



# **RUN, WIN AND LEAD:**

## Toward Parity in Municipal Politics

Municipal Sector Framework for Achieving Gender Parity  
in Local Government



FEDERATION  
OF CANADIAN  
MUNICIPALITIES

FÉDÉRATION  
CANADIENNE DES  
MUNICIPALITÉS



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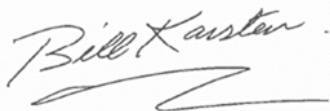
## FOREWORD

Despite progress, Canadian women remain underrepresented at all levels of political leadership. Only one fifth of our mayors are women and only a few provinces have exceeded the 30% while the Yukon and the Northwest territories are the only ones to have attained parity for women elected as councillors. While some communities have attained or surpassed parity, there remains much work to ensure equal representation across the country. This is particularly true for ensuring the voice and participation of younger women and those with intersectional backgrounds, who often experience challenges with compounding impacts.

A challenge of this magnitude requires the engagement of all levels of government, along with the entire municipal sector, to bring about tangible change. Building on 20 years of incremental progress by FCM and the municipal sector, the “Run, Win Lead: Toward Parity in Municipal Politics” framework provides areas of intervention that stakeholders can consider, adapt, or undertake to increase the opportunities for women to engage and remain in municipal politics.

The Framework is based on broad consultations of over 850 stakeholders from the public, men, women, youth, non-binary folk, local elected officials, and provincial and territorial associations. The high level of engagement of the municipal sector in these efforts attest to the importance of the parity agenda for elected officials and the municipal sector. Together, we can ensure that all women, regardless of background and intersectional identity, can run, win and lead on an equal footing to their counterparts for the benefit of strong and thriving communities. This is especially true as we continue to respond to COVID and move toward a post-COVID recovery era where we hopefully build back better through more equal representation.

Communities benefit when there is diverse political representation at the local, provincial and federal levels. Whether, by increasing the opportunities through improved access to information, enhanced inclusion, and strengthened supports and enhancement of governance structures, the opportunities and solutions will be as varied and unique as each of our communities across Canada.



**Cllr Bill Karsten**  
President, FCM



**Mayor Sheryl Spence**  
Chair, Standing Committee  
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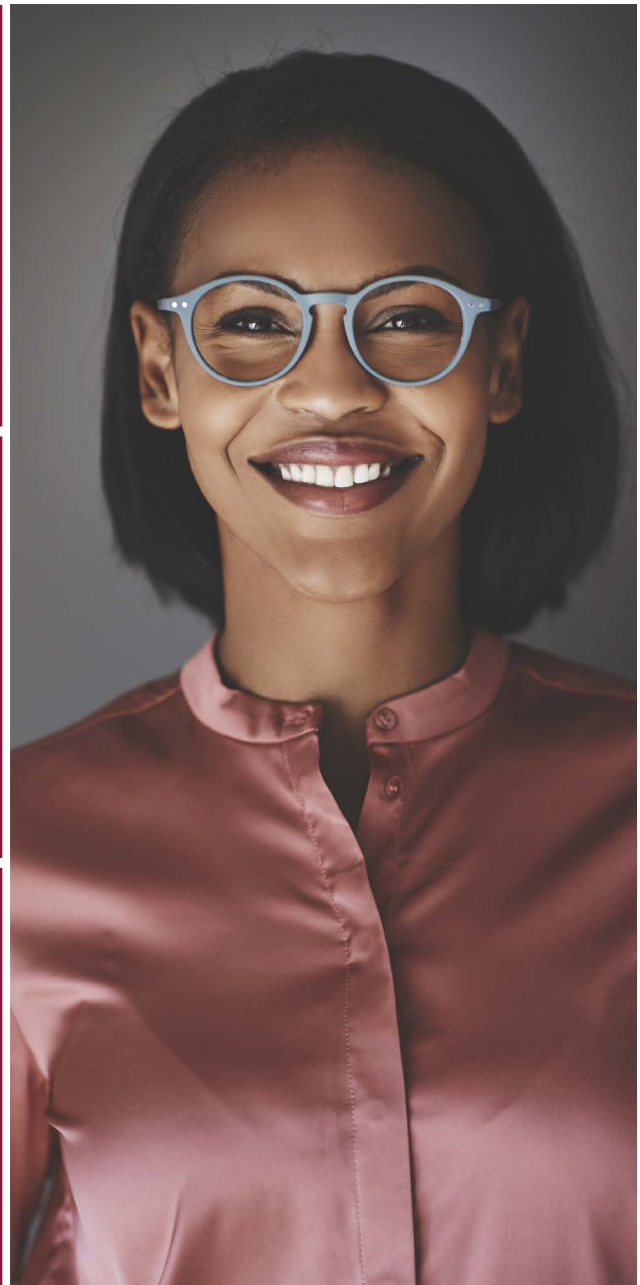
## PROJECT VISION

