

HVAC Industry Guide

# Tactics to Attract & Retain a Diverse Workforce



## Who is this guide for?

This guide is for owners, hiring managers, and other leadership working in the heating, ventilation, and air condition (HVAC) sector in British Columbia



### Why this guide now?

The HVAC sector is experiencing a massive boom in demand for workers because of the growing focus on decarbonizing our built environment. At the same time, all organizations are working hard to increase diversity in sectors to fill gaps and make work more welcoming to everyone. To learn more, read the background research report to this guide.

Labour shortages in the skilled trades industry are already hampering the transition to greener economies. Expanding the market in the local building community at the pace necessary to meet British Columbia and Vancouver's climate goals requires the empowerment and support of tradespeople of all races, genders, and ages to participate. This is especially important for equity-priority groups (Women, Indigenous people, visible minorities, people with disabilities, and/or members of the LGBTQ2S+ community), which are substantially underrepresented in the skills trade workforce in BC.

### What's in the guide?

This guide covers strategies for recruiting diverse candidates, making it more comfortable for them to stay in a workplace, and has other resources on peer mentorship, other organizations who can help, and links to work on climate action that are also increasingly relevant in this industry.

### Who made this guide?

This guide was developed by the BC Centre for Women in the Trades (BCCWITT), with the support of the City of Vancouver, Vancouver Economic Commission, and BC Hydro.





## What is an equity-priority group?

At BCCWITT we believe that everyone deserves equity, which is why we have moved away from the term “equity-deserving” groups.

Instead, “equity-priority” refers to groups that deserve equity first. These groups have historically been disadvantaged by systems, policies, politics, and more. Some of these groups include:

- Women, including trans women
- Indigenous people
- Visible minorities
- People with disabilities
- LGBTQ2SIA+ community (also styled LGBTQ2S+ in the rest of this guide)

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### ACRONYM EXPLAINED

## LGBTQ2S+

This acronym stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, and two-spirit, intersex, and asexual, and the plus represents the acknowledgment that there are more identities and groups than are listed in the acronym.

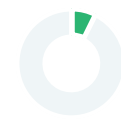
Visit the [Qmunity](#) website to learn more about LGBTQ2S+ communities.

# The labour gap and the equity gap

The 2021 Labour Market Outlook forecasts that BC will need 75,900 construction workers over the next 10 years to meet demand. According to recent data from Statistics Canada, trades, transport and equipment operator occupations have the lowest percentage of women than any occupational group in British Columbia, with men accounting for 92.6% of the workforce and women only 7.4%. Additionally, women only make up an average of 2% of the workforce in HVAC trades.

To meet this demand for labour and increase representation, employers must remove barriers to entry in the skilled trades for equity-priority groups. As such, BCCWITT has identified the following best practices or HVAC employers to increase representation in their workforce and transition to a just future, with more sustainable, long-term employment.

**75,900**  
workers needed  
over 10 years



**7.4%**  
of trades, transport  
and equipment identify  
as women

“The top barrier to employment women identified were discriminatory recruitment, hiring and advancement practices at the organizational level.”

[Enhancing the Retention and Advancement of Women in the Trades](#) report, 2017

## HIRING BEST PRACTICE

### Use gender-neutral terms

“While some consider journeyman to be a gender-neutral term, other female apprentices look for gender-neutral terms as an indicator of how welcome they would be.”

[Employing Women in the Trades](#), 2018

Use **tradesperson** instead of *tradesman*

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Use **foreperson** or supervisor instead of *foreman*

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Use **journeyperson** instead of *journeyman*

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Use **handyperson** instead of *handyman*

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## HIRING BEST PRACTICE

# Demonstrate your commitment to diversity

**Increase the representation of equity-priority people on your website, social media, and promotional material.** Diverse people need to see themselves represented in the industry and workplace in order to feel welcomed there. If you are trying to attract more diverse tradespeople, make sure your representation reflects that.

