



Ten ways local government can advance gender equity

Promoting women in leadership

The fact sheets, *Ten ways local government can advance gender equity*, are part of a resource package designed to build the capacity for local governments to consider gender equity in their planning, policy and service delivery.

Local government plays an important role in creating and supporting environments that enable community to achieve optimal health and wellbeing. Reducing gender inequity for women is a key strategy in achieving this goal, as it allows for a more just, inclusive and fair society for both women and men. The fact sheets include practical information and practice examples of ways local government can advance gender equity for women. The ten fact sheets are:

1. Why gender matters
2. Gender analysis
3. Infrastructure
4. Land use planning and design
5. Promoting women in leadership
6. Workplaces
7. Sports and recreation
8. Access to services
9. Key concepts and definitions
10. Further resources

Why focus on women and leadership?

A gender analysis of who has the capacity and opportunity to contribute to community decision-making highlights that women are often absent or under-represented in leadership roles and positions of power. Despite making up 45 per cent of the Australian workforce, women are significantly under-represented in senior leadership and management positions. In an effort to strengthen the representation of women at decision-making levels, the Australian Government has set a target of achieving a 40 per cent representation of women on federal government boards by 2015.

Increasing the representation of women in leadership positions will help challenge and shift workplace cultures and provide women with a greater capacity to participate in the development and implementation of legislation, policies and services that affect their lives. Women's voices and perspectives need to be sought and respected in order to ensure that policy, planning and decision-making best reflects the diversity of the community. Without processes that are specifically designed to increase women's involvement in decision-making, women will continue to be excluded from leadership positions in the community, government and business sectors.

Why should local government promote women's leadership?

Local government is in a unique position to encourage and foster women's leadership and decision-making, and ensure that women have equal representation. Local government is legally obliged to comply with the rights and responsibilities outlined in the Victorian Charter of Human Rights and Responsibilities. This includes Section 18, which specifically refers to the right for all persons to take part in public life. Local government therefore has a responsibility to work towards enabling the full participation of all women within their municipality in all aspects of community and public life.

How can local government promote women's leadership?

Local governments can strengthen women's leadership both within their organisation and through their work with the community. There are many supporting frameworks that local government can implement. The following is a list of suggested activities which has been adapted from the Victorian Women's Charter Checklist:^{1,2}

- Endorse the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter³
- Review women's representation on council and council committees and establish annual targets and timelines for achieving gender equity
- Designate a council committee with responsibility for increasing women's participation or create a women's portfolio to be led by a councillor and resourced and supported by council officers
- Establish and resource a mentoring program for newly elected women councillors, senior women executives and women officers
- Establish links and partnerships with women leaders and representatives from Aboriginal groups and agencies, women from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds, women with a disability and same sex-attracted women, to encourage their participation and leadership
- Ensure that diverse groups of women have the opportunity to participate on council and community decision-making bodies by identifying and rectifying any exclusion barriers. For example, meeting times, lack of childcare, inaccessible venues or lack of transportation.

¹ Department of Human Services, *Facts and Figures: Key Facts About Victorian Women*, accessed at <http://www.dhs.vic.gov.au/about-the-department/documents-and-resources/reports-publications/key-facts-and-figures-about-victorias-women> (retrieved 14.6.12)

² Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition. April 2010. *Women's Charter Checklist*. Victorian Government, Department of Planning and Community Development, accessed at: <http://www.vlga.org.au/site/DefaultSite/filesystem/documents/WPILGC/Charter%20Ideas%20Checklist.pdf>

³ Initiated by the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition, endorsed by the Minister for Local Government, the Municipal Association of Victoria and the Victorian Local Governance Association

Gender inequity facts

FACT: Despite comprising slightly more than half of the Victorian population, only 25% of mayors and 29.8% of local government councillors are women

FACT: In the Victorian state parliament cabinet only 4 of the 22 Ministers appointed by the Baillieu government are women²

FACT: Currently, less than 30 per cent of Victorian councillors are women. Six councils have no female representation, and in 14 councils there is only one female representative.

Examples of local governments working to promote women in leadership

Darebin City Council has established the Darebin Women's Advisory Committee to provide advice and strategic direction on issues affecting women back to council. This committee is made up of community members with councillor representation.

Darebin Council also supports an internal Women's Leadership and Equity Group made up of staff to inform workplace development, gender equity and leadership opportunities for women.

City of Port Phillip (CoPP) has developed a Gender Equity Action Plan which identified CoPP as an employer of choice for women, with women totalling more than 50% of staff and councillors. Three of the five Senior Executive Team, including the CEO, are women and four of seven councillors are women. This trend continues to be reflected across leadership roles within council.

Yarra City Council presents an annual award on International Women's Day to recognise and honour the work of a woman council officer.