The Toward Parity in Municipal Politics project strives for a Canada in which gender parity in municipal government from coast to coast to coast becomes the new norm. Our vision is one in which women of all identities, ages and backgrounds:

**RUN**  
FOR  
MUNICIPAL  
OFFICE

**WIN**  
THEIR  
CAMPAIGNS  
AND

**LEAD**  
ON ISSUES  
OF IMPORTANCE  
TO THEIR  
CONSTITUENTS



## BACKGROUND

**THE FEDERATION OF CANADIAN MUNICIPALITIES (FCM)** has worked to increase women's participation in municipal government for nearly two decades. In 1999, FCM, formed the Canadian Women in Municipal Government Committee followed by the establishment of the *Standing Committee on Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Government* in 2005. FCM launched the Regional Champions network in 2008, connecting elected officials and gender champions committed to increasing the participation of women in their own local governments.

For the past 15 years, FCM and the Department for Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) have collaborated to address the gender gap of women's representation. In 2003, FCM launched its first Status of Women Canada (SWC) funded project which led to our 2004 report, *Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making: Strategies for More Inclusive Communities*. The report recommended a national strategy to strengthen women's involvement in public participation and to bridge the gender gap in Canadian municipal processes. Other FCM projects have included: *Getting to 30 percent* (2012); the *Protégé Program* (2013); *Head Start for Young Women* (2015); *Diverse Voices for Change* (2018); and *Toward Parity in Municipal Politics* (2018–2020).

The *Toward Parity in Municipal Politics* project is the latest partnership between the Canadian municipal sector and WAGE. *Toward Parity* developed a pan-Canadian framework that outlines the strategies and actions that will ultimately help attain gender parity by making it more appealing for women to run for office, win seats at the table and thrive as elected officials.





## PURPOSE OF THE FRAMEWORK

**ONE OF THE GREATEST STRENGTHS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT** is that it is the order of government closest to the people. Municipal government provides services that have a daily impact on people's lives. Local government has a key role in promoting women's empowerment to reduce poverty, increasing inclusion and creating communities where all people can live free of discrimination. More inclusive communities support women's political participation and lead to more women becoming involved in decision-making and policy development. Through their involvement in community work and women's movements, local female politicians are better aware of issues faced by women in their communities and are uniquely positioned to address them.

Leadership opportunities are scarce for most women. These opportunities are even scarcer for women of diverse and intersectional backgrounds – including women who are Indigenous, Black, racialized, LGBTQ2S+, newcomers, living with disabilities or earning low incomes. Systemic barriers, stereotypes and biases are among the challenges to women being elected – and remaining elected – in municipal government. These women of diverse backgrounds often face these challenges to a higher degree or with compounding impacts. The Toward Parity project includes all people who identify as female in our definition of women, including trans, LGBTQ2S+ and people who identify as non-binary. To ensure equal opportunities for women of all identities, targeted initiatives and locally relevant responses are required. Communities benefit when there is diverse political representation at the local, provincial and federal levels.



## CONTEXT

**DESPITE THE EFFORTS, AWARENESS AND ENGAGEMENT OF FCM,** stakeholders and elected officials, women's representation as elected officials in local government in Canada is far from attaining parity. Canadian women remain underrepresented at all levels of political leadership. In their 2020 Global Gender Gap Report, the World Economic Forum ranked Canada 25 out of 153 countries in "Political Empowerment," behind such countries as Iceland (1), Rwanda (4), South Africa (10), New Zealand (14) and Namibia (23).

In 2015, the United Nations released the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) including a specific goal focused on the promotion of gender equality to increase women's participation at all levels of leadership. Target 5.5 of the SDGs states: "Ensure women's full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic and public life."

In Canada, gradual progress has been made, with women representing only 19 percent of Canadian mayors. Quebec and British Columbia are the only provinces to surpass 30 percent representation (34.5 percent and 36.7 percent respectively) while the Yukon and the Northwest Territories have attained parity, which is defined as 40 to 60 percent representation. While some communities have attained or surpassed parity, on the whole there remains much work to ensure equal representation across the country. While some Canadian municipalities have attained or surpassed parity, the overall portrait in Canada remains close to FCM's 2015 statistics, where only 18 percent of mayors and 28 percent of councillors are women.