**Write that you are an equal opportunity employer on your website and job postings.** Include that your organization is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) as well, but make sure to follow through on that promise with your hiring practices, workplace culture, and policies and procedures.

**Include a thorough job description that includes employee responsibilities.** Consider things like:

- **Different abilities**  
Lifting heavy weights, climbing ladders, standing all day
- **Employee safety**  
Working alone, remote work
- **Familial commitments**  
Times of day, weekend work

**Hire at every apprenticeship level. It is crucial to train the next generation of tradespeople.**

“SkyTrain is committed to employment equity and building a diverse workforce, representative of the customers we serve and the many communities in the Metro Vancouver region. We welcome and encourage Indigenous applicants, people of colour, all genders, LGBTQ2S+ and persons with disabilities to apply.”

A Skytrain job posting

“Skills shortages and the retirement of experienced tradespeople are creating an urgent need to transfer knowledge from one generation to the next, developing the skills and competencies companies need. Apprenticeship is a proven method of developing future workers, managers and mentors.”

Canadian Apprenticeship Forum  
Apprenticeship: [An Employer Handbook](#), 2023

## What is an equal opportunity employer?

An equal opportunity employer recruits, trains, pays and promotes employees fairly and equally regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, religion, age, or physical status. The **Canadian Human Rights Act** (CHRA) is the primary guideline in Canada against employment discrimination.

### Where to learn more

Refer to this [article for more information](#) on how to write an equal opportunity employer statement, the legal implications, and the benefits of equal opportunity employment.



## HIRING BEST PRACTICE

# Describe why applicants should work for your company

**Describe the employment benefits and consider adding more.** Examples include work-life balance, flexible hours, medical and dental, tools and PPE, and childcare supports. There are tangible hiring and retention advantages to adding benefits specific to equity priority people, so being transparent on the job description about what you offer your employees is critical.

**Detail any opportunities for ongoing training and advancement.** For example: “our company is dedicated to creating a safe and welcoming atmosphere that rejects all forms of discrimination, and we are committed to internally training, promoting and providing resources to our staff regardless of age, race or gender.” This statement should be written with genuine intent and reflect the specific views of the company.

“We provide a comprehensive benefit program including, extended health, dental, disability and life insurance plans. Our plans give you the flexibility to select the coverage that works best for your needs.

We’re proud to support employee physical, mental and financial well-being. We provide time off programs to support work/life balance, on-site fitness facilities (select locations) and many health and well-being resources, including an Employee and Family Assistance Program.”

A BC Hydro job posting

**Include how your company is committed to addressing climate change and sustainability,** including membership in initiatives like the Building to Electrification (B2E) Coalition, or expertise in a specific sustainable area of work; studies have shown that the next generation of workers increasingly make career decisions based upon their values.

**Include information on how this job contributes to the larger green economy.** For instance, “Installing heat pumps is critically important to reducing emissions in BC and providing cooling to those in need. Join our team, get well-paid, hands-on technical experience, and help make a real difference in the fight against climate change.”

“Our findings demonstrate a trend among youth that is consistent with many other studies: youth are concerned about the climate crisis. In addition to concern, we also found a strong desire for youth to have a career that actively addresses the climate crisis... However, our findings regarding the general knowledge that youth have about green jobs and the trades suggest that although youth want to act on climate change, many do not know that the skilled trades sector can be a viable pathway to do so. The skilled trades sector can capitalize on this to attract youth to pursue a trades career by reframing the concept of ‘green jobs’ around trades careers that help address climate change.

[Youth Perceptions on Skilled Trades report](#), 2023



## Employment Organizations

Employment organizations help people find meaningful and lasting careers. By contacting these organizations, you are increasing your commitment to a diverse workforce, and tapping into a resource that works directly with jobseekers. Additionally, consider reaching out to the trades training institutes that offer foundation or level 1 training in the trades you are currently hiring. Often-times foundations programs help students find work in their field, so consider reaching out to them directly.

