviews with companies. Many groups go through recruiters. I have not had much luck on this route. A recruiter asked me once if I thought I could handle the business of work, since I have been 'out of the workforce'. All you can do is shake your head sometimes at comments like that."*

*- Participant in Calgary, an IT expert*

### SOLUTION:

- Use social media such as LinkedIn to research mutual connections or possible 'warm introductions' to other STEM professionals within a prospective company.
- Attend networking events through professional organizations.
- Take a course in a certificate program that might lead you to an internship: It shows commitment to continuous learning and your classmates can become a new network.
- If you do speak directly with a company, speak with HR to see if there is a suggestion box where you can write suggestions anonymously. You could suggest an Intern Style/Part time employment as an idea.
- Use your network and mentors (see previous suggestions on developing these) to get introductions directly with other high level professionals and employers.
- Talk to consultants in your field; some are always on the lookout for assistance.



CAUTION KEEP OUT

### KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ Social media platforms: [Facebook](#), [LinkedIn](#), [Twitter](#), and others
- ◆ [SAIT \(Southern Alberta Institute of Technology\)](#)
- ◆ [NAIT \(Northern Alberta Institute of Technology\)](#)
- ◆ [Immigrant Services Calgary](#)
- ◆ [Lethbridge Family Services](#)
- ◆ [Edmonton Immigrant Services Association](#)
- ◆ [Immigrant Services Red Deer](#)
- ◆ [AVE Network](#)
- ◆ [APEGA Networking Events](#)

# Barrier 9: Underemployed or Over-qualified

*"I have a hard time finding a job in my field and when applying for general jobs, I'm over qualified. It's very frustrating."  
- Participant in Calgary, an Architect*

*"I couldn't find job in Calgary within my profession, I have been working as a non-profit coordinator instead."  
- Participant in Calgary, a Geologist*

## SOLUTION:

- If you were employed in work that is not your field, highlight the key skills that you learned on your resume.
- Contact community organizations for what other resources are available for re-engaging into workforce: include non-profit organizations, immigrant services, and/or employment agencies.
- Attend career counselling courses and resume workshops.
- Volunteer within your Professional Organization to help increase your network, as many jobs are found due to personal/professional connections.

## KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ Work Re-engagement Program
- ◆ Calgary Immigrant Educational Society
- ◆ CIWA (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)
- ◆ Making Changes
- ◆ Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion
- ◆ Calgary Catholic Immigration Society
- ◆ Careers Under Construction
- ◆ JobLinks Employment Centre
- ◆ Immigrant Services Calgary
- ◆ Lethbridge Family Services
- ◆ Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
- ◆ Immigrant Services Red Deer



# Barrier 10: Non-Canadian Credentials

*"I have credentials, but I think I need to have Canadian credentials in order to enter the workforce." - Participant in Calgary, an Agriculture Engineer*

*"My credentials are not valued the same as in my home country and therefore I have to prove my experience and skills here."*

*- Participant in Calgary, an Electrical Engineer*

## SOLUTION:

- Confirm with your licensing body if credentials are recognized or not; speak to prospective employers and your network to understand what is required or expected before looking for re-training.
- Enroll in training programs, re-training programs or upgrading programs.
- Explore options for transition programs available at companies in your field.
- Research your field, find out if there are any opportunities for further designations; e.g. project managers could obtain their PMP designation.
- Ask prospective employers for informational interviews so you can gather information about what specifically they would need to see.



## KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ Immigrant Services Calgary
- ◆ Lethbridge Family Services
- ◆ Edmonton Immigrant Services Association
- ◆ Immigrant Services Red Deer
- ◆ Calgary Immigrant Educational Society
- ◆ CIWA (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)
- ◆ CCIS (Calgary Catholic Immigration Society)
- ◆ APEGA, ASPB, ACPA and other Professional Organizations
- ◆ SAIT (Southern Alberta Institute of Technology)
- ◆ NAIT (Northern Alberta Institute of Technology)

# Barrier 11: Lack of Canadian Experience

*"I cannot find a job due to the fact that I do not have Canadian experience."*

*- Participant in Calgary, an Industrial Engineer.*

*"I was told I needed Canadian experience. When companies are not hiring me, how can I get Canadian experience?"*

*- Participant in Calgary, an Architect*

## SOLUTION:

- Volunteer with Professional Organizations such as AWSN, CSPG, SPE and others.
- Attend local conferences as a participant or a volunteer.
- Consider presenting at a local conference or at an event to talk about your experiences on past projects.
- Contact your local MP and speak about your issues with getting Canadian experience.
- Seek out job / subsidy programs.
- Keep trying. Consider offering to work part time or unpaid work to prove yourself.



## KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ Select People Solutions
- ◆ The Canada-Alberta Job Grant (CAJG)
- ◆ AWSN (Alberta Women's Science Network)
- ◆ CSPG (Canadian Society of Petroleum Geologists)
- ◆ SPE (Society of Petroleum Engineers)
- ◆ APEGA (The Association of Professional Engineers and Geologists of Alberta)
- ◆ Find your Member of Parliament (MP)

## Barrier 12: Cultural Barriers

*"Canadian employers think that (our) work ethic is different and (we) are not educated like them."*

*- Participant in Lethbridge, Technology field*

*"Coming from a male dominated culture, I am finding it hard to re-enter the workforce because I constantly have problems with my husband when trying to re-enter the workforce."*

*- Participant in Calgary, a Chemist*

### SOLUTION:

- Attend events that work on soft skills training: such as language, writing skills and leadership skills Include reference to these skills on your resume.
- Take courses on effective communication, teamwork strategies, and understanding Canadian jargon.
- Volunteer with professional organizations: at conferences, local universities, and other public events.

### KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ MentorUP Alberta
- ◆ Calgary Career Counselling
- ◆ University of Calgary Career Counselling
- ◆ Mount Royal Career Counselling
- ◆ University of Alberta Career Counselling
- ◆ ERIEC (Edmonton Region Immigrant Employment Council)
- ◆ CIES (Calgary Immigrant Educational Society)
- ◆ CIWA (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)
- ◆ CCIS (Calgary Catholic Immigration Society)
- ◆ AAISA (Alberta Association of Immigrant Agencies)
- ◆ ASSIST Community Services Centre



## Barrier 13: Underpaid Skill Sets

*"A company was willing to hire me as a volunteer, but not as an employee. This volunteer position has allowed me to have Canadian work experience, but they will still not hire me as an employee."*

*- Participant in Calgary, a Statistician.*

*"Most of the time employers do not know much about the education system of the other countries or have a wrong picture of it. The same goes for work experience."*

*- Participant in Calgary, an Electrical Engineer*

### SOLUTION:

- Remember that the skills Canadian immigration look at for immigration purposes are not necessarily what a local employer requires.
- Join local immigrant or newcomer programs as they link you with others who have been through similar experiences. They may have more specific advice for your situation.
- Research to find organizations where you can find professionals of the same background and experience as you within your community.
- Consider how you can get local skills through networking, volunteering and other public activities.
- Join Professional Organizations to increase your network.
- If you are underpaid in your current position, research with your professional organization (Eg. APEGA salary survey) to determine your expected pay scale and use this as a concrete example when talking to Human Resources.

### KEY RESOURCES:

- ◆ AWSN supported programs such as AVE Network and MentorUP Alberta
- ◆ Brew Your Network
- ◆ Calgary Women in Energy
- ◆ Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology
- ◆ WISER (Women in Science, Engineering Research)
- ◆ WinSETT Centre
- ◆ CIWA (Calgary Immigrant Women's Association)
- ◆ APEGA Networking events
- ◆ Government of Alberta Training to Work
- ◆ The Workplace
- ◆ R. Work group
- ◆ Government of Alberta Workplace Training

## Section 5: Conclusions

### *Increasing the Economic Prosperity of Women within our Greater Community.*

The AWSN Work Re-engagement Program hosted by AWSN has provided valuable insights into the barriers female STEM professionals face when attempting to re-enter the workforce after an extended leave. With the participation of STEM women from across Alberta, this leading practices was developed with those insights in mind to aid in the successful returns and transitions of women returning to the workforce.

The increased participation of women in the work force benefit not only the women and their families, but also the companies who employ them and the greater community. Diversity and a balanced gender composition in the work place has been linked to increased innovation (Østergaard et al, 2011) and profitability (Williams et al, 2014). Female STEM professionals with career gaps can bring valuable experience to the work place.

To the professional STEM women on the journey to re-engagement, the team hopes that this guide<sup>3</sup> is useful to you and will help you with your transition back into the workforce.

The AWSN and Work Re-engagement Program teams welcome feedback on this guide by contacting us through our website, [www.wrprogram.ca](http://www.wrprogram.ca)

On behalf of Status of Women Canada, AWSN, the Work Re-engagement Program and our advisory committee, we wish you great success in your transition!



<sup>3</sup>To obtain a hard copy of the A Planning Resource Guide for a fee, contact AWSN at [www.aws.org](http://www.aws.org)

# Section 6:

## Useful Links

- ◆ Athena Factor 2.0: Accelerating Female Talent in Science, Engineering and Technology “ICE civil engineering 'return-ship' work placements: What are they and how can you take part?”
- ◆ Making Changes: Women in Technology Training Program
- ◆ Path Forward
- ◆ Supporting the STEP back into STEM careers
- ◆ Supporting the step back into STEM- Best Practices Guidance for Employers
- ◆ WES - Disruptive Diversity
- ◆ Wharton Work/Life Integration Project
- ◆ "Canadian Experience" For Immigrants and Newcomers
- ◆ The Daphne Jackson Trust: Returning qualified women engineers to industry
- ◆ Forbes: “Baby Bust: Millennials’ View of Family, Work, Friendship and Doing Well.”
- ◆ iRelaunch: The Return-to-Work Experts
- ◆ Fortune: “Those 7 Tech Companies are Joining the Effort to Recruit Moms Who Left the Workplace.”
- ◆ Harvard Business Review: “The 40-Year-Old Intern”
- ◆ Women Returners