The Municipal Sector Framework developed by Toward Parity provides areas of intervention that stakeholders can consider, adapt or undertake to increase the opportunities and success of women to run, win and lead in municipal politics. Consultation stakeholders included the general public, local councils, including local elected officials, provincial and territorial associations, national associations and civil society.<sup>1</sup> The context and corresponding interventions outlined in the framework will vary based on the region, the local context and the community stakeholders. Recognizing that each stakeholder has a unique opportunity and role to play to increase women's participation, the framework encourages all stakeholders to adapt the suggestions or themes included in the framework in order to develop locally responsive solutions. A challenge of this magnitude cannot be accomplished by any one stakeholder; it requires engagement at all levels of government and the entire municipal sector to make tangible change. Together, we can ensure that all women, regardless of background and intersectional identity, can run, win and lead on an equal footing to their counterparts for the benefit of strong and thriving communities.

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<sup>1</sup> In this case, "national associations" refers to pan-Canadian organizations like FCM, Equal Voice and Canadian Women's Foundation.

## PROCESS FOR DETERMINING TOWARD PARITY FRAMEWORK AND PRIORITIES

**IN ORDER TO ACHIEVE GENDER PARITY IN MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT**, varied, concrete and locally appropriate measures and actions are required to overcome the systemic challenges that exist and to increase opportunities that will allow all women to participate fully. The framework is a culmination of the research and consultations of FCM's Toward Parity in Municipal Politics project, collected input from representatives of various municipal sector actors to influence, design and inform the framework through 30 varied consultations involving more than 850 respondents, with 75 percent identifying as an elected official, from every province and one territory (Yukon). Just over 80 percent were women, 19 percent were male and just under one percent identified as non-binary. In terms of language, 81 percent responded in English and 19 percent participated in French, as supported by the francophone provincial associations in Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick. Urban community members accounted for 47 percent compared to 53 percent who identified as living in a rural community. Efforts were undertaken to engage a diversity of perspectives, including those of Indigenous people, newcomers and youth, through varied mechanisms, targeted invitations and engagement with key stakeholders, such as webinars, in-person discussions and surveys.

The consultation began by exploring, validating and prioritizing the 13 challenges to women's participation in municipal politics as identified by FCM's *Diverse Voices for Change* project. The pan-Canadian consultations confirmed that all challenges exist in all regions but the degree to which each individual is impacted varies. It was important to note that individuals all experienced or witnessed these challenges differently but there was consensus that all issues were valid and remain pertinent.

Through the discussions, trends and groupings of the challenges began to emerge, which led to categorization of the 13 key challenges into four pillars of intervention: **(i) improved access to information; (ii) enhanced inclusion; (iii) increased support; and (iv) improved governance structures**. These are the broad themes or opportunities that need to be addressed if we intend to make significant progress on attaining parity in representation. Data, ideas and suggestions for the pillar of actions were captured through engagement and outreach with the project's National Working Group consisting of elected and non-elected representatives,<sup>2</sup> along with the project's implementing partners, Equal Voice and Canadian Women's Foundation.

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<sup>2</sup> Member organizations of the National Working Group are listed at the end of the document.



## PROCESS FOR DETERMINING TOWARD PARITY PRIORITIES

Validation of  
key challenges  
to women's  
participation

4 pillars of  
intervention  
required to  
attain parity

3 priorities  
for action

See pages 11-14

These four pillars of intervention are:

### **1. IMPROVED ACCESS TO INFORMATION**

Addresses all the gaps in information that exist from tools, best practices and knowledge from running a campaign, and the data gaps and misinformation that persist about the roles and responsibilities of local government.

### **2. ENHANCED INCLUSION**

Addresses a number of societal challenges including but not limited to disparities due to gender, race, age and economic status. The inclusion theme also tackles key issues such as intimidation and harassment (on-line and in person), as well as exclusionary norms and processes.

### **3. INCREASED SUPPORT**

Addresses the steps, mechanisms and processes that could be put in place to ensure that all women have support to overcome challenges or to balance out additional burdens that exist as a result of their gender. This includes familial support, access to mentorship, policies and workplace accommodations.

### **4. IMPROVED GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURES**

Addresses the changes to policies and structures (political, financial and legislative) that impact an individual's ability to serve their community. This also incorporates the broader relationships with stakeholders that will allow for more informed and reflective decision-making for the community.

