

AWiE 2025: Fostering success for women engineers

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By [Peter Saunders](#)

Advance Women in Engineering recently returned for its third year.



On June 19, *Canadian Consulting Engineer* hosted its third annual Advance Women in Engineering (AWiE) virtual summit, in advance of International Women in Engineering Day on June 23. With a mix of keynote presentations and panel discussions, the event drew more than 230 registrants and nearly 150 live attendees. It was sponsored by [Reliable Controls](#), [Tulloch](#), [Rheem](#), [Viega](#), the Canadian Precast/Prestressed Concrete Institute ([CPCI](#)) and [Eaton](#).

The sessions addressed research into fostering greater success for women engineers, how men can provide support as allies, inclusion of Indigenous perspectives and thriving through adversity.

Removing systemic barriers

First up was keynote speaker Denise Pothier, P.Eng. (pictured, top left), COO for the Canadian Council for Indigenous Business ([CCIB](#)). As a Nova Scotian with French Acadian and Mi'kmaq heritage, she has committed herself to removing systemic barriers for Indigenous businesses—including burgeoning engineering firms—across Canada.

Pothier studied both engineering and business, then spent the bulk of her career at Stantec, rising from director of quality management to vice-president (VP) of practice services before turning her focus to Indigenous relations, which in turn led to joining CCIB in 2024. She also serves on the boards of directors for [EfficiencyOne](#) and [Engineers Canada](#).

“To say I am proud to be an engineer is an understatement,” said Pothier. “Engineering is more than a career. It is a calling to make the world a better place for all, where integrity, honesty and diversity are welcomed and honoured.”

Pothier cited the seventh-generation principle, the Indigenous concept that emphasizes thinking about other people in the future when you are making decisions today.

“We are connected both to the first people who practised engineering and to future engineers who are not even born yet,” she said. “We take wisdom that came before us, improve upon it, protect it and pass it on.”

Personal examples from her career included focusing on quality control and incorporating Indigenous ways of knowing and doing into her work. Having learned from such projects, she encouraged today’s engineering students “to quiet your intellect long enough to be open to new ways of doing and knowing” in an effort to make society more equitable.

“It has been proven time and time again that a variety of viewpoints from different backgrounds and experiences will lead to better problem-solving and more creative solutions,” she said. “They helped me develop not only the mind of an engineer, but also the heart of an engineer.”



Engendering success

The first panel was a ‘fishbowl’ conversation between Dr. Toni Schmader, head of the department of psychology at the University of British Columbia ([UBC](#)) and director of the Engendering Success in STEM ([ESS](#)) research consortium; Kim Bouffard, manager of belonging and engagement for Engineers Canada and president of the Canadian Coalition for Women in Engineering, Science, Trades and Technology ([CCWESTT](#)); and Kalena McCloskey, a fourth-year engineering student at [Queen’s University](#) and past-president of the Canadian Federation of Engineering Students ([CFES](#)).

Schmader discussed her research into “developmental pathways” for girls’ engagement with and women’s entry into engineering and related fields, from increasing awareness of the profession to the crucial roles of mentors and sponsors.

“We choose careers where we feel welcome and respected for our contributions,” she said. “When engineering is framed in a communal way, it’s more attractive to women.”

For McCloskey’s part, as her work with CFES brought her into partnership with Engineers Canada, she has considered how to bridge the gap between learning on campus and working in the field.

“Universities have made a lot of progress in support for women in engineering,” she said, “but then where are the supports when you’re transitioning into the workforce?”

Bouffard discussed how Schmader’s research is influencing the activities of Engineers Canada as a regulator of the profession, such as professional development. Diversity

training, for example, has become mandatory for all engineers in Ontario and is now spreading across the country.

“Thanks to Toni’s work, no one’s questioning that barriers exist,” she said. “Now we can mobilize to do something about them.”



