

Lessons learned from one of New Zealand's most challenging civil engineering projects: rebuilding the earthquake damaged pipes, roads, bridges and retaining walls in the city of Christchurch 2011 - 2016.

Diversity Awards 2015 submission: Category: Empowerment

Story: Women in Construction

Theme: People and Culture

An award submission nominating SCIRT Women in Construction (SWIC) for the 2015 Diversity Awards: Category: Empowerment.

This document has been provided as an example of a tool that might be useful for other organisations undertaking complex disaster recovery or infrastructure rebuild programmes.

For more information about this document, visit www.scirtlearninglegacy.org.nz



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DIVERSITY AWARD APPLICATION 2015

SWIC – Raising the Visibility of Women in Construction

The initiative(s)

Please tell us about the initiative(s) which specifically address opportunity for cultural and ethnic engagement in your workforce. Why was this initiative developed?

Background

Greater Christchurch has experienced over 13,000 earthquakes since September 2010. The most devastating in February 2011 caused the loss of 185 lives, irreparably damaged around two thirds of the city's commercial buildings and liquefied about a third of its land area. Entire suburbs have since been disestablished with a massive rebuilding programme underway both above and below ground.

The sudden and unprecedented demand for construction industry labour created significant opportunities to address gender diversity in the civil design and construction industry. There was only a 13% representation of women in professional engineering roles (IPENZ 2011) and markedly less in crew or trades level numbers (estimated at 1%). Overall, New Zealand construction industries are 86.4% male (2013 NZ Census data).

One organisation challenged to think differently around labour shortage was the Stronger Christchurch Infrastructure Rebuild Team (SCIRT). A competitive/collaborative alliance between five large civil construction companies (City Care, Downer, Fletcher, Fulton Hogan and McConnell Dowell) and three government 'client' organisations (Christchurch City Council, Canterbury Earthquake Recovery Authority (CERA), New Zealand Transport Agency), SCIRT was set up to rebuild the earthquake damaged horizontal infrastructure. That's the publicly owned pipes, roads, bridges and retaining walls.

This involves over \$2billion of work over 600 projects in 5.5 years. It would also take 2,000 team members seconded from over 100 organisations of different sizes and natures (eg professional services organisations such as Opus, Beca, GHD, URS, Aecom, Jacobs, MWH, Auercon etc through to small to medium civil contractors).

A Foundation For Positive Action

One of SCIRT's Mind Sets/Values is to be "open to new ways and other perspectives". Demonstrating that value, its strategy in early 2012 to fill the labour gap of 900 resources included targeting women.

A catalyst for further action came with the findings of the May 2013 "Building Back Better" research from the Ministry for Women. This survey of 500 under and unemployed Canterbury women found an untapped pool of labour – half of whom said they would explore rebuild jobs (such as civil construction) but had not in the past as they were viewed as "jobs for men".

The Initiative

To link supply to demand in Christchurch, perceptions and unconscious biases needed to be challenged. To respond to the earthquake repairs was not a 'business as usual' situation so 'out of the box' thinking to address the labour shortage was both possible, and required.

As a result, the SCIRT initiative was to launch the SCIRT Women in Construction (SWIC) working group in August 2013. They set about by establishing an aim and objectives which they communicate regularly:

Aim: *“Raise the visibility and enable women working in construction across the SCIRT programme”.*

Objectives: challenge biases, provide role models and explore ways the industry could be more welcoming of women.

Philosophy: profiling and emphasising the positive rather than roadblocks. This has helped the group grow in numbers, awareness, regard and respect industry-wide. The model is also working towards being sustainable beyond the life of SCIRT.

Belinda de Zwart, the SCIRT HR Manager recalls the approach SWIC took *“Overall, having a philosophy of profiling and emphasising the positive and showing where women in construction works rather than a list of issues generated the right kind of energy. Starting the journey with the black and white facts from research was also useful as a reference point to what perceptions needed reshaping.”*

Who is SWIC and how it works

This self-governing group of women has representatives from all parts of SCIRT including HR, communications, design engineers, project managers and crew operational team members. All five head civil construction companies are represented, along with a professional services organisation and a representative from NAWIC (National Association of Women in Construction).

