BLG clients win three awards at the 2026 Canadian General Counsel Awards

National (May 29, 2026) – BLG-nominated finalists recognized across business excellence, deal making, diversity, emerging leadership and innovation.

Borden Ladner Gervais LLP (BLG) celebrates six clients and legal teams named finalists at the 2026 Canadian General Counsel Awards (CGCAs), held last night at the Fairmont Royal York in Toronto. Now in their 21st year, the CGCAs is Canada's definitive awards program for the in-house legal community, recognizing excellence across 10 categories including innovation, deal making, litigation management, emerging leadership and diversity.

BLG Stephen Sigurdson Lifetime Achievement Award

David Di Paolo, National Managing Partner and CEO, presented the BLG Stephen Sigurdson Lifetime Achievement Award to Jacqueline De Gagné. Ms. De Gagné retired in December 2025 from Bayer Inc. after a distinguished 30-year career in the in-house legal community, with senior roles in Canada, Germany and China. The award acknowledges in-house counsel who have demonstrated sustained and exceptional leadership throughout their careers.

"This year's CGCA finalists represent the highest standard of Canadian legal practice," said Di Paolo. "They manage major infrastructure projects under geopolitical pressure, solve complex litigation matters and lead landmark capital markets transactions. These leaders are defining the future of the in-house legal profession in Canada. We congratulate our nominated finalists for their outstanding work and celebrate Jacqueline De Gagné, recipient of this year's BLG Stephen Sigurdson Lifetime Achievement award, for her remarkable contributions to the legal community."

Among BLG's finalists, three received awards at last night's gala. Congratulations to:

Maryann Besharat, Vice-President, Legal Claims Canada, Intact Financial Corporation (OpenText Innovation Award)

Maryann Besharat directs the legal team behind DocMax, a purpose-built AI tool developed with Intact's Data Lab that processes complex claims files to produce cited, sourced summaries, reclaiming approximately 10,000 hours annually and reducing medical-legal summary time by 50 per cent. BLG serves as external counsel to Intact Financial Corporation and co-nominated Besharat alongside Intact and Blake, Cassels and Graydon LLP.

Rustam Juma, General Counsel and Corporate Secretary, Volkswagen Group Canada Inc. (Blakes Judy L. Wilson Diversity Award)

Rustam Juma co-founded the National GC Network, a platform dedicated to advancing equity, diversity and inclusion within Canada's in-house legal community, which has grown to approximately 100 members and hosted four annual conferences for more than 500 attendees. BLG's John Hunter co-nominated Juma alongside Osler, Hoskin and Harcourt LLP.

Matthew D. Turner, Senior Vice-President, Chief Compliance Officer and Secretary, Guardian Capital Group Limited (Osler Purdy Crawford Deal Making Award)

Matthew D. Turner led the legal and governance workstreams behind Guardian's C$1.67 billion take-private transaction with Desjardins Global Asset Management Inc., which closed in March 2026 at a 66 per cent premium to the last closing price of Guardian's Class A shares, creating a combined organization overseeing approximately C$280 billion in assets under management and advisement. Turner also directed the legal strategy for a broader corporate repositioning including Guardian's C$750 million divestiture of its Worldsource retail distribution businesses and the acquisition of Sterling Capital Management, which added approximately US$76 billion in assets under management. BLG Partners Carlos Cerqueira, Tim McCormick and Andrew McLean co-nominated Turner alongside counsel from several national law firms.

BLG-nominated finalists at the 2026 CGCAs:

Chuck Andary, Interim CEO and Chief Legal Officer, Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority (Business Excellence Award)

Chuck Andary began his legal career at BLG before joining the Windsor-Detroit Bridge Authority (WDBA) in 2019, where he was appointed Interim CEO by the Governor in Council in January 2026 during the final construction phase of the C$6.4 billion Gordie Howe International Bridge project. In this role, he has navigated U.S. political pressure that threatened the bridge's opening schedule while advancing commercial readiness. BLG Partners Rich Yehia and Andrew Punzo co-nominated Andary alongside counsel from Fasken Martineau DuMoulin LLP.

Janie Dugas, Director, Assistant General Counsel, North America, Vantage Data Centers (OpenText Innovation Award)

Janie Dugas built Vantage Data Centres' Canadian legal function from the ground up after joining in 2022, implementing data-centre-specific contract frameworks and deploying contract lifecycle management and AI-enabled review tools to support hyperscale digital infrastructure development across North America. BLG Partner Adina Georgescu co-nominated Dugas alongside counsel from several national law firms.

Vanessa Gray, Senior Legal Counsel, UAP Inc. (Sun Life Tomorrow's Leader Award)

Vanessa Gray leads M&A, commercial, and franchise compliance for the Canadian operations of UAP Inc., a division of Fortune 500 company Genuine Parts Company. She directed UAP's legal strategy for the acquisition of Benson Group Inc. and Paco-Benson Inc., managing 18 months of negotiation, Competition Bureau approval and approximately 50 new lease negotiations across Ontario, Québec and other provinces. BLG Partner Kyle Denomme nominated Gray.

For more information, please contact:

Kate Gifford
Borden Ladner Gervais LLP
KGifford@blg.com
416.350.6540

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