



# Raising Profits and Potential: Return on Investment for Work-life Effectiveness, Diversity, Workplace Equity

2006 National Employer Summit  
Conference Papers and Discussion Summary

## Executive Summary

Business and Professional Women's (BPW) Foundation sponsors national employer summits to bring together individuals and employers concerned with workplace equity, work-life effectiveness and diversity. BPW Foundation had three clear goals in sponsoring the 2006 National Employer Summit (NES): *Raising Profits and Potential: Return on Investment for Work-life Effectiveness, Diversity, Workplace Equity*:

- to share the latest knowledge and research on the return on investment to employers for engaging in policies and practices that enhance work-life effectiveness, workplace equity and diversity
- to discover promising practices and public policy options that better enable the adoption of such practices
- to identify areas for education, programs, policy action, or education to enhance the ability of employers and employees to build successful workplaces

The Summit's publications showcase insights from specialized research undertaken at the events that synthesize the combined knowledge of participants around critical workplace issues, promising practices, and public policy implications.

The 2006 NES Conference Papers and Discussion Summary is a collection of informative conference papers and table discussion summaries. The original speaker abstracts, which outline recent research and promising practices at the time of the Summit, are included for each discussion area and provide a thorough discussion framework.

Following each set of abstracts is a synthesis and analysis of the event's table discussions per track and topic. Included within each synthesis are relevant insights provided during the table discussions for each topic area as well as those offered during networking and other informal discussions throughout the day. The discussion notes include an overview of trends identified by participants; an analysis of common ground issues where these trends appear to intersect; highlights of priorities within the common ground areas that appear to be critical to moving the agenda forward; actionable strategies for creating change; and any comments that helped to illuminate the discussions.

Whenever possible, references to specific practices, research, or policies mentioned during discussions are footnoted in the text. Because the references were made as part of free-flowing discussions, it was not always possible to find citations for every reference captured. The reference information is provided mainly to aid readers in using the information provided in the table discussions in their own conversations or research. Any oversight in citations is not intended as a claim of ownership by BPW Foundation. Readers who spot an omission are encouraged to contact the Foundation and provide a citation. The electronic version of the summary will be periodically updated to include such revisions.

BPW Foundation staff is solely responsible for the content of the synthesis and analysis sections. Not all participant ideas or comments could be included, but we believe our efforts reflect insights from participants as shared throughout the 2006 National Employer Summit.

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## Overview

The 2006 NES engaged more than 70 participants for discussions. Prior to the Summit, Business and Professional Women's (BPW) Foundation strategically identified employers, organizations, and government agencies that represent the varied stakeholder groups and industries impacted by equity, diversity, and flexible workplace practices. It also sought to ensure the sharing of a wide-range of views as well as the dissemination of the latest in research and practice. Representatives from these organizations were then invited to speak and/or attend. They ranged from employers that were early adopters of promising practices, research organizations, policymakers, government agencies, to nonprofits representing key constituencies (i.e. maturing workers, workingwomen, people with disabilities, women veterans, etc.). The Summit's design, including its invitation list and speaker selections, was strategically developed to elicit both cutting-edge thinking on key topics and to foster the development of a diverse, cross-sector network. This network includes researchers, policymakers, advocates, and employers who could drive new action around work-life effectiveness, workplace equity, and diversity.

## Discussions

Discussions held at the 2006 Summit are indicative of the ideas and practices of those on the leading edge of work design. The employers, researchers, policymakers, and individuals engaged in the Summit's educational programming and research are already thinking and acting to build successful 21<sup>st</sup> Century workplaces.

These "change agents" are not necessarily representative of most U.S. businesses. For example, while the realities of upcoming demographic shifts such as the aging of the American workforce are being discussed by researchers and industry associations, the majority of employers involved in a 2005 General Accounting Office report which looked at the aging of the workforce indicated that they had not taken steps to hire or retain older workers<sup>1</sup>. The early adopters of work-life effectiveness, workplace equity, and diversity initiatives present at the 2006 National Employer Summit include employers, researchers, policymakers, and government agencies seeking to address a myriad of impending changes in the workplace and labor market.