The 14 member group meets monthly to collaborate on ideas and determine strategy, tactics and actions to achieve the group’s aim. Such is the success, momentum and tangible impact of the group that two members continue to attend, even though they are no longer part of SCIRT. Kate Hood, SCIRT Fulton Hogan Estimator, describes her involvement in the SWIC group: *“What I have valued the most is networking with other women in construction – feeling less isolated as can happen with working with only males for most of the time.”*

Introducing the team members of SWIC:

Kimberly Jupp, Project Engineer, McConnell Dowell; Jeanette White, Civil Engineer, Auercon; Belinda de Zwart, HR Manager, SCIRT; Frances Adank, Senior Communications Advisor, SCIRT; Marcia Beuth, Senior Project Manager, Hawkins (and NAWIC member); Jane Taylor, STMS Supervisor, City Care; Monique Berry, STMS Supervisor, Fletcher; Kiri Ward, Traffic Management Coordinator, Downer; Kate Hood, Estimator, Fulton Hogan; Cherie Leckner, Construction Manager, Fulton Hogan; Ruth Bullen, Project Manager, Downer; Fritha Bevin-McCrimmon, Site Engineer, Fulton Hogan; Marianne Rogers, Project Manager, McConnell Dowell; Tesh Lange, Traffic Controller, Fletcher.

Implementation

How was the initiative developed? How was it introduced to the workforce? How was it implemented?

Influencing without being in a senior position with authority – ‘Leading From Where You Are’

SWIC is about “leading from where you are” – the strong empowering message is you don’t need to be in a position of authority to make change happen.

By putting aside the competitive environment of the different organisations they work for, the women come together monthly to share stories, experiences and through their collective influence and commitment, deliver beyond boundaries and structures.

As a result, SWIC has a solid list of actions, tactics, achievements and measurable objectives.

The group started small with four team members who had shared thought about the results of the Ministry for Women’s research outcomes and decided to meet informally to explore ideas about how it could be addressed.

Then the 5 Civil Construction companies who are part of the SCIRT Alliance were asked to provide operational representatives: women from the field who were working in roles where male representation was the ‘norm’ (eg Project Managers, Site Engineers, Civil Construction crew members).

As a result, the group grew to 14 members and a wider diversity of views were explored. In particular the ‘ground roots’ view of operational women was taken into consideration.

Find out the facts of the present: Look to the future

The group established their aim and then assessed the current situations to determine some achievable initiatives:

- They looked at how many images of women in construction were in the SCIRT communications library available for use in publications and other information material – they were alarmed to find only one.
- Through HR they measured how many women were in SCIRT and broke it down to operational roles.
- They explored what other unconscious biases might exist that may send a message to women that they are not welcome in construction and uncovered a glaringly obvious one – women who worked on site in operational roles had to wear men’s work attire as that is all that was available!

They then set about to address these issues with the support of SCIRT Senior Leadership. Ian Campbell, the SCIRT Executive General Manager, explains “*Underpinning our relative success was the opportunity presented by the rebuild environment and the way in which that opportunity was quickly identified and taken. It’s all about the future – we’ve only just started! We need to get our stories out to the rest of the country.*”

Support

Show us how the initiative(s) is supported by the leaders/managers of the organisation. How is their support visible? What is management accountability for the success of the initiative?

Only one woman in SWIC is in a Senior Management position however everyone influences in their 'corner' of SCIRT.

One corner that SWIC determined there was a gap was visibility at the SCIRT governance level.

In response, SWIC challenged the SCIRT Board to provide a SWIC champion from the Board table. Roger McRae, Managing Director of McConnell Dowell quickly accepted the post and has been active in his duties since. The SWIC Board champion holds other Board members to account on actions agreed.

This level of endorsement and commitment has put SWIC in a position of influence to work pro-actively with the top leadership of the eight Alliance partners and all the organisations that are part of SCIRT.

The activities, targets and results of the group are communicated to the Board via the SCIRT monthly operational report. The SWIC activities are also regular agenda items at the SCIRT monthly HR Operational forum (15 organisations represented) and the bi-monthly SCIRT Strategic HR Forum (six General Manager level representatives).

