

Suncor's Anna Seinen Builds Capacity in Her Community

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NORTHAMPTON, June 28, 2023 - Anna is responsible for managing Suncor's community investment in the Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo area. By leveraging her connection to community and work experience with Suncor Energy Foundation, she joined the Board of the then newly established Wood Buffalo Community Foundation (WBCF). Her first task: develop a grant process - and quickly! This new process allowed WBCF to make its first donations within months of launching. Along the way, WBCF began working closely with Capacity Canada, a charity that helps other organizations with strategic plan development support and board member training.

WBCF launched in 2017, to provide long-term financial support for projects in health, the environment, sport, arts, culture and other emerging community needs. Like many charities that can't afford full-time staff, WBCF had an operational board, meaning the board members themselves carried out most of the organization's work. One challenge they faced, in those early days, was how to issue grants.

"When the board first approached me, I was intrigued," recalls Anna, who is responsible for managing Suncor's community investment in the Fort McMurray Wood Buffalo area. "Drawing from my experience in community investment and seeing how the Suncor Energy Foundation (SEF) makes donations, I was confident I could do it."

Right on time, Anna developed a grant process and began building a committee to review the applications, allowing WBCF to make its first donations within months of launching.

As the foundation matured, the board realized they needed to recruit members with professional skills like Anna's, and diverse perspectives that represented the community. They were able to onboard new members with human resources and legal experience to guide the foundation as it hired staff and navigated accepting different kinds of donations, including real-estate.

Along the way, WBCF began working closely with Capacity Canada, a charity that helps other organizations by offering strategic plan development support and board member training.

Anna signed up for Capacity Canada's training and has used what she learned to help WBCF move from an operational board to a governing board.

"There were four of us from WBCF that took Capacity Canada's Modern Board course," shares Anna. "The timing was perfect as we learned the necessary steps to transition our board from day-to-day operations to one that is focused on strategic direction and financial oversight."

Capacity Canada, a SEF partner since 2011, offers the Modern Board course twice a year. The course aims to equip participants with a fundamental understanding of effective board membership and addresses specific concerns that board members may encounter. Participants who successfully complete the course also receive a micro-credential in partnership with Conestoga College's continuing education program.

"The course was comprehensive and appropriately challenging," reflects Anna. "They provided ample time for reflection and facilitated online group discussions, which I found immensely helpful in absorbing the material and immediately applying it to my board role."

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