In order to provide readers with an overall sense of the direction and tenor of ideas presented during the Summit, discussion summaries were compiled from notes taken during the formal table rounds as well as informal discussions that developed during the networking and luncheon sessions. BPW Foundation believes that these conversations as well as the actionable strategies outlined in the Summit papers can drive forward proactive changes in work design that will provide win-win solutions for employers and workingwomen striving to create equitable, flexible, diverse workplaces.

## **The special role of workplace flexibility**

As participants addressed issues in all three topic areas (work-life effectiveness, workplace equity, diversity), one work-design tool, workplace flexibility, emerged as a favored solution for multiple challenges associated with creating equitable, diverse workplaces. Its general popularity rested on its perceived potential to reshape the workplace to the benefit of the broadest group of employees as well as employers.

While numerous additional solutions and practices to support the development of equitable, diverse workplaces were discussed, *workplace flexibility* was the most talked about tool in work design discussions. It was viewed as having great potential to reshape work structures to the benefit of a variety of industries and a multitude of workers.

Workplace Flexibility 2010 of Georgetown University Law Center, 2006 NES co-sponsor, defines workplace flexibility in the following manner:

- The ability to have flexibility in the scheduling of full-time hours (e.g., a range of flexible work arrangements, including flextime and compressed work weeks)
- The ability to have flexibility in the number of hours worked (e.g., reduced hours, such as part-time or part-year)

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<sup>1</sup> "Older Workers: Labor Can Help Employers and Employees Plan Better for the Future." United States Government Accountability Office. 2005.

- The ability to have career flexibility with multiple points for entry, exit and re-entry into the workforce (e.g., extended time off and career on- and off-ramps)
- The ability to address unexpected and ongoing personal and family needs (e.g., short-term time off and episodic time off)

Rather than view workplace flexibility as an accommodation of the needs of specific groups of employees, proponents view flexibility as a tool for reshaping work options and attitudes that can empower both workers and employers. According to those active in promoting work-life effectiveness, a positive by-product of making work “work” via providing flexible work options is that they make the workplace accessible to the largest possible pool of employees. By designing work options that measure productivity versus the time spent in the workplace, it allows personnel that may have had a harder time fitting into traditional work structures to be available for employment (i.e. caregivers, impending retirees, people with disabilities, etc.)

Challenges foreseen for the establishment of workplace flexibility as a new norm relate to concerns that flexibility might become a substitute for receiving equitable wages, health and other benefits, and career advancement opportunities. The benefits of workplace flexibility<sup>2</sup> for employers emphasized within the Summit discussions referred to resulting increases in employee engagement and the related boosts to overall company productivity<sup>3</sup> rather than their efficacy as a substitute for other equitable work practices. Proponents of workplace flexibility as a work design tool are clear that the overall success of the option relies on it not being uncoupled from other measures that ensure equitable and diverse workplaces. Rather, the view expressed by many participants is that when flexibility becomes a workplace norm, it must necessarily be accompanied by proportional access to benefits and productivity-based measures of performance as a means of recruiting and retaining valued employees. They also emphasized that employer issues related to utilizing workplace flexibility options must also be addressed including concerns about wage-replacement, the challenges of supervision, and the equitable application of flexible work options across employee groups.

### **Priority Strategies**

Prioritizing the exciting ideas and promising practices offered during the Summit was the task of participants during their final two large-group discussions. Attendees divided into two groups—one to prioritize actionable strategies to drive the development and adoption of voluntary practices, and the second to prioritize strategies related to developing and supporting public policies and government programs.

Participants in the voluntary practice discussion identified the workplace practices about which they wanted more information or which they felt could be promoted as promising practices. Within the discussion, they also identified strategies to gather and share practices among stakeholders. Those engaged in the final policy discussion were tasked with identifying areas for public policy development or for the development of supporting research as well as to identify promising practices that could inform policy development. They were also asked to identify policy-related topics about which they desired more information.

### **Top Priorities in Voluntary Practice Adoption or Education**

Over the course of the next year, it is imperative that those providing research, working on, or supporting the voluntary adoption of promising workplace programs focus on two key areas:

1. Provide practical examples of solutions and user-friendly tools that employers of all sizes can use
2. Develop deliberate strategies that lead to culture-change

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<sup>2</sup> Business Impacts of Flexibility: An Imperative for Expansion. Corporate Voices for Working Families. 2006. <[www.cvwf.org](http://www.cvwf.org).

