



VLGA Leading Edge Forum
Women and Local Government
3 September 2009

*"It is not women against men; it is women and men,
and not that the world will be a better place if women run it,
but that the world will be a better place
when women who bring their perspectives
share in running it." Indira Patel 2002*

IAP2: Aim to consult and involve members to inform work of the VLGA Women's Policy Working Group and ultimately the Board.

There are three main aims for the evening:

- contribute to development of VLGA strategies for 2010 National Year of Women in Local Government
- inform VLGA and partnership strategies to get a greater number and diversity of women candidates in the 2012 elections.
- inform VLGA's Councillor development opportunities and the work of the VLGA Women's Policy Working Group.

Key points emerged from a pre LEF Focus Group with women Councillors 30 years and under and the LEF panel and discussions.

Members of the Panel included:

Councillor Luba Grigoravitch, City of Hobsons Bay
Councillor Pam McLeod, City of Whittlesea
Councillor Paula Nixon, Shire of Central Goldfields
Councillor Beth Ripper, Shire of Wellington

Small group discussion topics:

Topic 1: Getting there (supporting candidates).

Topic 2: supporting women councillors general and supporting women councillors for VLGA men.

Topic 3: building a diversity of women councillors.

Focus Group (face to face and phone interviews with 7 of the identified 8 women councillors 30 years and under:

The potential for encouraging the participation of young women with Local Government as citizens and elected Councillors is immense due to their self confidence, value of their diverse networks and ability to bring fresh eyes to policy and practices in Local Government. A project to design, deliver and maintain a reach-out strategy using web-based technology and appropriate face to face events up to 2012 is conceivable. The benefits of this method to encourage and support the participation of women in the next oldest cohort (30-40 years) is likely.

Design elements would need to include consideration of factors such as young women councillors who participated appeared very task oriented and while appreciating the opportunity to meet together, were only interested if they saw a useful purpose. There is a question about whether a “networking” event would be attractive for them. On the other hand, for the majority, the attractiveness of opportunities for learning was prominent in their stories.

Unknowns raised by the focus group included:

Are the experiences and contributions of young men councillors similar or different?

Do women seen as “young” have different experiences of adversity compared to women councillors in other age groups? Age rather than gender was a more commonly acknowledged factor in some of the interesting challenges they experienced. There were no reports of “bad behaviour” based on gender insults or stereotyping.

LEF Panel and discussion groups

Men who support women can:

Obey and implement (actively support and champion) the local and other laws against discrimination and bad behaviour.
Continue VLGA leadership on the issues.
Continue to challenge institutional barriers such as Councillor pay and support.
Support “a questioning culture” – this would encourage a challenge to the existing power bases.

Supporting women candidates:

What has worked well in the past?
What do we need to add which will work well in the future?
Get women interested by inviting active women to Council meetings. Once at Council meeting make them feel welcome by other Councillors. Invite them via letter or personally.
Find Local Government champions to do some community talks.
Provide extra support for women who have children: not just child-care. How else can we help?
Publicise awareness of what is actually expected from a Cr.
Use on-line social networking through Facebook and other chat rooms
Key is community participation
Run workshops and courses
Get a profile for the issue e.g. through the Council Plan

Design workshops based on knowledge about the barriers and issues
Take out ads in local papers to encourage women to get involved.
Start 2 years out – plant the seeds well before 2012 elections.

Encouraging diversity among women who put their hands up

One key is building self esteem and confidence.
Increase presence of existing women leaders in community, schools, women's groups.
Invite WPILG Coalition and VLGA to community events.
Create a calendar of events.
Use celebrations to invite different communities:
Language is a barrier – send a Councillor or a Council Officer out to these diverse groups; form a Committee of Council to overcome exclusion as an issue.

Supporting women councillors

Be honest with yourself, develop self knowledge and confidence.
Get support wherever you can – through mentors, ALGWA, men, book groups, etc, etc.
Value and use your personal support.

Community women can sometimes put pressure on women Councillors to attend afternoon events – but not blokes (meeting times during the days)
Set up a 'Goals group' for women in community.

Many thanks for all the contributions made by those involved in the September 2009 LEF. The above will inform the work of the VLGA Women's Policy Working Group as it develops recommendations for 2010 National Year of Women in Local Government and the 2012 elections.

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