



Summary of data and research findings about women in Victorian Local Governments

Please let us know if you know of other research of relevance T: 9349 7904 E: linda@vlga.org.au

1. Fact Sheet August 2009: Participation of women in Victorian Local Governments - Women's Participation in Local Government (WPILG) Coalition 2009

See Fact Sheet Women's Participation in Local Government (WPILG Coalition) handout

- 631 Councillors: 443 male, 188 female.
- 5 Local Governments have no women at all.
- 14 Local Government have close to "critical mass".
- Over 25% of wards in the 2008 elections had no woman candidate at all.
- Fewer than 30% of Councillors are women.
- 2008 elections saw the first reversal since 1999 of trends toward increasing representation of women.

www.women.vlga.org.au (webpage of the WPILG Coalition)

2. What women (in Local Government) are saying - ALGWA 2009

What ALGWA commissioned University of Sydney Centre for Local Government to research progress towards ALGWA's 2001 *National Framework for Women in Local Government*. The data was collected by an internet survey of women elected to and working in Australian Local Government. Of the 389 elected women respondents, 19% (65) were from Victoria. The research relied on respondents replying to internet survey. No dis-aggregated State results are available.

Summary findings:

Many themes and stories of hardship and some good news stories – "hurdles cleared, good polices, cultures and behaviours" (p.23).

Issues for elected women: time demands (80%), training and confidence building (61%), financial considerations (55%), CEO and staff support (39%) and information and support regarding elections (24%).

Other significant issues seen as gender related: being excluded from decision making outside meetings (43%), harassment and bullying (43%) and sexist remarks (43%).

Issues for non-elected candidates: support for running campaigns, technical matters, finances, etc (63%)

Issues for employed women: workplace culture which frequently puts women down (51%); adequate training and confidence (42%); job selection which shows lack of faith in women and “boys club” mentality (43%); lack of family friendly policies (26%); distance - travel costs and time, lack access to training (36%); aspiration to more senior positions (68%).

Conclusion:

There has been a modest improvement in the status and treatment of women in Australian Local Governments since 2006 (last internet survey). Their experiences are diverse, with some negative and some positive. However, the frequency of experiences of discriminatory, damaging and belittling practices is significant.

http://www.algwa.net.au/html/s01_home/home.asp

or <http://tinyurl.com/mmq85u>

3. Women matter in Local Democracies Project Findings 2008 – Women’s Participation in Local Government Coalition 2009

What: a project with Victorian Government and 11 Local Government partners to support increased civic and political participation of women of culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) communities in local communities.

Summary findings: 11 success factors identified including:

- work with groups of CALD women who already meet for other purposes and partner with community leaders
- personal approach works best
- women are deeply interested in opportunities to participate in civic and political life
- use of interpreters is effective and gives the right message
- Local Government websites offer immense potential to illuminate pathways
- Local Government and other funders need to recognise the extra workload of using successful approaches which are initially intensive
- sustained efforts builds trust and credibility with CALD communities.

Conclusion: There is immense potential to build relationships between all levels of government and women of CALD communities to increase opportunities for civic and political participation.

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4. 2008 November Local Government elections: Women’s Tally Room - WPILG Coalition and VLGA

What: VLGA Tally Room for all Local Government elections also hosted the Women's Tally Room for the WPILG Coalition.

Findings:

- 1974 candidates for 631 vacancies.
- 1360 male candidates 614 female candidates (31%).
- Number of wards with no women candidates: 76 of 297 (25.6% compared to 21% in 2005, and a return to worse than 2003 figures).

Conclusion: The numbers of women as candidates and elected councillors went backwards by a small margin for the first time since 1999 from when data has been collected systematically. No research has been conducted, but possible reasons for the disappointing result include: impact of changes in electoral rules such as multi-member wards and 4 year terms, notable absence of a state-wide project to encourage and support women candidates for the first time since 1999.

www.vlga.org.au

5. Career development and identity of Victorian Local Government CEOs: Is gender a factor? - Dr. Andi Diamond 2007 VUT (unpublished PhD VUT)

What? In-depth interviews with 7 female and 7 male CEOs and 3 female and 4 male councillors in metro and rural Victoria. The research explores issues with a significant number of women CEOs and a small number of men CEOs, balanced by the views of a small number of Mayors.

Summary findings:

Female CEOs' experiences differ from those of male colleagues.

Most female CEOs have entered Local Government at more junior levels and been promoted within the sector.

Male CEOs appear to have more access to appointment without substantive Local Government experience.

Female CEOs are subject to more scrutiny about their ability to meet family requirements during selection process.

Both male and female CEOs believe that female councillors on selection panels may be less inclined to appoint a female CEO.

Female CEOs are subjected to harsher scrutiny and are aware not only of how they represent themselves but how they are seen to represent all women.

Masculine culture and behaviours dominate in Local Government - "competitive and ego driven". (p.175)

Gender awareness and concerns with female representation appear to be given little priority with male CEOs and at councillor level.

The scarcity of senior females in management and the dominant male culture are explained as "the way things are in Local Government". (p.178)

Councillors of both genders appear to be more comfortable with a male at the helm.

Conclusion:

"Gender does matter, if you are a woman." (p. 178)

Local Government could do much to maximise opportunities for women across all technical areas. This is seen to have a long term positive effect on CEO demographics across the State.

Local Government needs to acknowledge that a bias exists against women at the most senior levels. Then a focus on solutions to overcome the bias can be put into practice.