Organization	Who they serve	Website and contact
<b>BCCWITT</b>	Women and equity-priority people in the skilled trades industry across BC	<a href="http://bccwitt.ca">bccwitt.ca</a> <a href="mailto:info@bccwitt.ca">info@bccwitt.ca</a>
<b>ACCESS Trades</b>	Indigenous people in Metro Vancouver	<a href="http://accessfutures.com">accessfutures.com</a> 604-251-7955
<b>MOSAIC</b>	Immigrants, Refugees, Migrants, and new residents of Canada	<a href="http://mosaicbc.org">mosaicbc.org</a> <a href="mailto:info@mosaicbc.org">info@mosaicbc.org</a>
<b>WorkBC</b>	All unemployed or precariously employed citizens across BC	<a href="http://www.workbc.ca">www.workbc.ca</a> Varies per region
<b>STEP</b>	Unemployed or precariously employed equity priority people across BC	<a href="http://www.stepbc.ca">www.stepbc.ca</a> 1-833-567-STEP
<b>NWAC NAP</b>	Native Women in Canada looking to start an apprenticeship	<a href="http://nwac-nap.ca">nwac-nap.ca</a> <a href="mailto:nap-pna@nwac.ca">nap-pna@nwac.ca</a>

# Beyond Recruitment

## Recruiting equity-priority tradespeople into the skilled trades industry in British Columbia is only the start

Beyond discriminatory hiring practices, diverse tradespeople frequently face barriers to their success in the trades once employed. Many encounter toxic workplace culture dominated by lateral violence, bullying, harassment, and discrimination. Lack of peer support networks, mentorship, and opportunities for advancement hinder the retention of equity-priority tradespeople.

“Lack of role models and networks was identified as an organizational-level barrier occurring at all three phases, from pre-apprenticeship to journey... In apprenticeship, the pivotal period for women’s retention, the lack of networks at an organizational level was most felt as women experienced struggles with bullying and discrimination, as they navigated those experiences alone.”

Enhancing the Retention and Advancement of Women in the Trades report, 2017



## Be More Than a Bystander program: creating safe, healthy, respectful and inclusive workplaces

Be More Than a Bystander is a training and educational program to support organizational and cultural shifts towards more inclusive, safer, and respectful workplaces. The training equips participants with practical tools and strategies to intervene in bullying, harassment, and violence. The three-day intensive training engages allies to take ownership and play an active role in ending bullying, harassment, and violence. Participants learn effective intervention strategies to model in their organizations and are then encouraged to share what they have learned with other colleagues. Since 2018, BCCWITT has trained over 300 spokespeople to address workplace bullying, harassment, and discrimination.

“I think this is a phenomenal program both in how I can help our organization, as well as how I can be a better person moving forward. The tools and knowledge I will take with me will make me a better leader, a better employee, a better father and a better husband. It was a real eye-opener and I’m truly grateful for being provided this experience.”

Participant from Be More Than A Bystander train-the-trainer program



# Mentorship and Peer Support



Mentoring is an important part of any apprenticeship. However, for equity-priority people in the trades finding a mentor that can relate to their lived experiences can be difficult. When you are the only person like yourself in the classroom or job site the experience can be very isolating. Creating a network of diverse tradespeople to provide peer support, and mentors representative of diverse tradespeople can support the retention of equity-priority tradespeople. Programs like [SkillPlan's Mentorship Matters](#) train mentors and mentees in skilled trades workplaces.

“When other women were on the job it made a remarkable difference. One other woman, and you are no longer the freak, the anomaly. You have an ally. Three or more, and everything changes. We can no longer be isolated or targeted in the same way. It becomes an undeniable reality: there are women here. Someone has to organize a second bathroom.”

[Thick Skin: Field Notes from a Sister in the Brotherhood](#) by Hilary Peach, 2022

The goal of BCCWITT's Leaders in Trades program is to increase the number of tradespeople from equity priority groups (including but not limited to tradespeople who identify as Indigenous, Black, people of colour, LGBTQ2S+, newcomers, immigrants, people with disabilities, women) in leadership positions as both volunteers and staff within the skilled trades sector in British Columbia. Participants actively represent themselves, their trades, their regions, their identities, and their communities.

