



**Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion**  
**Centre canadien pour la diversité et l'inclusion**

# Success stories

**Jazz Aviation LP**

**A Canadian case study in diversity and inclusion**

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## Jazz Aviation LP: A Canadian success story in diversity and inclusion

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Thanks to Erica Fuhr, Attendance & Diversity Manager at Jazz Aviation for talking to us.

# Building the fundamentals for diversity and inclusion

Jazz Aviation LP has established a responsibility to the communities the regional carrier flies into with its diversity strategy. Corporate citizenship is a priority at the company and volunteerism is encouraged as employees give their time to workplace initiatives and events in their communities. The airline, owned by Chorus Aviation Inc., operates Air Canada Express flights and specializes in serving smaller markets as well as larger markets at off-peak times. Headquartered in Halifax with offices in Montreal, Toronto, Calgary and Vancouver, Jazz serves approximately 70 destinations across North America and flies more daily flights to more Canadian communities than any other airline.

When organizations invested in diversity and inclusion describe the practice as a key value that is embedded in their culture, it's easy for hyperbolic communications to ensue. One of the goals of this series is to draw a line that connects the strategic and tactical aspects of diversity and inclusion, how plans execute in Canada and the successes that flow from them. Jazz Aviation has built a solid foundation for diversity and inclusion that interlaces with other departments to touch employees across all the parts of their operations. To understand how that foundation was built, we talked with Erica Fuhr, the airline's lead on diversity and inclusion since 2009, when the company first dedicated a role to focus more strategically on the practice.

This case study will examine how that foundation has moved Jazz beyond compliance to a strategy that has had an impact on their business and helped the airline outperform the competition. While most of our *Success stories* finish with tactics, this one peppers the tactics throughout, including them in the processes.

## When are you ready?

The diversity manager role at Jazz was created initially to fill a need that was identified for a multi-faith space in one of the airline's largest locations. That project started their journey from managing employment equity to developing a diversity strategy and executing on it. As work began on the multi-faith space, Erica devoted herself to research; looking for the successful practices that would

help the company become more actively engaged with its diversity. A gap analysis was conducted of the policies already in place along with an assessment of an employment equity survey that the company had previously completed. Erica attended a human resources management conference and examined what other companies were doing to learn what was working elsewhere.

One of the key insights uncovered was that the company had the right training, policies and values for diversity, but employees weren't significantly engaged: so the goal at the outset was to create a more active celebration of diversity and to foster inclusion. As research emerged that shaped the diversity strategy for Jazz, the company focused on employee engagement by explicitly talking about diversity to improve awareness for inclusion and ensure employees were communicating well with the public, the communities they were flying into – and interacting well with each other. The plan started with internal engagement.

Talking about diversity internally would become important for employee retention and in supporting a promise of inclusion to the public. Talking about it externally would turn out to give the company a competitive edge both for recruiting and customer service.

## The building blocks

The fundamentals that have helped Jazz Aviation integrate diversity and inclusion into the company's operations included

- Accommodation policies;
- Respect in the Workplace Training;
- A diversity-specific section on the intranet;
- A diversity section within the weekly employee newsletter;
- A monthly diversity and inclusion newsletter for managers;
- Recognizing dates of celebration across the dimensions of diversity;
- Scholarships for students belonging to an employment equity group;
- Leadership support;
- An internal leadership group for diversity, Diversity Association;
- Their Women in Aviation initiative;
- Employee resource groups – it's notable that both the LGBTQA group and another for Aboriginal employees started up organically.

## The springboard for engagement

Effective communications can ignite employee engagement with diversity topics and at Jazz, the conversations around diversity and inclusion started with communications tactics. Introducing a diversity section into the company newsletter with religious and cultural celebrations generated participation with employees offering up more suggestions for content and due to the interest that came from it, a diversity newsletter was launched that targeted management, with celebrations

to incorporate into their calendars which they could observe with their employees. That led to a heritage potluck in Calgary that opened up new conversations about culture and backgrounds over shared food.

What started at that dinner turned into a lasting nation-wide initiative: heritage maps for employees. On large wall maps in the airline's hangars across the country, the people working at Jazz place stickers that point to the places they or their parents were born, promoting discussion and discovery around race, nationality and cultural, religious and ethnic identities.

