

Victorian Local Government Women’s Charter

Gender equity • Diversity • Active citizenship

2020 is a local government election year and therefore it is a critical time for councils to be engaging the women in their communities.

Victorian councils need to be taking action to ensure that women are encouraged and supported to participate in local government at all levels – as community members, council officers, candidates and elected representatives.

The Royal Commission into Family Violence (2016) identified a lack of women in leadership positions as a key driver of violence against women. The Victorian Government has set a target of 50 per cent women councillors by 2025 and this will only be achieved through concerted efforts to encourage more women to stand for local government.

With the *Local Government Bill 2019* and *Gender Equality Act 2020* highlighting the importance of community engagement and equality, all 79 Victorian councils have a legislative imperative to prioritise the active and equal participation of women in council decision-making.

Suggested Actions – 2020

CHARTER STATUS & CHARTER CHAMPIONS

Become a Charter signatory.¹

Reaffirm your commitment to the Charter.²

Reappoint your Charter Champions.
Appoint a councillor and an officer.
Try to rotate the Charter Champion position among councillors throughout the council term.

Make the Charter a standing item on Council’s agenda:

- requiring an annual report on actions related to gender equity, diversity and active citizenship.
- appoint Charter Champions at the same time as other delegations.

Send a copy of the minutes to the VLGA (deborah@vlga.org.au) for publication on their website.

Display a framed copy of your council’s Charter certificate (or multiple copies in different council buildings, including community centres, libraries etc).³

Empower Charter Champions and council staff to use the Charter in their work. Provide them with the time or delegation to implement action items and attend network meetings or development sessions related to the Charter.

¹ Use the template motion on the VLGA website which includes background information for council officers preparing a report.

² See above.

³ This is available from the VLGA on request.

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POLICY & ADVISORY GROUPS

Undertake a simple audit of Council's activities, processes and community projects to identify what you have already achieved and can build on.

Create a committee or working group of council that has oversight/responsibility for women's civic participation (i.e. Gender Equality Working Group, Women's Charter Advisory Committee).

Empower the committee to operate in a meaningful advisory capacity on all relevant policies facing council – not just 'women's' or 'family' policies.

Conduct a gender equality audit of all committees. Encourage committees to consider diversity when recruiting new members.

Provide regular opportunities for women on all committees to develop their skills in leadership, policy, negotiation and decision-making.

Conduct an audit of committee meeting times and locations.

- Are they held in venues and at times that suit working women and women with childcaring responsibilities?
- Consider using a survey to investigate barriers to women's attendance at/participation in committees.
- Work to address these barriers and evaluate the success of these measures.

Compile a list of community groups (and their contact details) that may have women who are interested in running (or interested in supporting another woman to run) for local government.

- Invite these groups to pre-candidate training and ask that they distribute details to their networks.
- Invite these groups to participate in community engagement or consultation that council undertakes.

Make sure that you are actively seeking input from the Indigenous community, people with disabilities and culturally and linguistically diverse groups. Dedicate resources to provide cultural, language, accessibility support where appropriate.

Ensure that the Charter is referenced in any council policy that relates to Charter principles.

Include the Charter in relevant council documents and strategies, including the Council Plan and Municipal Health and Wellbeing Plan.

Distribute the Charter document to officers and ensure that they are aware of Council's signatory status. Encourage officers to consider the Charter as an authorising document in their reports and daily work.

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AWARENESS RAISING

Increase information and resources available to the community about the business of local government, on topics such as:

- How councillors are elected
- How councils make decisions
- What services councils provide

Make sure that these resources are accessible to all community members, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse groups.

Spotlight the experiences and achievements of women leaders in your community, particularly those from culturally and linguistically diverse groups and current and former women councillors.

Profile current and former women councillors on their backgrounds, their motivations for running for office and their achievements during their time as a councillor.

Facilitate community conversations about the importance of diverse representation. Seek local examples and anecdotes of the impact that diverse representation has on decision-making and community outcomes.

Hold an event for International Women’s Day (8 March). Consider holding an awards ceremony celebrating the achievements of local women.

Encourage the community to nominate women for civic awards (see Honour A Woman). Nominate a local active citizen for inclusion on the Victorian Women’s Honour Roll.

Celebrate the centenary of Mary Rogers’ election – the first woman elected to local government in Victoria and only the second in Australia (1920).

ENCOURAGING WOMEN TO RUN

Host a Victorian Local Government Women’s Charter Afternoon Tea with women councillors, community groups and women interested in running in the October 2020 elections (or supporting another woman to run). This is a great opportunity for women to network and share information.

Host one of the VLGA’s *Local Women Leading Change* workshops for women ahead of the October 2020 elections. These workshops are held across Victoria, free of charge for councils and communities. Contact Deborah Wu (Women’s Engagement & Project Officer) for more information.

Encourage all community members to attend the VLGA’s Candidate Information workshops.

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NEW COUNCILLOR INDUCTION

Provide information on the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter as an authorising document for council during induction for new councillors.

Encourage councillors to consider the Charter when developing the Council Plan. As a task that must be completed within the first 6 months of the council term, it is important that councillors begin the next four years considering gender equity, diversity and active citizenship as core business for local government.

Provide opportunities for all councillors to learn about the importance of diversity and gender equity in local government, and the importance of a diversity of views in decision-making processes.

Provide gender equality and/or unconscious bias training as part of new councillor induction.

Connect women councillors with opportunities for mentorship and support, including the Australian Local Government Women's Association (ALGWA).
Consider working with the VLGA and other councils in your area to initiate a mentorship/peer support program for new women councillors.

Do you have suggestions for other actions that councils can take to implement the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter in 2020? Email Deborah Wu at deborah@vlga.org.au.