

Victorian Local Government Women's Charter – template for council motion

MOTION

That Council:

1. Notes the history and progress of the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter ('the Charter');
2. Continues to progress actions in support of the Charter's three principles: gender equity, diversity and active citizenship;
3. Nominates the following people as Charter Champions:
 - a. Councillor: ((NAME))
 - b. Council officer: ((NAME))
4. Authorises the Chief Executive Officer to promote Council's Charter signatory status and display the Charter in council premises and communications (including Council's website).
5. Sends a copy of the report to the Victorian Local Governance Association (VLGA), notifying the VLGA of Council's ((AFFIRMATION / REAFFIRMATION)) of the Charter;

((OPTIONAL))

1. Supports the VLGA campaign to increase women's participation in local government as citizens, candidates and councillors;
2. Requests that a quarterly report be provided by the Office of the Chief Executive Officer in collaboration with Council's nominated Charter Champions to Council on progress against the Charter principles;

NB: We recommend that councils reappoint their Charter Champions annually. This may be done as part of delegate appointments or as a standalone motion (providing an opportunity to report on Council's progress).

Background information

History

- The Charter was established in 1998 by the Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition (WPILGC) to recognise the need for increased women's participation in the key decision-making forums in the community and in democratic governance.
- The WPILGC was a coalition of organisations, including peak bodies in local government, the Victorian Immigrant and Refugee Women's Coalition, Victorian Women's Trust, Women's Electoral Lobby Victoria, Women's Planning Network and YWCA Victoria.
- Following council amalgamations in 1996, the number of women councillors was at a record low (134 out of more than 600)
- In 2013, the WPILGC dissolved itself and handed responsibility for this work to the MAV and the VLGA. At present, the VLGA manages the administration of the Charter signatories and network, working alongside the MAV on promoting the charter and achieving gender equity in local government.
- In 2020, 73 of 79 Victorian councils are signatories to the Charter
- We aim to have all councils as signatories by October 2020
- Cross sector/community collaboration is crucial 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.

Purpose

- The emphasis of the Charter is 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.
- Victorian State Government's *Gender Equality Strategy 'Safe and strong'* identifies a target of 50 per cent women councillors by 2025 – this will require a concerted effort from peak bodies, councils and communities, supported by the state government.
- 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 Royal Commission into Family Violence identified a lack of women in leadership positions as a key driver of violence against women.
- Increasing the representation of women in decision-making roles improves democracy – a diversity of views leads to better representation and we see that around the board table as well as in the parliament and the council chamber.

Rationale for councils to affirm/reaffirm commitment

- Provides an avenue to promote the existing work being done by councils to achieve gender equality and improve outcomes for women and men.
- Ensures that gender equality remains central to the work that councils do in supporting communities.
- Ties in with councils' gender equality strategies and family violence prevention plans, as well as community capacity building (diversity and active participation)
- The Charter principles are pertinent to the Victorian government's *Gender Equality Bill*, which will require councils (as state government agencies) to audit their gender equity status
- Initiatives under LGV's Listen, Learn and Lead program can be included as Charter activities
- To the 6 Victorian councils who are not signatories: don't get left behind.

For more information, contact Deborah Wu (VLGA Women's Engagement & Project Officer) on 9349 7999 or deborah@vlga.org.au.