“Honestly, I felt like I found others like me in a trade setting. It helped me not feel so isolated and encouraged me to bring more of myself to my job. With that I feel more empowered and confident to take on leadership roles.”

Leaders in Trades program participant

# Going Further

Your HVAC business has the potential to prosper as the HVAC industry becomes a central pillar of Vancouver's efforts to decarbonize the building sector, and as the HVAC workforce expands and diversifies. Consider accessing or connecting with the following resources and networks.

## Industry Networks

**[British Columbia Construction Association \(BCCA\)](#)** – Increases productivity and resiliency in the skilled trades sector. Resources are available for tradespeople, and both union and open shop employers.

**[Home Performance Stakeholders Council](#)** (HPSC) – Facilitates certifications and access to government incentives, and quality assurance in the residential home performance sector.

**[Building to Electrification Coalition](#)** (B2E) – A network for BC organizations working to decarbonize buildings, offering capacity building, research support, and collaboration opportunities.

**[Thermal Energy Comfort Association](#)** (TECA) – A nonprofit for BC's residential HVAC industry with training programs and a collective voice in local and provincial issues affecting their trade.

## Training Providers

**[BCCWITT's Resources](#)** page – Resources available to all apprentices and employers, including funding, workplace safety, rights and responsibilities, mentorship, workwear, and more.

**[SkillPlan](#)** – Trains capable, confident workers, and supports apprentices in building their skills through partnerships, skill-building, customizable products, and training.

**[SkilledTradesBC](#)** – Learn more about the apprenticeship system, how to report hours, technical training institutes across the province, and more via the governing body of skilled trades in BC.

## Market Research

**[BC Heat Pump Technology Attraction Strategy](#)** – This strategy, and the programs that underpin it, comprise VEC's core offering to support the Vancouver HVAC industry.

**[Green Building Sector Profile](#)** – A regularly updated page with statistics and figures on Vancouver's large (and growing) green buildings sector. Includes the increasing presence of heat pumps and advanced, fully decarbonized HVAC systems.

**[Regional Market Demand Research \(2019\)](#)** – This report and accompanying SHIFT tool showcase and illustrate the projected market growth expected in the HVAC sector as a direct result of climate policy.

**[Needs of Diverse Sustainability Professionals](#)** – a networking event and roundtable recap that helps contextualize some of the needs of diverse, racialized sustainability practitioners. Delivered in partnership with the Vancouver BIPOC\* Sustainability Collective.

\*Black, Indigenous and People of Colour

# More ways to get involved in the **green buildings market opportunity**

## CITY POLICY

### The Future of Heating & Cooling

As Vancouver works to decarbonize buildings, new opportunities are emerging to increase the quality and comfort of our buildings. As our climate gets warmer, there will be a greater need for cooling in our homes and buildings – and heat pumps, which can both heat and cool, are the perfect technology to help.

Learn more about how the City of Vancouver is transitioning to [zero emissions buildings](#).

## GREEN JOBS

### Diversity & Workforce Development

Addressing climate change means work. VEC is taking action to create support for people in industries whose jobs are changing as part of the transition to a net zero economy, and to bring in new people – especially those historically excluded – to the good, green jobs that are coming.

Contact [Vanessa Sun](#) or [Andrew Williamson](#) to learn more about VEC's workforce development supports, and [Karen Dearlove](#) to learn more about BCCWITT.

## HIGH-IMPACT INVESTMENT

### The Economic Opportunity

Manufacturing and installing heat pumps related systems is a huge economic opportunity. VEC is working with the [Building to Electrification Coalition](#) (B2E) through the [BC Heat Pump Technology Attraction Strategy](#) to attract investment and help local manufacturers and installers.

Contact [Peter Sun](#) to learn more about VEC's heat pump technology attraction work.

