

POTASH IN OUR PROVINCE

Closing the gap: IMII issues diversity and inclusion challenge

BY ASHLEIGH MATTERN

The International Mineral Innovation Institute (IMII) has issued a challenge that may change the face of the mining industry. The Diversity and Inclusion Challenge Program is providing \$1 million to projects that will address the mineral industry's diversity and inclusion needs.

"IMII is meant to be an innovation institute, and we thought we should support innovation not just in technology but in our practices," said Al Shpyth, IMII Executive Director. "These open innovation challenges are more often than not done around technology, so we thought it should be something we should try on the education and training front as well."

The challenge is meant to address four critical areas:

- Improving access to employment opportunities with contractors and suppliers to the minerals sector for Indigenous peoples;
- Creating new opportunities for Indigenous peoples in the minerals sector workforce;
- Promoting mining careers to young women by connecting earlier in the talent pipeline;
- Increasing the number of women in key occupations in the minerals sector.

On May 2, IMII released a call-out for proposals, and by the deadline of June 9, they had received 26 preliminary projects. Nine have been shortlisted, which industry members are now reviewing, with recommendations for final choices brought to the board in December. Projects can receive a maximum of \$250,000 in funding.

Applicants put forth ideas like career and industry awareness, support systems for education and employment, and new ways to encourage more Indigenous people and women to enter



The International Mineral Innovation Institute's Diversity and Inclusion Challenge Program calls for the creation of new opportunities for Indigenous peoples in the minerals sector workforce. K + S POTASH

mining related programs or occupations.

Many of the proposals are education-based in part because there are still misconceptions about the mining industry in the province, said Shpyth.

"There are people out there who perhaps even still think mining is about swinging a pickaxe underground. People aren't necessarily aware of what really are mining related occupations... Some are in technology, many are degreed, and a wide range of skill sets can be applicable."

Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) fields are often the first areas of expertise people connect to the mining industry, but a Mining Industry Human Resources Council study reported there are actually more than 70 different occupations mapped to mining.

Shpyth is also hopeful the challenge will bring to light new ways to approach learning and training in the industry. Is the training reflective of how people want to learn? Are there ways to make the curriculum more appropriate? More engaging?

"There are traditional approaches to science that are not at all in conflict with stereotypical western approaches, but we don't always do a good job of bringing them together. If we can bring them together, we're more likely to engage Indigenous people in scientific occupations."

The IMII membership is made up of top industry companies, and Shpyth said to meet their workforce needs looking forward, they're going to have to successfully engage with Indigenous people and women. More women are graduating from post-secondary educa-



To meet their workforce needs, the mining sector needs to increase the number of women working in key occupations, states the IMII. K + S POTASH

tion institutions than men now, and Saskatchewan is expected to see a surge in the number of working-age Indigenous people in the coming decades.

"Young Indigenous people will have skills, will be educated, and we're not the only industry looking to engage them," Shpyth said. "If we want our fair share of the talent in those communities, we'll have to constantly be taking steps to be making sure we are competitive when it comes to recruitment and retention."

Staying competitive in hiring is vitally important in any industry, and from a human resources perspective, hiring more women and Indigenous people widens the potential pool of candidates available. Plus, improving

the diversity of a workforce can strengthen both the company and the community where it's located.

"The more diverse and inclusive your workforce is, the more likely it is to be innovative," Shpyth said. "The more it reflects the community in which it's situated, the more likely you are to have community support."

Shpyth said IMII members are all developing their own strategies for creating more diverse and inclusive workforces, but they recognized that they can do more together, which is one of the reasons why this challenge arose.

"They came together and recognized that... no matter what an individual company

does, they won't be able to overcome those barriers or challenges, but if we do it together, we're more likely to succeed."

There is also the potential for the challenge to create inroads and innovations beyond the borders of the minerals industry.

"Because it's an open innovation challenge, we will share the knowledge and practices that come out of this," Shpyth said. "We want to show people if you do things different you can get different and better outcomes. This isn't about us holding this information, but to share the results so that others who want to take action see there are new ways of doing things."

Mine Your Potential

BY ASHLEIGH MATTERN

When Donna Beneteau moved to Saskatoon seven years ago, she didn't know anyone, so getting involved in Women in Mining/Women in Nuclear Saskatchewan (WiM/WiN-SK) made all the difference.

"Having a network like this instantly introduced me to so many people," Beneteau said. "It would have been lonely moving to a new city."

Beneteau was the chair of the 2017 Mine Your Potential conference, held on Oct. 27 at the Saskatoon Inn. WiM/WiN-SK hosts this annual event as part of its programming to provide women in the mining industry with networking and career development opportunities.

With over 200 attendees, the conference brought together a wide range of people. WiM/WiN-SK members come from large corporations and small businesses; some are self-employed, and some are students; and their expertise includes administration, purchasing, engineering, geology, legal, accounting, education, and equipment and service suppliers, to name a few. Even though the conference was geared toward women in mining, anyone and everyone was welcome to attend, including men and people from outside the industry.

The diversity of this group of people is one of its strengths, said Beneteau. "The advantage of being part of a group like this is that I

know people in all different aspects of the industry... We're all at different stages in our careers – students, people starting families, people well established – we can share stories with each other."

Since attendees were so varied, organizers created a conference program that would interest a wide audience. Personal growth topics tackled negotiating, promotions, and boosting your energy; on the technical side, speakers explored uranium, potash, and mine water treatment and closure planning; health and safety covered the difficult topic of loss; and the culture and governance stream discussed Indigenous perspectives and how to engage teams.

"There were a number of opportunities to learn and grow on several different fronts all in one place," Beneteau said. Two different people attending the conference could have had entirely different experiences depending on their interests and the seminars they attended.

Beneteau particularly enjoyed the personal growth sessions. "They allow us to grow in a different way," she said. "Even knowing that those skills are something you can develop is important. Before I heard these speakers, I always focused on technical development, not realizing that some of the personal development is just as important."

While mining is still a male-dominated field, Beneteau said women are grow-



Oksana Dubasov (left) and Carolina Ramirez (right), Geological Engineering students at the University of Saskatchewan, assist at a blasting demonstration. SUPPLIED PHOTO

ing into new roles in the industry, and it's important for women in mining to gain confidence. Attending conferences like these is one of the ways they can do that. She says confidence comes from learning new skills, and Beneteau hopes the people who attended the conference did learn something new.

The conference is one of a kind in Canada – no one else is hosting a conference about mining aimed at women – and the price point for the conference was also purposely set low to make it affordable. "Without the support of the industry, this would not be possible," Beneteau said.

Event organizers also set aside a number of tickets specifically for students because they wanted to make sure they have a chance to learn about the industry.

For students and new graduates, attending Mine Your Potential may also

change the trajectory of their career, potentially connecting employees with employers. Beneteau has experience with this firsthand: She joined a similar group when she worked in Sudbury, Ont., and through the networking experience landed a job.

Beyond career movement, the networking at events like these creates opportunities for mentorships and friendships to grow and strengthen. "It reinforces for us that we have a large network to support us," Beneteau said.

This was the fifth annual Mine Your Potential, and at the conference organizers announced they will host the Women in Nuclear national conference in 2018.

"It's the first time it's going to be held in Western Canada, and that's cool because this is where all the uranium is in Canada – they're coming to us, the source of the product."

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