SWIC works to influence those in senior positions and challenge them to make a difference where they are – just as they themselves role model.

Tangible examples of leadership support are:

- The SCIRT Executive General Manager being the Master of Ceremonies at the November 2014 joint launch of the Ministry for Women's employers handbook "Growing your Trades Workforce: How to Attract Women to your Jobs" and the launch of the SCIRT/NZSafety Women's PPE workgear.
- Leaders of SCIRT businesses active participation in putting the handbook together, including the SCIRT Board Chairman and CEO of City Care, Onno Mulder.
- A 'call to action' in his speech from Roger McRae at the handbook/PPE workgear launch, to all construction leaders to look at how they could attract and retain women. He concluded the speech by saying, *"I would like myself and other leaders in our industry to be able to proudly stand at future events such as this and claim that we are leaders in one of the most gender balanced industries in our economy – Please join us to make that happen."*
- A challenge from SWIC for eight SCIRT Alliance partners to sign up to the United Nations Women Empowerment Principles – to date three organisations have.
- SCIRT Board support when the Ministry for Women recently asked a SWIC member to go to Japan to tell the story of Women in Construction post the Christchurch Earthquake at a world conference on disaster recovery in Sendai.
- The SWIC Board Champion Roger McRae using media interviews to raise the profile of women in construction being underutilised. In an April 2015 article in NZ Local Government

	<p>Magazine, Roger’s role as SWIC Board champion was reported along with his viewpoint: <i>“He’s especially concerned at the small number of women in the profession and has been upping his support of women in the industry for some time now.”</i></p>
<p>Workplace evidence</p> <p>Show us how the initiative(s) has benefited the workplace/ organisation</p>	<p>The impact of the SWIC group is evident to what has changed in the workplace and resources that are now available that were not there before. The impact of these initiatives extends beyond the SCIRT work programme and into the Civil Construction industry, with the aim of creating a ‘new norm’ – “Women in Construction: It is a Good Fit!”</p> <p>Some key activities of the SWIC group and how they have benefitted the workplace and wider civil construction industry are:</p> <p>Measure the Facts and Set Goals</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SWIC worked with Alliance partners’ HR divisions to measure the number of women in construction across SCIRT. The results in December 2013 found: 21% of women in the SCIRT workforce and 10% of women in operational/in demand roles (roles traditionally filled by men). • SWIC put a challenge to the SCIRT Strategic HR forum to raise that 10% to 13% by December 2016 and asked the five construction Alliance partners to set their own organisational goal – they did. • The metrics are captured yearly and the December 2014 comparisons have been shared – each competitor organisation knows how they are doing compared to others and last year. • Regular SCIRT Board metrics reporting on women in SCIRT – helps maintain visibility to the top level. • In the monthly SWIC meetings, members share what is happening in their ‘corner’. • Three SWIC members attend the quarterly Ministry for Women led Canterbury Women in Construction working group. They share and capture what is happening, and take that back to the monthly SWIC group who in turn take it back and share it in their ‘corner of influence’. <p>Enabling strategies: Encouraging employers to engage women in construction</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A SWIC member presented to the SCIRT Board the poor picture that only one New Zealand construction company had signed up to the UN Women Empowerment Principles (UN WEPs). The eight leaders around the table were challenged to do the same. To date, three have done so. • SWIC has linked the construction organisation in SCIRT with the highest percentage of women to the Ministry for Women for role modelling opportunities. • SWIC provided SCIRT construction women as keynote speakers for the Canterbury Employers Chamber of Commerce and Ministry for Women’s workshop on innovative resourcing strategies for Christchurch Construction

Employers in November 2013.

- SWIC members and the HR people they influence played a key role in working with the Ministry for Women to create a handbook for employers - "Growing your trades workforce: how to attract women to your jobs". They then partnered with the Ministry in November 2014 to launch the handbook alongside new women's work gear (see below).

Impact: Making a difference that goes beyond SCIRT

- In one year women in SCIRT have grown from 21% to 22%. In that same year the number of women in trades roles has grown by a significant 50%. While women in trades are only at 6% in SCIRT, it is moving in the right direction and upwards from the national 1%. Four New Zealand construction organisations now espouse to the UN WEP's compared to one before SWIC's influence. Four (one acting) of the 10 member SCIRT Management Team are women, vs two a year ago.