# PARITY IN MUNICIPAL POLITICS FRAMEWORK

## IMPROVED ACCESS TO INFORMATION INCLUDES:

Collection of disaggregated data  
Enhanced knowledge sharing and best practices  
Greater access to tools, training and manuals  
Overcome negative stereotypes and false perceptions

## ENHANCED INCLUSION INCLUDES:

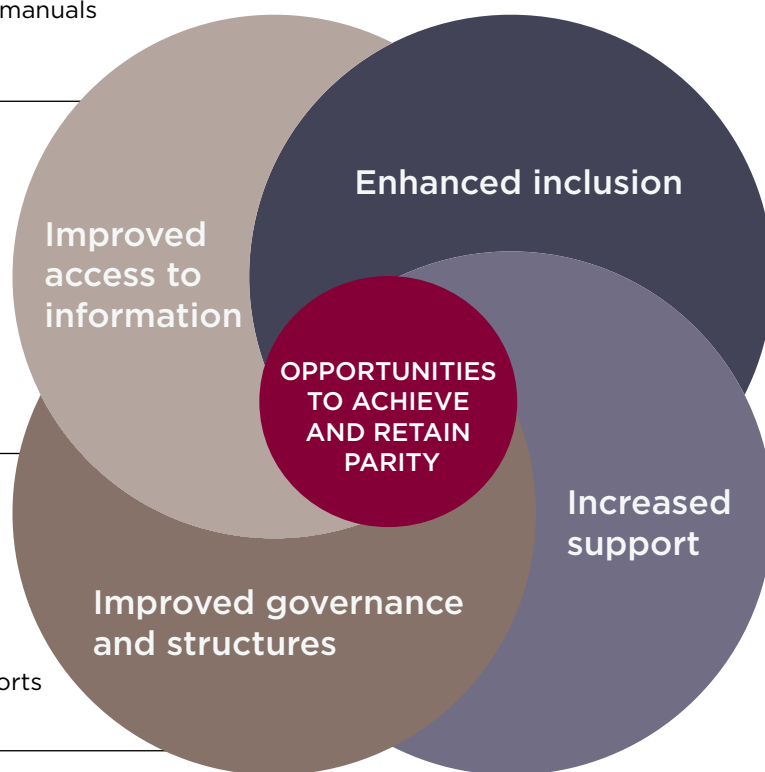
Recognition and action to reduce societal/systemic barriers (sexism, racism, etc.)  
Action to mitigate economic inequalities  
Inclusive and transparent processes  
Reduction of intimidation and harassment

## INCREASED SUPPORT INCLUDES:

Increased mentorship and encouragement  
Enhanced work-life balance and support for familial responsibilities  
Enhanced and shared practical supports  
Inclusive workplace accommodations

## IMPROVED GOVERNANCE AND STRUCTURES INCLUDES:

Enhanced inclusive policies  
Strengthened relationships between women's groups and councils  
Increased women's participation and input into consultation processes



# STRATEGIES AND ACTIONS TO ATTAIN PARITY IN MUNICIPAL POLITICS

**FROM THE INITIAL 13 CHALLENGES** that they felt responded to the four pillars of action, consultation participants prioritized three key actions: (i) mentorship and encouragement; (ii) breakdown of informal networking and decision-making; and (iii) improved access and sharing of tools. While three challenges emerged, it was clear that many of these issues are interconnected and solutions would need to be as diverse as the communities they are intended to support. This prioritization of challenges neither negates nor diminishes the impacts of the other challenges, but focuses on feasibility and opportunities.

The consultations prioritized the challenges and solicited ideas, experiences and options as potential solutions intended to help attain gender parity of elected representation in municipal politics. The solutions looked at the potential impacts and generated ideas that could be implemented at the individual level (either as elected officials or as members of the community), local government level (municipal councils) or through provincial or territorial associations, as well as at the national level through pan-Canadian civil society groups or associations such as FCM.

The ideas and suggestions put forward by participants, often stemming from existing best practices, pilot projects or initiatives, resulted in a wide menu of actions that stakeholders at all levels of engagement can consider, each with its unique opportunity to inspire, change and influence.





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## 1. MENTORSHIP AND ENCOURAGEMENT

Mentorship has proven invaluable in the private and public sector when preparing the next generation of leaders. This is particularly relevant for women in politics; mentorship ensures they receive proper guidance, support and the opportunity to speak to others who understand and can help navigate the complex reality of municipal politics. Key themes include:

### 1.1 Provision and space for formalized mentoring and networking

- Set up formal mentorship networks for and among women mayors, reeves, directors and councillors, etc.
- Facilitate training and mentorship workshops and seminars for both mentors and mentees.

### 1.2 Peer and thematic mentoring and networking

- Create peer mentor or thematic groups where women can connect (for example, councillors from rural agriculture-based communities or mining communities across different regions to share experiences from similar contexts to discuss potential solutions).
- Promote members who are taking leadership roles or addressing diversity and inclusion in innovative and engaging manners.