<sup>3</sup> Levin-Epstein, Jodie. “Responsive Workplaces: The business case for employment that values fairness and families.” Reprinted from the Mother Load, a special report in The American Prospect. 2007<[www.clasp.org](http://www.clasp.org)>

## **Top Priorities in Public Policy Development and Education**

Over the course of the next year, it is imperative that those working on developing policy or providing research and information to support the development of work-life policy focus upon ideas to:

1. Remove barriers to work-life effectiveness options
2. Develop metrics around measuring impacts of work-life effectiveness, equity, and diversity to build the case for change and measurable impact
3. Provide incentives for flexibility

## **Follow-up to Summit**

In the first months following the 2006 National Employer Summit, BPW Foundation began to implement the strategies identified by Summit participants as top priorities. Through educational activities, policy outreach to U.S. Congressional Staffers, and research efforts, BPW Foundation is following-through on its commitment to Summit attendees to offer them a year's worth of robust resources. Work by the BPW Foundation and other Summit attendees is driving activities that are impacting the development of public policy, government programming, research, and voluntary practices which will help re-design workplaces for workingwomen and men. These workplaces of the present and future will be more likely to model work-life effectiveness and workplace flexibility, equity, and diversity.

## **Current and Ongoing Activities Undertaken by BPW Foundation**

### Policy Outreach

- BPW Foundation Special Policy Event

BPW Foundation believes that through collaboration it can support the development of public policy that positively impacts the workplace as well as the lives of workingwomen and their families. Special policy events and audio conferences provide participants with the tools they need to discuss and develop public policies that help build successful workplaces and create systemic change. In February 2007, BPW Foundation sponsored a Special Policy Event titled *Building Policy Together: Workingwomen, Employers and Policymakers*.

- Policy Resource Activities

In its capacity as a neutral convener and independent clearinghouse and research institution, BPW Foundation has a long and continuing tradition of informing policymakers at all levels on issues impacting workingwomen. After the 2006 NES, BPW Foundation:

- Began working with its sister organization, BPW/USA, as a resource to Capitol Hill staffers working on legislation related to workplace flexibility, paid sick leave, paid family and medical leave, etc.
- Utilized a workshop at the Special Policy Event as a focus group for a Hill Staffer, allowing workingwomen and small business owners a chance to provide input on key aspects of the draft legislation
- Engaged NES participants as well as other employer, workingwomen, and research connections in policy development discussions with Hill staffers to ensure that they were able to hear from key stakeholders
- Participated in an Equal Employment Opportunity Commission-sponsored focus group on issues impacting workingwomen

### Media Outreach & Publicity

BPW Foundation has strategically expanded outreach for its messaging and research by participating in strategically chosen conferences, seminars, and focus groups that support the development of research, practice and public policy around workplace equity, diversity, and work-life effectiveness. But BPW Foundation is not limiting its outreach to research and policy circles. BPW Foundation is committed to contributing to the public dialogue as well and is developing an outreach strategy that includes contributing to and developing articles and opinion pieces for mainstream media outlets.

### Expansion of the Cross-Sector Network

- Partner Engagement
  - Two speakers from the 2006 NES were elected to BPW Foundation's Board of Trustees in early 2007. Lisa Hershman, Global Vice President of Operational Excellence and Quality and first Chairwoman of Avnet, Inc.'s Global Women's Forum and Muriel Watkins, Vice President of Human Resources of The New York Times represent major employers with strong work-life and diversity initiatives.
  - A Department of Labor-Women's Bureau representative reported to BPW in early 2007 that a new collaboration was recently created between the DOL-WB and the DOL-Office of Disability Employment Policy as a result of conversations begun during the 2006 NES. The two agencies will collaborate on workplace flexibility outreach and education.

