

## **Women Lawyers Forum, Canadian Bar Association (WLF) “Madam Justice Project”**

### **About the Program**

The Madam Justice Project is an initiative presented by the Canadian Bar Association’s Women Lawyers Forum in collaboration with the Canadian Bar Association’s Judges Section which seeks to highlight and celebrate diversity on the bench by showcasing women judges from across Canada through an online gallery.

The Madam Justice project was launched by the Canadian Bar Association’s Women Lawyers Forum in March 2020. The project is intended to celebrate the accomplishments of women judges and diversity on the bench by showcasing advice and perspectives of women judges from across Canada, with particular attention to achieving a balance in court level and regional representation.

We recognize that the success of the project depends on engagement from our members and participation from judges. Therefore, we felt it was important to ensure the CBA Judges Section had an opportunity to collaborate with us and provide their feedback early on in the process.

The idea behind the project was to create a link between the bench and the bar by having WLF volunteers reach out to the judges directly. All judges that we wish to profile are contacted by the WLF in advance for their consent to participate and they are provided with the following four standard project questions:

1. What was your path into law and onto the bench?
2. What experience in your legal career best prepared you for work on the bench?
3. What advice do you have for counsel who appear before you?
4. What do you wish the public knew about the justice system?

Judges can provide the WLF with their written response to any or all of the above questions. Alternatively, if they prefer to provide their answers in an interview format, which allows for richer content and connection, the WLF will arrange an interview with a WLF volunteer at a mutually convenient time. The WLF has created a webpage that is dedicated to displaying the profiles of the featured judges. Each month, we focus on a theme such as Black History Month or highlighting Indigenous judges or judges from certain geographical locations.

The WLF is committed to featuring both English-speaking and French-speaking judges. However, due to translation costs, the Canadian Bar Association will only translate up to two responses per profile at this time. Additional responses will appear in the language in which they are received.

The Madam Justice Project features short profiles of women judges from across Canada at the federal, provincial, and territorial level. The profiles generally include basic biographical information, a photograph, and answers to one or more of the four standard project questions. Completed profiles are uploaded to an online gallery on the WLF’s webpage. We have profiled 24 judges so far and our goal is to feature approximately three new profiles per month as long as we have the resources for this project.

[Click here](#) for the link to the online gallery on the WLF's webpage.

### **Advice for Replicating the Program**

Here are some useful tips for those wishing to implement a similar project:

(a) Set up a committee. We set up a committee prior to launching the Madam Justice project, which included members of the CBA WLF Executive. The Madam Justice committee is responsible for reviewing nominations received from the Chief Justices and other judges, and deciding who to feature on our online gallery with a particular focus on achieving balance in diversity, court level and regional representation.

The committee is also tasked with identifying gaps in representation and finding ways to fill those gaps, obtaining the contact information of nominated judges where necessary, selecting monthly themes, and agreeing on timelines to receive, translate and upload responses.

(b) Create a set of standard questions that each judge will respond to. For our project, we decided to focus on four questions to keep the profiles reasonably brief and easy to digest. All judges are asked the same questions so we can offer different perspectives and ensure that participants do not deviate from our main objective, which is to highlight and celebrate diversity on the bench.

(c) Reach out to judges' groups or organizations to ensure access to judges for profiles. When we came up with the idea of profiling women judges, we expected that it would be a low-key initiative with a slow drip. We sent letters to the Chief Justices of various courts through the CBA Judges Section shortly after the project was launched to ensure all levels of court would be represented. To our surprise, we had an overwhelming response from across Canada and we received many nominations. We were not expecting this much interest and support for the Madam Justice project! We continue to work closely with the Judges Section and we welcome their input with respect to project development. They help us fill gaps where certain levels of court are not represented by providing names of judges we can approach, and they follow up with judges as required.

(d) Recruit volunteers. Reach out to members of your organization to build a database of volunteers to whom judges can be allocated. Create a toolkit for your volunteers which could include a program description, the standard questions, samples of profiles that have already been published, and tips for communicating with the judges and conducting interviews.

(e) Have a communication plan. Prepare a template letter that can be sent to the judges that are nominated describing the project and the process. Work with your organization to create a communication plan, which could include a regular feature on your website or webpage, regular email blasts to your members, and sharing links to recently uploaded profiles through your organization's social media platforms (Twitter, Instagram, LinkedIn, etc.).