



WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT
COALITION



and participating Local Governments

Women Matter In Local Democracies 2008

Findings of a project with women of culturally
and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds



Project funded by Local Government partners (Cities of Greater Dandenong, Greater Shepparton, Hobsons Bay, Latrobe, Manningham, Monash, Moreland, Whitehorse, Whittlesea, Yarra and the Shire of Moira), Victorian Centenary of Women's Suffrage and Community Support Fund.

Produced by the VLGA for the Womens Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC)



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What is the Project?

This two-part project worked with 11 Victorian Local Governments. Part One (celebrating the Victorian Centenary of Suffrage) was a rallying point for Part Two (women's participation in Local Government elections and civic and political participation generally). These steps, critical to each other for success, celebrated both the right to vote and the capacity of under-represented groups of women to use the vote by participating in the non-party political processes of our local democracies.

Through this project, the Centenary of Victorian Women's Suffrage and the 2008 Victorian Local Government Women's Charter Awards for gender equity, diversity, active citizenship, worked together to increase the diversity of women participating in local civic and political life.

The Project was designed to support ongoing Local Government culture change towards diversity of women's participation and to contribute to significant work being undertaken by Local Government partners with local CALD communities. It also supported compliance with

the Victorian Human Rights and Responsibilities Charter.

The project used a 'stepping stone' model. Step 1 involved events to celebrate the Victorian Centenary of Suffrage which reached out to women of CALD communities, especially those more

recently arrived. This was a rallying point to interest, identify and encourage women to take up their active citizenship rights through either candidacy or other interest in the 2008 Local Government elections. Step 2 was a gender specific workshop about pathways to active citizenship for women.

The perception of politics and the sort of people who would participate in the process is important as it often makes or breaks the decision to enter the arena. This is the first step in making that crucial decision to become a candidate or support a candidate.

Centre for Asia Pacific Women in Politics website
(www.capwip.org 9/8/07)



The Project reached out to women of cultural and linguistic diversity who would make excellent community candidates for the 2008 Council elections or other elected office (e.g. Community Health Boards or School Councils) but who are frequently limited by their lack of confidence, perceived skills and

information about political culture and processes in their new homeland.

The entire Project resulted in the participation of over 700 women across metropolitan, regional and rural municipalities.



Findings

- **Work with groups of CALD women who already meet for other purposes, and partner with community leaders.**

Participant numbers in workshops were generally higher and the women were better able to support each other when the Local Governments targeted an existing group of CALD women or partnered with existing women community leaders as facilitators.

- **A personal approach along with reminders and follow up phone calls works best. The time-intensive nature of this community development work needs to be properly costed and funded.**

Engagement of CALD women was more effective (i.e. higher numbers participated and engaged) when, for example, Multicultural Officers were involved in planning and publicising workshops. This was because they often knew the women and used a personal approach in inviting them. They did reminder calls and other personal follow up. Generally speaking, 'broad brush' publicity



such as Council newsletter, local newspapers, flyers, letters to ethnic groups and organisations, did not work. This approach was taken with good intentions by various Local Governments who wanted the workshops to be open to all CALD women, rather than targeted. However this approach to the workshops generally delivered low numbers. The use of personal contact is time consuming and needs to be costed and funded to recognise that a community development approach works best.

- **Women are deeply interested in their civic and political participation, regardless of their settlement status.**

Women were overwhelmingly interested in the ideas discussed no matter what their settlement or English language stage was. They were keen to talk about it with other women and girls not present whom they saw as likely to be interested.



- **Generous and frequent use of properly briefed interpreters is a key to early engagement.**

When Local Government resources were able to fund interpreters, the quality of the participation increased and was a powerful gesture of goodwill and invitation to participate.

- **Local Government websites have immense potential to identify pathways to participation.**

The Project involved a search of Local Government websites in preparation for the workshops. It was generally impossible or difficult to find web information about participation opportunities, such as advisory committees or community consultations. The workshops found that the potential of web based information is immense.



- **Project design needs to recognise workload of Local Government workers and should involve practical support in order to build capacity of Local Governments.**

Many Local Government Officers showed immense commitment on top of their other duties. They valued the expert and practical support offered by the Project which recognised that reaching out successfully to CALD women requires investment of much extra time and a range of skills.

- **Better outcomes are achieved when the local activity is planned and supported by a 'cross-directorate' approach with a designated leader.**

When Local Government Community Development, Governance and Multicultural Officers were involved along with women Councillors, events were better attended and provided positive learning experiences for Councillors and officers as well as for participating women. Consistently, governance and community services staff learnt a lot from each other during the process of organising civic workshops for CALD women.

- **Lack of personal confidence was a prominent issue with all groups, yet the workshops showed that learning about pathways and sharing ideas can build this confidence quickly.**

- **When women across generations participated together, younger women participants showed interest in future Local Government candidacy and often encouraged older women and vice versa.**

- **Language about democracy and participation did not translate well to other languages; communicating concepts such as 'democracy' and 'civic and political' participation needs careful thought when working with interpreters and early English language learners.**

- **Sustained effort is needed. Trust and credibility is only built when once-off events are followed up.**

This Project demonstrated that there is immense potential to build relationships between all levels of government and women of CALD communities to increase opportunities for political and civic participation.

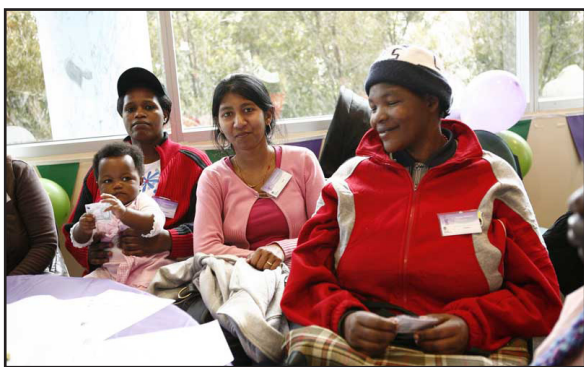
Enquiries

WPILG Coalition Secretariat

T: (03) 9349 7904

E: linda@vlga.org.au

Coalition Members: Local Government Professionals, Municipal Association of Victoria, Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition, Victorian Local Governance Association, Victorian Women's Trust, Women's Electoral Lobby Victoria, Women's Planning Network, YWCA Victoria.



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Victorian Local Governance Association
Connecting Communities, Strengthening Democracy

T: (03) 9349 7999
W: www.vlga.org.au
E: vlga@vlga.org.au