

Policy Statement

Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government

Introduction

Canada's true democratic deficit is this: women from diverse backgrounds who comprise about one half of the population, make up just 26 per cent of municipal councils. FCM wants to help close this gender gap, because Canada and its communities cannot afford to lose the insights and expertise of one half of our population. To encourage all women to participate in municipal government, FCM has secured funding and implemented five projects with financial support from Status of Women Canada. The first project, in 2004, showed that of 152 communities surveyed, 86 per cent did not have an equal number of men and women on council, while 14 per cent had no women on municipal council.

The information collected was used to produce FCM's *Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision-Making* report, which identified a number of reasons why women were not involved in municipal politics, including:

- inadequate information about how to get involved;
- the perception that volunteer groups afford women better opportunities to make a difference;
- family responsibilities;
- a lack of inclusive and gender sensitive policies;
- systemic discrimination, specifically sexism and racism; and
- a lack of financial resources.

In 2005, FCM established the Standing Committee on Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government to seek and support initiatives to increase women's political participation in municipal government.

The second project had two components: a national mobilization tour and a series of workshops held throughout the country. The tour included a national media component to raise awareness and build local networks for change.

Their ideas about how women can overcome barriers to participating in municipal government were distilled into *Getting to 30% by 2026*, a community mobilization plan released in June 2006. The publication supported FCM's position that efforts to increase women's participation in municipal governance are most effective when executed at the local level. Staff also developed a National Strategic Action Plan for delivery to Status of Women Canada in March 2007 as the final deliverable of the project.

FCM subsequently launched a national campaign that aimed to significantly increase the number of women running for — and being elected to — municipal government over the next two decades. This campaign became the third program funded through Status of Women Canada. The *Getting to 30%* Program delivered workshops, webinars and mentorship opportunities to women, to increase their campaign and communications skills.

The fourth project — the *Protégé* Program — funded by Status of Women Canada, targeted women, ages 18-28, interested in becoming leaders and decision makers in municipal government. Taking the mentorship program model developed in the City of Toronto, FCM worked with four pilot communities, representing the full spectrum of Canadian municipalities, and developed a series of tools, products and processes that municipalities can use to run a mentorship program responsive to their local needs.

FCM's Head Start for Young Women program — funded by Status of Women Canada — aimed at engaging and enabling girls and young women in identifying and addressing barriers to their full participation in community life.

Working with 6 municipalities across Canada to deliver a project that is national in scope, FCM engaged girls' and young women's groups from a diverse cross-section of the country on the issues, barriers

andsolutions to greater civic and political participation within their communities. This was an 18 month project designed to increase the capacity of girls and young women to identify and respond to specific barriers to their full participation in civic, political and community life in Canada. The program ended in September 2014, and the *Head Start* guidebook was released in winter 2015.

FCM's most recent initiative, *Diverse Voices for Change* — funded by Status of Women Canada — seeks to increase the meaningful participation of women across diverse communities in municipal decision making processes, specifically Indigenous, racialized and immigrant women.

FCM continues to explore new ways to partner with Status of Women Canada in order to build on the extensive programming FCM has built over the past 10 years, and provide longer-term funding to develop and deliver comprehensive programming aimed at engaging and supporting the full life cycle of girls and women in municipal government.

Key Principles

FCM supports the full participation of women from diverse backgrounds in all aspects of public and political life, everywhere in the world, including the right to vote, the right to stand for election and the right to hold public office in all orders of government. These principles are contained in the Beijing Platform for Action, the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the International Union of Local Authorities (IULA), the Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, the Canadian Human Rights Act and the Federal Plan for Gender Equality. All orders of government must actively ensure that policy, planning and decision-making respect the needs of all Canadians, meaning that public policy must be inclusive and reflect gender equity. FCM supports inclusive approaches to engage women and girls to serve as members of municipal advisory committees, boards and other agencies. Inclusive approaches to outreach, mobilization and mentoring encourage all women to participate in municipal life. Special consideration and strategies are required to include women who have limited status, influence, power or voice in their community.

FCM Policies

ELECT WOMEN TO MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

FCM believes that all women and men should have equal opportunity to run for municipal office. The United Nations says that at least 30 per cent of a government's representatives must be women before that government's policies can be said to reflect the needs of women. Currently in Canada, women represent 18 per cent of mayors and 28 per cent of councilors, with an average of 26 per cent. FCM agrees that there are clear benefits for cities and communities when women participate fully in the democratic life of their communities, and aspires that its programs and initiatives can help to realize gender parity at the municipal level in the future.

Strategies

- FCM will continue its national campaign to increase women's participation in municipal government to achieving gender parity.
- FCM will make available the tools for municipalities to deliver municipal campaign training workshops.
- FCM will make available the tools for municipalities to run a mentorship program for young women, and support their efforts to do so.
- FCM will make available the tools for municipalities to deliver a program for young women that will support the identification of barriers to their participation in local government along with a young women from diverse backgrounds-led project to address these barriers.
- FCM will continue to encourage young women to consider leadership roles in municipal government

as a career option by awarding the annual Mayor Andrée Boucher Memorial Scholarship to a qualified college or university recipient, as well as award scholarships to Canadian secondary students and post-secondary students in FCMI partner countries.

DEVELOP AND IMPLEMENT A NATIONAL MENTORSHIP PROGRAM

FCM supports efforts to increase all women's participation in municipal decision-making and is continuing to build a network of Regional Champions across Canada.

Increasing the number of women from diverse backgrounds running for and winning seats on municipal councils requires extensive local involvement — a national network of regional and local champions capable of organizing and sustaining a continuous campaign to encourage all women to run for municipal office or seek leadership roles in municipal government. These regional champions will include members of the Standing Committee and others who are nominated to work within their individual communities to recruit, organize, encourage, support and mentor women interested in entering local politics. The long-range goal is to have a champion in every community in Canada, with these efforts intended to ultimately increase the number of women running for — and being elected to — municipal government.

Strategies

- Regional Champions will continue to be identified to work within their communities to develop networks whose members will encourage, support and mentor women who are interested in running for municipal office by setting up campaign schools, organizing public meetings, recruiting potential candidates to run in municipal elections, and using the news media to promote women's participation in municipal government.
- FCM staff will continue to promote the mentorship campaign through its online Facebook page, *Campaign for More Women in Municipal Government*, and distribute the *Regional Champions' How-to Manual* — a resource tool that offers tips to champions on how to recruit others; and how to communicate among themselves and with external audiences, including the news media.
- FCM staff will continue to promote training materials aimed at increasing capacity for women to run for local office, as well as establishing mentorship programs for young women.

DEVELOP PARTNERSHIPS WITH LIKE-MINDED ORGANIZATIONS

The continued success of the work FCM is doing relies on creating a community of knowledge. To this end, FCM is committed to reaching out to like-minded organizations — public and private — to develop partnerships and linkages.

Strategies

- FCM will continue to collaborate with municipalities, women organizations (i.e. indigenous, immigrant, and racialized), government departments, , and businesses working to advance the rights of women in politics and start a comprehensive outreach strategy.
- Partnership agreements will be drafted and signed with applicable organizations.
- FCM staff will continue to work through the website, Facebook and Twitter to better facilitate knowledge mobilization.