Overarching strategy: You can't be what you can't see – more visibility of role models

- Since its inception SWIC members have worked to get more images and profile stories in the public to challenge perceptions, create a 'new norm' and provide role models.
- With only one image of a woman in construction in the SCIRT image library 18 months ago, this has intentionally been grown to a number too large to count for this award submission.
- SCIRT Women in Construction have been profiled in the internal newsletter and importantly, images of women in construction working alongside men have been used in operational communication material to help 'normalise' women in construction (eg, SCIRT work notices, newspaper/magazine advertising, brochures, posters and other presentation material).
- Stories of SCIRT Women in Construction have been seen in CERA rebuild newsletters and in magazine publications (Avenue Magazine, March 2015 "Women in Neon", Future Christchurch Update, Metropole Magazine).
- Those in leadership roles are now proactively contacting the Communications team with opportunities to profile women working in construction. Frances Adank, SCIRT Senior Communications Advisor says "*It has raised awareness of women working in construction amongst my delivery team colleagues. The Delivery Team Leads now say to me: 'we have a new traffic supervisor, I will try and get a photo of her hard at work'.*"

Employee evidence

Show us how the initiative(s) has benefited the employees?

There is a new sense of pride which has been built amongst not just the SWIC women, but their many colleagues. With an aim to contribute to a positive mindset shift in the construction industry, these women are always helping to build awareness and increasing acceptance amongst their colleagues. Women are becoming more 'the norm' in every day SCIRT and other construction sites.

The benefits have brought a new level of self-confidence, surely increasing connection, productivity and commitment to the job at hand.

Monique Berry, a SCIRT Fletcher Traffic Supervisor says "*The women working within the traffic team I work with now feel like they are more a part of and accepted into the industry.*"

Some key activities of the SWIC group and how they have benefitted employees are:

Enabling strategies: addressing unconscious biases and creating a 'new normal'

- One of the most significant and high profile representations of SWIC's leadership was an event in the Christchurch city mall in November 2014 to launch the new women's Personal Protection Equipment (PPE) clothing in conjunction with the Ministry for Women's employers handbook.
- The PPE for women initiative was in partnership with NZSafety after gaining feedback from women in the field that there wasn't a female fitting hi-visibility vest or traffic compliant shirt on the New Zealand market. Women were allocated men's PPE clothing which did not always fit well.
- SWIC member and SCIRT Engineer Kimberley Jupp, was the driving force behind the gear which she said would fit properly to help women feel more comfortable and more equipped for their jobs when on site. SWIC used its collaborative influence (representing seven key industry employers and links to a powerful Board) to challenge a PPE supplier to join the initiative to make a difference. NZSafety is now a committed supplier.
- Kimberly spoke at the public launch event, along with other speakers, Duncan Gibb (the then Executive General Manager of SCIRT), Roger McRae (Managing Director of McConnell Dowell and SWIC SCIRT Board Champion) and Louise Upston (Minister for Women). Speakers at this level at this well attended event helped to significantly raise the profile of women in construction, both amongst those attending and the subsequent media coverage.
- Reflecting on the benefits of the PPE initiative, Kimberly says "*The PPE initiative made our women feel as though they belong. I will ever forget seeing their faces putting on the women's shirt for the first time. They looked proud to be wearing their PPE, mainly because it fitted them.*"

Next Steps for SWIC: Expanding women's involvement by empowering their views into action

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In March 2015, SWIC hosted a breakfast workshop for Women in Construction roles across the SCIRT programme. It provided a networking opportunity for over 40 women from crew/trades roles from different organisations. The workshop also asked for their ideas on how SWIC could further meet its aim. SWIC team members moved through the group to capture these ideas which will become the SWIC's focus for 2015. It is planned that these breakfast workshops will be quarterly. <p>In summary, the impact of SWIC's work can be summed up by Marcia Beuth, Senior Project Manager, Hawkins: <i>"SWIC has empowered me to get up and be more visible out on site and not be in the background. We are part of a team and it has made me feel included."</i></p>
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