



Leading the Agenda in June

Victorian Local Government Women's Charter Champions – Maintaining the momentum

On Friday 21 June, the VLGA hosted a working lunch for Victorian council signatories of the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter. Participants included council CEOs, officers and councillors, representing a vast array of metro, rural and regional councils that are signatories to the Charter. Currently 72 of the 79 Victorian councils are signatories to the Charter.

The conversation was facilitated by Liddy Clark, who encouraged participants to reflect on their council's interactions with the Charter and share their ideas on how the VLGA and MAV may support councils to take meaningful action in line with the Charter principles (gender equity, diversity and active participation).

Below is a summary of the discussion, including suggestions and action items which were workshopped by participants. For the video recap, click [here](#). Thank you to our Leading the Agenda partners, Pitcher Partners for hosting this important event.

Linda Bennett opened the lunch with a history of the Charter, from its origins in 1997 to its progress today.

The Charter was created by the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC), which came about at a time when the number of women councillors was at a record low. Its emphasis was not only on increasing the number of women in elected representative roles, but on encouraging and empowering women from a diverse range of backgrounds to actively participate in decision-making roles in their communities.

Linda highlighted the need for collaboration across the sector and the community when it comes to achieving the Charter's aims, from the women's groups who were part of the original WPILGC to the VLGA and MAV jointly holding responsibility for the coordination of the Charter today.

Deborah Wu, VLGA Women's Engagement & Project Officer explained the motivations for holding the working lunch. It is clear from the Charter's history and the ebbs and flows of women's representation that achieving (and maintaining) gender equality in local government requires ongoing attention.

The strategic objective: **How can the Women's Charter be utilized to maintain the momentum for gender equity, diversity and active participation in our communities?**

Develop tangible actions that can be undertaken by Charter Champions and relevant organisations.

Discussion prompts:

- What does the Charter mean to your council?
- How is the Charter used/applied at your council? What does your council do well, and what could it improve on?

- What are the gaps in your council's achievement of the outcomes of the Charter? What support do you need, and how can the VLGA and MAV help? What kinds of tools would be useful to you?
- What kinds of initiatives could we undertake with your council's support? How do we structure activities to maintain the momentum for Charter principles?
- How do we structure activities to maintain the momentum for Charter principles?
- How do we bring the remaining 7 councils on board?

Suggestions:

Policy

- Link to council policies and strategies
- Link to state government policies and strategies – this can be an avenue for grants funding
- Have Charter-related actions enshrined in policy – this outlives election cycles
- Empower council staff to use the Charter in their work, including providing them with the time/delegation to implement action items and attend network meetings or development sessions related to the Charter
- Gender equity, diversity and active participation need to be seen as part of councils' core business
- Explore the concept of mandatory reporting on Charter measures – similar to other reporting councils undertake like asset management. This may tie in well with the Gender Equality Bill.

Council chamber

- Encourage councils to reaffirm their commitment to the Charter with a formal motion – at the start of each council cycle
- Standing item on council agendas – appointing Charter Champions at the same time as other delegations
 - Encourage councils to rotate the Champion role among councillors

Councillor induction

- Provide an opportunity for councillors to learn about the importance of diversity and gender equity in local government
- Provide materials about the Charter and speak to it
- Initiate a mentorship program for new women councillors (or work with ALGWA to deliver this)
 - Problem solving
 - Sound boarding
 - Helping women succeed

Network

- Create a Women's Charter Champions network/advisory committee
- Online resources for Women's Charter network
- Showcasing council initiatives through emails, website content etc

Resources/training

- Create resources that include the history of women and their achievements in local government, fact sheets that dispel myths/highlight the successes of women in local government

- Investigate development of tools for councils to audit gender bias, including Gender Equality Budget Analysis tool
- Investigate e-Learning for staff and councillors about gender equity
- Training for councils about their responsibilities under the Gender Equity Bill
- Action toolkit: checklist of suggested actions, policy templates, case studies
- Framed Charter document/certificate for all signatories – this could be tied into an event at the council – presenting the document

Communication

- VLGA to remind councils of their commitment to the Charter – many signatories are not aware of their status
- Regular communication with relevant contacts at councils

Events

- Events that attract women who participate in other aspects of community life
- Encouraging councils to hold events around International Women’s Day/other significant dates
 - Develop a gender equality audit tool for event organising, e.g. equal panel pledge
- Centenary of Mary Rogers’ election (1920)
- VLGA/MAV should organise regular Champions’ events
 - Councillors should be urged to attend these events – keep the Charter principles at the forefront of their minds
 - Framed Women’s Charter Certificates can be presented at these events

For more information about the Victorian Local Government Women’s Charter, click [here](#).

Please contact Deborah Wu, Women’s Engagement & Project Officer at deborah@vlga.org.au or on 9349 7999 should you have any questions about your council’s Charter signatory status, or to discuss initiatives that your council can take to support the work of the Women’s Charter.

Leading the Agenda in July is a panel discussion

‘Optimising our Planning System’

The panel includes:

Tania Quick, Consultant Planner, TQ Urban Planning
 Sue Wilkinson, Chief Executive Officer, City of Darebin
 Andrew Butt, Associate Professor in Sustainability and Urban Planning, RMIT
 Moderated by Martine Letts Chief Executive Officer, Committee for Melbourne

Friday 19 July, 11am – 1pm
Pitcher Partners, Level 13/664 Collins Street, Docklands

[Bookings essential](#)

A light lunch will be provided.