# Section 7:

## References & Bibliography

### References

- Canadian Centre for Policy Alternatives (CCPA), (2015) "The Best and Worst Places to be a Woman in Canada 2015: The Gender Gap in Canada's 25 Biggest Cities", accessed 1 May 2017
- Corporate Learning Alliance, Financial Times. (March 2, 2017). "Challenging talent myths and realities." Accessed 1 May 2017
- Davidoff, A., Hambley, L., Dyrda, A., Choi, J., Lucas, C., Teebay-Webb, R., and Cook, M. (2016). Making it Work! How to effectively navigate maternity leave career transitions. An Employee's Guide. Canadian Education and Research Institute for Counselling.
- Elejalde-Ruiz, A. (February 27, 2016). "Resume gap? Corporate 'returnships' for career breakers could help." The Chicago Tribune, accessed 10 June 2017
- Ericson, C. (December 2, 2014) "What It Takes to Successfully Transition from Returner to Full Timer." The Glasshammer, Smart Women in Numbers, accessed 5 May 2017
- Friedman, S. D. (2013). Baby Bust: New Chronicles for Men and Women in Work and Family. The Wharton School University of Pennsylvania.
- Hoyle, A. (January 23, 2017). "Move over millennials: the rise of the 'returnship' for middle-aged mums." The Telegraph, Life Style Women, accessed 5 May 2017
- Maclean's (2015) "Gender inequality in the sciences? It's still very present in Canada", accessed 5 May 2017
- Mavriplis, C., Heller, R., Beil, C., Dam, K., Yassinskaya, N., Shaw, M., and Sorenson, C. (April 20, 2010). "Mind the Gap: Women in STEM Career Breaks." *Journal of Technology Management & Innovation*, 5 (1), accessed 5 July 2017
- Nash, Christine Jean (2002). "The Law and the Discipline of Geography: A Parallel Universe." *The Great Lakes Geographer*, 9(1): 29-36.
- NSERC (2010) "Women in Science and Engineering in Canada by the Corporate Planning and Policy Directorate", accessed 5 May 2017
- O'Connell, A. J. (June 03, 2015). "Seeking Female STEM Employees? Find Those On Career Break" Skilledup For Companies, accessed 5 May 2017
- Østergaard, C. R., Timmermans, B., and Kristinsson, K. (2011). "Does a different view create something new? The effect of employee diversity on innovation." *Research Policy*, 40(3): 500-509.
- Perry-Sizemore, E., and Maclaughlin, N. (2016). "Non-Traditional Careers for Women." Accessed 17 June 2017
- Preston, J. (March 17, 2017) "Helping Women Get Back in the Game" The New York Times, accessed 17 June 2017
- Statistics Canada (2008) "Women in Canada: Economic well-being", accessed 17 June 2017
- Statistics Canada (2011) "National Household Survey." Catalogue Number 99-012-X2011033
- Statistics Canada (2016) "Labour Force Characteristics by sex and age group", accessed 17 June 2017
- Steinke, J. (2013) "In Her Voice: Identity Centrality and Perceptions of Workplace Climate in Blogs by Women Scientists." *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, (5) 1.
- Weisgram, E. S., Deikman, A. (2015) "Family-Friendly STEM: Perspectives on Recruiting and Retaining Women in STEM Fields." *International Journal of Gender, Science and Technology*, 8 (1).
- Williams, C. I., Mullwer, C., Kilanski, K. (2012) "Geonedered Organizations in the New Economy." *Gender & Society*, 26 (4): 549-573.

## Bibliography

APEGA 2017 Salary Survey: [Getting the 2017 Salary Survey Results](#)

Engineers Canada & Geoscientists Canada. “Managing Transitions: Before, During and After Leave”

Buildforce Canada (2015) “Meeting Construction and Maintenance Workforce Challenges: National Industry Strategy”: [Buildforce](#)

Hango, D. (2014) “Gender differences in science, technology, engineering, mathematics and computer science (STEM) programs at university” Statistics Canada: [Article](#)

Report to the Community, Women Building Futures (2014):  
[E-Delivery 2014 Women Building Futures Annual Report and Financials](#)

Women in Mining (WIM) (2010) “Ramp-Up: A Study on the Status of Women in Canada’s Mining and Exploration Sector. Final Report”: [Report](#)

Women Still Lacking in STEM Fields, Leadership Positions in Canada: [Techvibes News Desk](#)

Parkland Institute report (2015) “The Alberta Disadvantage: Gender, Taxation, and Income Inequality”: [Report](#)