### 1.3 Engagement of men

- Engage male leaders who want to be mentors for women councillors or mayors.
- Actively make space for women during council and committee meetings.

### 1.4 Creation of a pipeline of candidates and leaders

- Support girls' learning from an early age. Encourage municipal actors to be available for and engage with schools (primary through secondary), youth councils or Girl Guides.
- Celebrate successful women leaders, especially those of colour, religious or cultural minorities, Indigenous and other groups to highlight positive examples regionally and nationally.



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## 2. BREAKING DOWN INFORMAL NETWORKING AND DECISION-MAKING

For effective decision-making to occur, councils must uphold good governance practices that ensure consensus-oriented, accountable, transparent, responsive, effective and efficient, equitable and inclusive approaches. A greater push toward inclusion, open and increased dialogue has been proven to be “good business” for all.

### **2.1 Engage stakeholders in the process to advocate against and dismantle informal decision-making**

- Identify advocates and spokespersons (male and female) on the value and positive contributions of a gender diversified council.
- Build, recruit, identify and engage future leaders of varied backgrounds and identities.

### **2.2 Address perpetuation of exclusionary behaviour by all demographics**

- Councils can create Women’s Advisory Committees to reach out to the communities to help ensure gender responsive decision-making including such tools as gender sensitive budgets and Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA+).
- Train members on how to spot exclusionary practices and how to address them in an effective manner.

### **2.3 Address unconscious bias and stereotypes**

- Training on how to address unconscious biases and discrimination.
- Speaker series from women experts and local leaders working on issues concerning the municipal sector to better understand others’ experiences, impact and opportunities.

### **2.4 Social and cultural sensitization**

- Publicize opportunities to participate in municipal advisory committees and boards in an effort to hear from a diverse set of voices and perspectives.
- Formulate an equity and diversity plan for the community as a means to recruit a diversity of representatives to council, committees and other spheres of consultation.





### 3. IMPROVED ACCESS AND SHARING OF TOOLS

Without sufficient information, people, no matter how talented or competent, are unable to work to their potential. Gaps in information exist at all stages of the electoral journey from roles and responsibilities of elected officials: to how to apply, how to run as a candidate, how to run campaigns and the ongoing learning as an elected official. Clear, concise, easily accessible information, best practices and tools are required to facilitate the process for all candidates and elected officials.

#### **3.1 Redress information gaps at all stages, from attracting potential candidates, running successful campaigns and transitioning into the elected role**

- Offer or participate in training for individuals running for council on council roles, responsibilities, key functions, etc.
- Hold mock council meetings where the public debates relevant issues as a means to demonstrate to the public and potential candidates the format and issues discussed by council.

#### **3.2 Increase dissemination and sharing of existing tools – Knowledge Hub**

- Conduct online surveys and interviews of former elected officials to ask them about challenges they saw and suggestions on how to make it easier for women of visible minorities to become engaged or run for office.
- Share existing or proven models – replication is easier if a community can learn from the success of another community.

#### **3.3 Provide programs to increase awareness and positive perceptions of municipal politics**

- Provide ongoing training (including resources) and opportunities for councillors to earn a certain number of learning or training credits each year and ensure that relevant learning opportunities are easily accessible.
- Conduct an analysis of the different campaigns to increase women's participation in order to create a platform of best practices and tools to share.

#### **3.4 Collect and share data to promote informed decisions based on knowledge and data**

- Collect information by gender, ethnicity and other identity markers to better showcase the gaps and how to address them.
- Ensure all candidate, campaign and municipal election information is available and accessible to the public.



## TOWARD PARITY NATIONAL WORKING GROUP MEMBERS

- Canadian Women's Foundation
- Equal Voice
- Association francophone des municipalités du Nouveau-Brunswick (AFMNB)
- Alberta Urban Municipalities Association (AUMA)
- Association Manitoba Municipalities (AMM)
- Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) / Rural Municipalities of Ontario (RMO)
- Federation of Prince Edward Island Municipalities (FPEIM)
- Fédération québécoise des municipalités (FQM)
- Municipalities Newfoundland and Labrador (MNL)
- Municipalities of Saskatchewan
- Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities (NSFM)
- Rural Municipalities of Alberta (RMA)
- Saskatchewan Association of Rural Municipalities (SARM)
- Union des municipalités du Québec (UMQ)
- Union of British Columbia Municipalities (UBCM)
- Union of the Municipalities of New Brunswick (UMNB)

### **AFFILIATED MEMBERS**

- NWT Association of Communities (NWTAC)
- Association of Yukon Communities (AYC)

Canada 

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