

## **Emerging Diversity and Inclusion Award Highly Commended: State Services Commission for Government Women's Network**



Video Link <https://vimeo.com/178545445/c2fcc2444a>

Diversity and inclusion is picking up pace across the government. New Zealand's Public Service is recognised as a leader in sharing its diversity indicators openly. There's a great story to tell: women make up more than 60 per cent of employees. Women are now 39 per cent of Chief Executives and 44 per cent of senior leaders - the highest levels ever.

But there is a way to go. Women earn on average 14 per cent, or \$11k per annum, less than their male colleagues, often because of occupational differences.

Women still hold 82 per cent of clerical roles but only 32 per cent of better paid IT roles. Only six per cent of people in the public sector work part-time, compared with an estimated 22 per cent in the wider economy.

It's shared dialogue around these metrics that has led to the birth of the Government Women's Network (GWN), an exciting new cross-government collaboration, designed for women by women.

Ministry for Pacific Peoples Advisor – Projects, Planning and Reporting Tina Simcock says that women are not the issue – now they are creating solutions in partnership with CEs and agencies. “In the past women have been given mixed messages. ‘Speak up. Beware the mummy track. Step up. Be more resilient. Lean in’.”

“We now understand that the major issues facing women in New Zealand and globally are structural, systemic and date back a long time. This is not a ‘women's problem’. Working together we can remove barriers and achieve a step change that will see women in government achieving their potential.”

GWN operates as a community of interest, growing visibility of the issues and dialogue to enable the sharing of information and good practice, and acts as a glue to connect efforts and the co-ordination of plans and programmes, Tina says.

It promotes events and relevant resources on diversity through its website [www.GWN.govt.nz](http://www.GWN.govt.nz), provides practical support and advice and contributes to professional development for women in the public sector.

Interest in establishing the network grew from a series of ad hoc meetings of individual women's networks in 2014 and 2015, which included representatives from Inland Revenue, the Ministries of Business, Innovation and Employment, of Education, Environment, Foreign Affairs and Trade, Justice, Pacific Island Affairs, and Women, the New Zealand Defence Force, Police, Treasury, and the State Services Commission.

Women came together from disparate business roles and functions - many who were active in forming or supporting women's groups on their own initiative, simply because they were passionate about supporting their female colleagues and enable their agencies to succeed.

These meetings identified that women's groups were operating in parallel in many government agencies and there would be strong benefit in connecting the groups as a super-network.

After getting endorsement from the Women in Government group of senior women leaders and support from Public Service Chief Executives, a working group was set up to establish the network. Thirty six people stepped forward to represent their agencies and others took on larger roles to help GWN grow.

The network was officially launched in March 2016. A key milestone was partnering with Public Service CEs to deliver the inaugural Women in Public Sector Summit in April. Originally intending to target 300 women, the Summit had to have a venue change after places sold out within a couple of weeks. Eventually 520 paid delegates were accommodated.

GWN has wide support among government agencies. Members range from chief executives to entry level roles and hosting and leadership responsibilities are shared and rotated annually. Inland Revenue is currently the home agency for GWN, with Naomi Ferguson CEO being GWN's strong champion since its inception.

"GWN works through a strong base of agency networks and emerging groups (e.g. returning parents), delivering excellent gender diversity action that sustains, spreads and deepens," Tina says.

Agency representatives actively connect their women and the network, ensuring GWN is visible to the people and leaders in their agency and that their agency is participating in the network dialogue and actions.

The network champions the representatives through coordinating and planning action, regular catch-ups, peer contacts for support and coaching, connection to senior leaders as speakers and mentors and online collaboration.

As well as the Summit in 2016, the network has delivered successful launches in Auckland and Wellington, an International Women's Day seminar featuring former Deputy State Services Commissioner Sandi Beattie sharing her success story, and other afternoon and breakfast events with Naomi Ferguson, Ministry for Pacific Peoples CEO Pauline Winter and Acting Government Chief Talent Officer Ginny Baddeley. Evaluations, surveys and environmental scanning have been completed to provide baseline data.

Network agencies also organise events that support the group's goals, with the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment delivering a Women in Leadership seminar series, Treasury running mentoring, the Ministry of Justice hosting the website and also arranging speakers and seminars in common with other agencies such as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade.

Women attending these events are seeing very real benefits, Tina says.

One attendee at the Public Sector Summit came with the goal of finding a mentor and left with three great options. Others reported taking away great career tips and being empowered by engaging with such a large and diverse group of women.

Another woman postponed reconstructive surgery so she could attend the event and told her manager she was glad she made that choice after finding the day very rewarding.

But ultimately the network is aiming to offer an even wider return, Tina says.

"Empowering public sector women strengthens the sector as a whole, and thereby the New Zealand economy."