In 2015, employees celebrated the anti-bullying campaign, Day of Pink, for the first time. This became another nation-wide initiative, fueled by the diversity section of the intranet and the monthly newsletter, which helped managers plan and coordinate the event across the company's regional offices. A Jazz employee designed an anti-bullying pin for everyone to wear on the Day of Pink and employees signed the Jazz Pink Pledge, committing themselves to stand up against bullying.

## Building on connections

To enhance the candidate pool, Jazz has increased targeted recruitment through diversity partnerships with external organizations. The partners' networks and expertise with diverse communities have been valuable in building an employee base that represents local demographics.

**Aboriginal representation:** Aboriginal recruitment has increased significantly over the years. With more attention on increasing employment equity for this group, partnerships with the [Aboriginal Human Resources Council](#) and [Aboriginal Futures Employment Services](#) have been valuable for their recruitment fairs and other guidance, and have helped the airline improve Aboriginal representation, which now sits at 2% of total employees and 2% representation among managers.

**People with disabilities:** Jazz developed a partnership with [Ontario Job Opportunity Information Network \(JOIN\)](#), an organization that opens up employment opportunities for people with disabilities. And to advance leadership, Jazz became a member of their [Business Leadership Network](#). The airline is supporting pilots with disabilities with their Pilot Wellness Committee and is developing a strategy for mental health in the workplace.

**People identifying as LGBT:** Jazz credits their partnerships with [Pride at Work Canada](#) and [Canadian Aviation Pride](#) with helping them with their goal of becoming an employer of choice within the LGBT community. As awareness has increased for diversity, celebrations at Jazz have become important to building employee engagement, and Pride has become a prominent celebration within the workplace, and in the larger community at Pride events as well. Leadership participation with diversity groups at the company has become highest with LGBT events and Pride. A Safe Space campaign for an inclusive work environment was launched by Jazz's employee resource group, LGBTA, and the company recently developed a policy for Gender Transition in the Workplace. The committee arranged for an LGBT 101 webinar in partnership with Pride at Work Canada, which all employees were invited to participate in.

**Cultural diversity, new Canadians and visible minorities:** Compliance to employment equity legislation is a starting point for any Canadian company in a regulated sector. Moving forward is another matter. At first, Jazz's commitment to visible minorities tapped into partnerships with

Immigrant Services of Nova Scotia for their recruitment and bridging programs for new Canadians, and African Nova Scotia Employment Centre, for their job fair.

More recently, an Employee Multicultural Network launched with a mission “to reflect our diverse community by working together to recruit and develop new Canadians and visible minorities through increasing representation, fostering innovation and inclusiveness, and providing equal access to learning and development opportunities.” So far, the group has a diverse mix of employees across all departments, including many unionized employees. A member of the Management Diversity Council at Jazz will be leading the employee resource group, and as a newcomer to Canada many years ago herself, she brings a valuable personal lens. Visible minority representation among Jazz employees is now 13%, 12% among managers.

## The commitments

Along with its partnerships, Jazz has made commitments within the company to develop talent and improve retention and advancement among women and youth, recognizing the challenges and opportunities for each group.

**Women in leadership:** Jazz launched their Women in Aviation initiative in 2014 with an event that featured a leadership discussion panel that was attended by the airline’s COO, legal counsel and directors – all women in leadership, which gave the panel discussion significant impact. 37% of the airline’s employees are now women; 30% are managers.

**Youth:** Investing in aviation education has given the company an opportunity to guide and mentor the next generation of aviators and help shape aviation education in Canada. Jazz has won recognition as a top employer for young people for several years. Since 2012, Jazz has had an agreement with the Pilot Cadet Program at Seneca College’s School of Aviation, which has supported qualifying graduates with cadet opportunities at the airline. They have partnered with the Collegiate Aviation Canada Group of Colleges with scholarships for students enrolled in Aircraft Maintenance Engineer programs and scholarships for students who identify as part of an equity group.