### **Upcoming Activities from BPW Foundation**

#### Educational Outreach

- Webinars/Audio Events Series

BPW Foundation, in conjunction with various program collaborators, offers a series of audio and web conferences on critical workplace issues. Upcoming topics include *Flexibility: Management's Perspective*, *Work Design: Flexibility Versus Face Time*, *Supporting Women Veterans*, *Building Public Policy Together: Consensus-Based Policy Creation*, *Workplace Flexibility: Developing a Strategic Plan for Public Policy Development*. In addition to publicly available webinars, members of BPW Foundation's employer advisory network, which includes past Summit participants, will have access to special webinars focused on peer-to-peer knowledge sharing around topics raised during the Summit. Recordings and resources from prior calls are available at [www.bpwfoundation.org](http://www.bpwfoundation.org).

- Women's Network Knowledge Sharing Series and Online Tutorial

As part of its commitment to promote the dissemination and adoption of promising voluntary workplace practices identified during the Summit, Business and Professional Women's Foundation is developing a Women's Networks Series. The Women's Networks Series integrates online learning, peer-to-peer knowledge sharing, articles, and web-based events to increase the level of knowledge about how to create women's networks within the workplace and what they can and can't do to increase women's career mobility and to foster equity and diversity. The project will be launched with a panel discussion on women's networks to be held in Reno, Nevada on July 19, 2007 as part of BPW Foundation's *Women's Advancement Luncheon and Seminar*. The luncheon and seminar take place during the 2007 BPW/USA National Conference. For more information, visit [www.bpwusa.org/nationalconference](http://www.bpwusa.org/nationalconference).



- Expansion of Rawalt Online Resource Center

Over the next three years, BPW Foundation will continue to convert its extensive physical archive, the *Marguerite Rawalt Resource Center* (Rawalt), into an easy-to-access online resource center. In response to requests by Summit participants for a comprehensive database that captures the latest in effective practices and information on policy development in one place, BPW Foundation will emphasize the collection of materials and links on work-life, diversity, and equity over the next year of the online resource center's expansion. Materials from participating 2006 NES organizations and employers will be highlighted along with those from additional university centers, national and international government websites, and innovative employers. But, Rawalt will not simply be a passive repository; through the Rawalt project, the knowledge contained within in it will be disseminated via e-newsletters, articles, op-eds, webinars, and online tutorials to mainstream publications, employers, researchers, workingwomen advocates and policymakers. To visit the resource center, visit [www.bpwfoundation.org](http://www.bpwfoundation.org).

- Quarterly Newsletter on Policy & Practice

In Summer 2007, BPW Foundation is launching a quarterly e-newsletter for employers, workingwomen, researchers, and policymakers that will feature articles and bibliographies on voluntary practice and public policy areas identified at the 2006 National Employer Summit.

- 2008 National Employer Summit

To answer the demand for safe places for employers, policymakers, researchers, and advocates to meet and share promising practices and public policy insights, BPW Foundation will host a 2008 National Employer Summit. BPW Foundation's 2008 National Employer Summit, to be held Summer 2008, will showcase research, voluntary practices, and information on public policy or government programs that helps employers build workplaces that model workplace flexibility, workplace equity, and diversity. Champions among employers, researchers, government officials, and policymakers will be highlighted as they present the latest research or promising practices that impact workplaces. Summit seminars will also examine the laws and regulations that impact employers in these areas and illuminate the rights and responsibilities employers and employees have under them. Opportunities for professional development, networking, and small-group discussions will be featured throughout the event. For more information on how to participate in the 2008 NES, e-mail [foundation@bpwfoundation.org](mailto:foundation@bpwfoundation.org).

#### Expansion of the Cross-Sector Network

- Employer Advisory Network

In 2005, BPW Foundation established the nucleus of a new cross-sector network of employers, workingwomen, researchers, and government agencies. The network's purpose is to identify and implement the systemic changes needed to fully empower workingwomen and to advise, promote, and participate in BPW Foundation programming and research activities. To date, over 60 organizations have shared their knowledge and resources to support BPW Foundation's research, education, and professional development events. In 2007, BPW Foundation will formalize relationships with a number of its employer advisory network members to engage in collaborative research and educational projects on topic areas arising from the 2006 NES.

#### Using the NES Conference Summary

This conference summary includes most of the original resources provided to Summit participants as well as a summary of participant discussions. Using these tools should offer those who were not able to participate in person a flavor of the day's insights and revelations.

BPW encourages readers to use the summary as a starting point for discussions within their own organizations, as a source of information to locate more research on this topic, and as a guide to prioritizing their own policy or voluntary practice activities.