<http://wallaby.vu.edu.au/> search for author Andrea Diamond

6. Councillor Census 2006 – MAV 2006

What: approximately 75% of Victorian Councillors responded to the census.

Findings:

Councillors are mostly male, over 46 years of age, born in Australia, with income more than \$52,000 pa.

75% of women councillors are over 46 years.

81% are professionals, associate professionals or managers/administrators by occupation.

46% of women councillors were in their first term, compared with 30% of men.

13% of women councillors earned more than \$52,000pa compared to 44% of men councillors.

www.mav.asn.au

7. Women in Politics: the art of the possible? Discussion Paper - Victorian Women's Trust 2004

What?: Survey of 215 women, including 28 elected politicians.

Summary Findings:

Women have little or no confidence in the ability of our party political system to reflect women's needs and interests.

Women see politics as a male dominated political arena where women's issues are squeezed out.

The majority of women who responded are prepared to expect that women politicians will bring women's issues to the table.

Elected female representatives wanted women in community to support them by acknowledging if something is well done, get their feedback.

Conclusions:

"A numbers only approach does not guarantee that women's needs and interests will be taken into account. The pressures to conform to existing norms are greater for women who enter male dominated institutions, within parties themselves and across parties. Women are more likely to be able to resist such pressures only if they have alternative arenas in which their identities as women can be validated (Susan Carroll 2003; also Moira Rayner).

There is a power in a "politics of presence", which is about embodiment, a physical presence of difference and the open acknowledgment of that.

8. Moving On: women and retirement from Victorian Local Government, 2003 - Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition and Victorian Office of Women's Policy 2003

What: In-depth interviews with 19 of the 21 women Councillors who decided not to stand in the 2002 elections.

Summary findings:

Findings are grouped under four headings: a Councillor's life; women leadership and Local Government; council culture and workload; and women, work and remuneration.

All participants pointed to a number of high points in their experiences, reflected in the fact that 15 of the 19 interviewed had served more than one term of office. More than half said they would like to give it another go in the future.

Role satisfaction and achievements came at a cost which led to their decision to retire: no time for family or friends, jobs or businesses; need to improve health and wellbeing.

The findings strongly reflect that a gender aware council culture, led by the CEO in most instances, is critical to the quality and effectiveness of the role.

The conflict between the need to earn a viable income and the demands of Council role was frequently mentioned.

Conclusion:

The *Moving On* research prompted 14 recommendations. A list and progress of the recommendations can be provided. Many of the recommendations have been or are being addressed. The recommendations would benefit from a review of progress and changes where the context has changed.

www.women.vlga.org.au (webpage of the WPILG Coalition)

9. Doing politics differently and doing it better - literature search for WPILG Coalition and Victorian Women's Trust 2003

What: Literature search designed to articulate what a political culture would like which reflects the needs and wants of women for themselves, their families and communities. The paper reflects the WPILG Coalition journey from being primarily concerned with numbers of women elected to local governments to being equally concerned with what happens when women get there.

Findings: There is striking agreement among practitioners and researchers about the qualities which make the most effective leadership for the 21st century, even though most of this research has occurred within the business sector. This paper suggests that a different way of doing politics has the potential to be not only more just, but also more effective. It supports the idea of people working together to create better solutions to the enormous challenges of the 21st century.

The paper ends with a question: “What would the saying by Mahatma Gandhi: “You must be the change you wish to create”, mean in practice in politics?”

Recommendations:

Create an action plan towards a different way of doing politics
Make resources available
Building partnerships
2008 election strategy
Identify champions
Create community discussion and support.

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10. Findings from the SCWP Project and Women Get Elected Project 2001-2005 – WPILG Coalition 2005

What: the Strengthening Communities through Women's Participation Project was funded by the Victorian Government from 2001-2004. The aims were to encourage and support increased participation and diversity among women in local government and community leadership. One component of the SCWP project, the Women Get Elected module, received funding in 2005.

Findings:

- Workshops run in communities where there was a supportive network of women (and men in some cases) resulted in immediate election outcomes
- Where women sought structural change they needed to be ready to deal with opposition and conflict
- Creating culture to encourage and practice how women get power, use it and keep it
- Community readiness was important in the success of campaigns to get women elected.
- The pace is slow
- Diversity is always a challenge.

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11. Gendered gerrymanders: A study of women candidates in the 1997 Victorian Local Government elections - Dr Rhonda Cumberland (unpublished PhD University of Melbourne) 2000

What: Women candidates in 55 Local Government elections were surveyed about their demographics and policies.

Findings summary:

Numerous findings are arguably applicable almost 10 years later:
Nominating candidates is a gendered process with men candidates far outnumbering women.
The electoral system reinforces women's absence.
An absence of democracy in the home is relevant to women's under-representation
Women campaign independently.

Increased work for overworked women Councillors (with the late 1990's restructure).
The role of political parties is largely unknown and unreported.
Overall, women are as electable as men when they stand.
Research to long term lack of women candidates and/or councillors would be enlightening.
Experienced, older, highly educated professional women are the majority of candidates
(also reflected in MAV Councillor Census 2006)

Conclusion:

The study concludes that it does matter that the number of men in elected positions far outnumbers that of women. (Then, of 565 elected councillors, 432 were men. Now 631 councillors, 443 are men.)

It argues that men's interests are over-represented in decision making and agendas of Local Governments. The systemic unfairness which exists in Victorian Local Governments is described as a "gendered gerrymander".

The study lists a number of research issues which would contribute to change.

Not available on web, contact Linda Bennett at VLGA

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