## Leadership, accountability and the business case

The airline has had a long-standing commitment to embracing diversity through its core values and when Jazz was ready to formalize its commitment to diversity with a diversity strategy in 2014, the company’s executive demonstrated their support by signing it. Leadership and accountability are essential to building successful strategies for diversity and inclusion, and Colin Copp, the company’s president, reinforced his support in the company’s public pledge to diversity with a personal statement, published to their website;

**“At Jazz, we work together. Facilitating inclusion by acknowledging the unique and diverse perspectives of all individuals creates one incredible team of employees – and we celebrate that.”**

Over the years diverse representation has increased, most notably among Aboriginal and visible minority employees. That is in large part due to all of the work that the recruitment team has put into reaching out to diverse communities and making connections with community-based organizations. The company also increased the amount of self-identification among employees, partly a result of the

shifting culture with the celebration of diversity as the company has moved beyond compliance.

By focusing their business case for diversity on employee engagement, awareness has increased among employees and managers for dimensions of diversity and what inclusion means. And as the company encourages discussion about diversity, its leadership keeps learning from employees about what matters to them.

As the people working at Jazz have shared experiences and events with each other, there has been a better appreciation for their diversity and the diversity of the places they fly into, which has impacted customer service. There is an online diversity and inclusion training module for management and administrative staff in development and all newly hired unionized employees receive in-class company orientations that include a section on diversity, introducing employees to the inclusion culture and the diversity and inclusion strategy.

Jazz has found that their engagement with diversity has given them an edge in hiring, and the focus on celebrating diversity and driving a culture that aims to embed inclusion into all facets of the organization has contributed to a wider talent pool of diverse candidates. And among employees, resource groups continue to grow and evolve as more diversity initiatives and events are organized across the country.

### A solid foundation for diversity builds reputation and trust

This case study illustrates how diversity and inclusion doesn't happen in isolation; the practice is inherently collaborative and when successful, woven into every part of an organization with an impact on measurable success. How can a solid foundation in diversity and inclusion affect a company's performance? FlightStats Inc. reported that **Jazz** ranked among the top five regional airlines in North America for on-time reliability for the second consecutive year. The foundation for diversity and inclusion at Jazz touched everything from training to operations to customer service, creating a competitive consumer experience.

Jazz has been the recipient of several awards. "Diversity has been a long-standing priority at Jazz," attests Colin Copp, President. "Being selected one of Canada's Best Diversity Employers for five years in a row attests to our efforts to create a working environment where employees feel that they are part of a collective team that supports individuality."

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## The Success story initiative

There is astonishingly little published that shines a light on diversity and inclusion successes in Canada, though there are many, across a wide range of organizations. Case studies referenced by trainers and leadership tend to be reporting on different countries, cultures, political and economic settings.

The goal of this initiative is to support diversity and inclusion leadership with stories that are relevant to what's happening now, here in Canada. By sharing their stories, we celebrate the successes of Canadian organizations while contributing to learning for everyone that cares about diversity and inclusion.

The employers who have developed initiatives to promote diversity and inclusion as priorities in the workplace are responding to an increasingly competitive economy that's responsive to the diversity of employees – and the country. We are grateful to those who have participated in interviews.

This series of case studies will be published monthly through 2016. Subscribing to our monthly newsletter at [ccdi.ca](http://ccdi.ca) will keep you updated with the latest case studies, which will all be posted online at [ccdi.ca/successstories](http://ccdi.ca/successstories). For more information, contact [mail@ccdi.ca](mailto:mail@ccdi.ca).

## The Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion

The CCDI has a mission to help the organizations we work with be inclusive, free of prejudice and discrimination – and to generate the awareness, dialogue and action for people to recognize diversity as an asset and not an obstacle. Through the research, reports and toolkits we develop and our workshops, events and workplace consultations, we're helping Canadian employers understand their diversity, plan for it and create inclusion.

CCDI's leadership has a proven model that's cultivated trust as an impartial third party. Our expertise is focused on the topics of inclusion that are relevant in Canada now and the regional differences that shape diversity.

A charitable organization that thinks like a business, we have created a niche with our innovative research technology and data analysis that brings a deeper understanding of Canadian diversity demographics and mindsets at any given moment.

CCDI is grateful for the support of Employer Partners across Canada. For enquiries, contact Susan Rogers, Chief Client Officer, [Susan.Rogers@ccdi.ca](mailto:Susan.Rogers@ccdi.ca) or (416) 968-6520, ext 103.

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