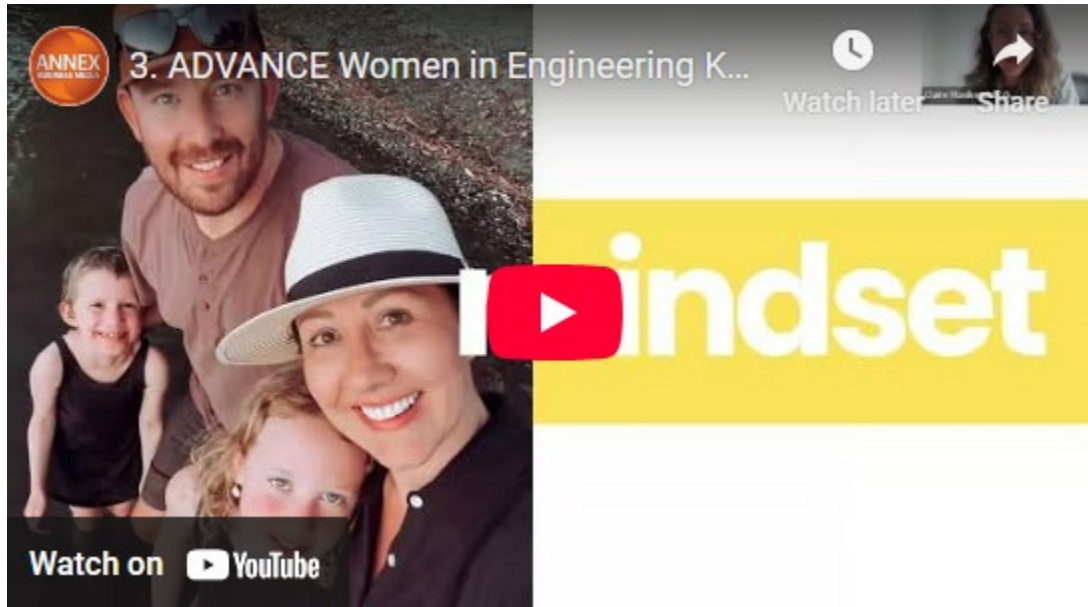
Thriving through adversity

Next came the second keynote speaker, Claire Masikewich, a marketing and communications (marcom) professional with experience working with many engineers in the energy and geomatics sectors.

In her motivational presentation, ‘Shift happens: How to thrive through hard times,’ Masikewich described how she put her career on hold after her youngest daughter was diagnosed with cancer. By helping found a charitable foundation (focused on the need for increased funding toward pediatric cancer research) and sharing her message as a public speaker, she was able to put her own energies to positive purpose, instead of descending into helplessness.

“I realized I could control my thoughts, my actions and my community,” she said. “The habits we build today reinforce how we show up tomorrow.”

‘Strong Like Sloane,’ which became an official charitable organization in Alberta last summer, has raised \$335,000 to date.



Making allyship work

Finally, Jeanette Southwood, P.Eng., is executive VP (EVP) of corporate affairs and strategic partnerships for Engineers Canada, moderated the second panel discussion.

“I’ve moderated at both previous editions of Advance Women in Engineering,” she said in her introduction. “One of my suggestions, which has also come up in feedback from past audiences, has been to explore the role of allyship. The vast majority of Canadian engineers are men. For women to achieve equity in the workplace, allyship will have to play a part.”

One of the panelists was Nensi Baboci, an [RJC](#) associate who has been heavily involved in her firm’s internal Women’s Employee Resource Group.

“My experience with men’s allyship has been good at some times and a struggle at others,” she said, “and I think every woman has had this experience. Men don’t really know the systemic barriers women face because they don’t experience them. The challenge of allyship is not that men don’t want to help, it’s that men don’t really know how to help. They don’t feel they have enough training.”

Another panelist, Dr. Jocelyn Peltier-Huntley, P.Eng., specializes in just such training through her company, [Prairie Catalyst Consulting](#). Among the students of her courses is fellow panelist Todd Steen, global potash director for [Hatch](#), who recently earned an internal award for leading workplace diversity and inclusion efforts.

“I took Jocelyn’s course a few months ago, combining self-learning with group sessions,” he explained. “I’ve always tried to treat people with respect, be a good leader and model

behaviour, but where the course helped me understand how not just to be a supporter, but to be an active ally in leading change. It was a big light-bulb moment.”

“People are motivated not just by the content of the course, but also by seeing their leaders take it,” added Peltier-Huntley.

“The first thing allies can do is listen and acknowledge,” said Baboci. “Being heard makes you feel more valued as a person. Then they can move into a support role by offering help and getting involved in internal clubs and external groups. Be an advocate. Speak up in your sphere of influence. Invest in training and tools to advance women’s careers.”

