

Women and Leadership

The purpose of this information paper is to discuss formal and informal strategies to help improve women's participation in leadership and decision making roles in Queensland. It examines the meaning of leadership, women's participation in leadership, potential barriers to women's involvement in decision making and community building, and opportunities for women leaders and women considering leadership.

Introduction

The Queensland Government is committed to increasing women's participation in formal and informal leadership roles across the State and to strengthening women's participation in decision making and community building. Women bring diverse skills to building, sustaining and leading communities. Strong government is built, at its base, on political and community participation by all Queenslanders. Where women are represented in sufficiently large numbers, they can influence the style, content and direction of political and community sector decision making.

Engaging Queensland: the Queensland Government Policy on Volunteering acknowledges the critical contribution that volunteers make to Queensland's economic and community life. This is particularly relevant for women, who tend to spend more time throughout their lives engaged in volunteer activities¹.

Forms of participation and leadership

How do women participate?

Women lead in all kinds of ways and all kinds of situations. This paper looks at leadership in the broadest possible terms, reflecting women's diverse leadership roles. There is no single style of effective leadership. The ways and extent to which women engage in leadership and decision making reflect their diverse roles and circumstances in society. Women in Queensland are parents, employers and employees, advocates, public officials, social entrepreneurs, business owners, volunteers and community leaders. Women often manage competing roles and complex responsibilities. Women's contributions, ranging from the most informal roles to the most formal and organised roles, play a vital role in community building.

Adopting a leadership role and taking responsibility for making decisions requires a considerable commitment of time and energy. This means that women must strike an effective balance between work, family, lifestyle, community and leadership commitments. Today, with the changing nature of employment and caring responsibilities, women are under increasing pressure to participate in leadership activities but have less time to do so.

Leadership opportunities for women need to be flexible so they are not excluded from participation. Flexibility of arrangements is also needed to allow women to participate in leadership and decision making with greater ease throughout their lives.

The Office for Women

Making things better for Queensland women

Department of
Local Government, Planning,
Sport and Recreation

PO Box 15031
City East Q 4002

Telephone enquiries
07 3224 4062

Facsimile
07 3224 4272

Email
ofw@dlgp.qld.gov.au



Political participation

Women's participation in formal decision making and leadership roles assists the government in responding to the diverse needs of all Queenslanders. The empowerment, enhanced autonomy and improved social, economic and political status of women contribute to transparent and accountable government. Gender equity in leadership and decision making roles would provide a balance that more accurately reflects the composition and interests of the community. Women's equal participation in decision making and public policy is critical for the general process of the advancement of all women.

According to the United Nations Development Fund for Women, despite clear shifts towards democratisation in many countries, women tend to be underrepresented in most levels of government².

In Queensland, as at July 2003, 33 of 89 Members of the State Parliament were women³. In the Commonwealth Government, two of 12 Queensland senators were women⁴, and five of 27 Queensland House of Representatives members were women⁵. In 2002, women constituted 28% of local government councillors and around 18% of local government mayors. At June 2000, women constituted 56.2% of the Queensland Public Service, including 26% of senior officer positions and 17.2% of senior executive service positions. In May 2001, five of 32 directors-general and chief executive officers were women⁶.

Leadership in the workplace

In July 2003, seven of 24 Supreme Court judges in Queensland were women. Five of 35 District Court judges were women. Fourteen of 74 magistrates were women and two of four Indigenous magistrates were women.

Women working in education and policing in Queensland are not highly represented in senior positions. In June 2000, around 27% of secondary school principals and 38% of primary school principals were women⁷. During the same time period only 4.9% of Queensland Police positions at inspector level and above were filled by women. Around 18% of general positions were filled by women.

The profile of women in formal leadership positions in Queensland is consistent with the national profile. In 2003 women constituted 44.5% of the total labour force in Australia but held only 8.8% of executive manager positions across the public and private sectors. For the same time period women held only 5% of chief executive officer positions and 8.4% of board directorships⁸.

Leadership skills

A survey conducted by the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women in 2003 collected the following insights about leadership:⁹

- Leaders collaborate with others, facilitate change, formulate visions independently or with others and achieve their implementation

- Leaders have clear vision and set and reach goals individually or in collaboration with others.
- Leaders respond to a situation with a vision that is usually for the betterment and common good of a society or an organisation.
- Leaders are forward looking and they initiate positive change, growth and new ideas.
- Leaders have skills and strengths, values, ethics, self-belief and integrity. They recognise the gifts of others and are passionate, determined, fair and focused.
- Leadership requires skills in communicating ideas, a capacity to think strategically and a willingness to take risks.
- Leadership requires an understanding of the environment, a commitment to learning new skills, and being willing to hope and persist in working to create change.

Community leadership

The Queensland Government recognises community leadership as a critical component of local social development¹⁰. Women have key roles in the community sector in Queensland as employees, volunteers and agents of social change.

Community leaders contribute significantly to Queensland's social cohesion and cultural capital. Community leaders need to be highly responsive to the needs and interests of the community. Leaders are most effective when they are connected to their local community, and know its values, goals and visions. Community leadership is not a static concept - it emerges to meet the specific needs of local communities.

Indigenous women are often strong leaders within their family and community. Unfortunately, the impacts and outcomes of Indigenous women's leadership can often go unacknowledged.

Also, community leadership has a particular meaning for people from migrant and refugee backgrounds. These women from migrant and refugee backgrounds have braved separation from their families, faced the complex challenges of migration and commonly experienced culture shock, language difficulties and social isolation.

At the same time, like many other Queensland women, they tend to have less economic security than men, greater caring responsibilities and fewer female leaders to model themselves on. With creativity and determination, many women from migrant and refugee backgrounds have become strong contributors both to Queensland and their countries of origin. Community leaders in the multicultural sector have worked diligently and strategically to bridge cultures and promote cultural diversity in Queensland.

Volunteerism

Volunteerism is a key aspect of community leadership and participation. According to the Australian Bureau of Statistics, in 2001 33% of women in Queensland volunteered compared to 31% of men¹¹. The Australian Bureau of Statistics notes that the pattern of volunteering varies with age and life stage. The volunteer rate for men

and women in Queensland and throughout Australia is higher for people aged between 35-44 years. People in this age bracket are more likely to be married with children and their higher than average volunteer rate reflects their family commitments¹².

Women, leadership and barriers

Women often have a difficult time in stepping forward and becoming leaders. There has been much research regarding the barriers facing women and attitudes that inhibit women from stepping into leadership roles.

Evidence suggests that women can face a 'glass ceiling' when they attempt to move into leadership positions. The barriers to women's participation in leadership can be considered under these three headings:

- barriers stemming from socialisation and stereotyping
- individual barriers
- organisational barriers.

Barriers stemming from socialisation and stereotyping

Constraints of traditional gender roles

Women's traditional identities and roles have been associated with parenting and caring/nurturing, while men's traditional identities are associated with paid employment and the public sphere. Traditional views do not take into account the variety of real skills and expertise that each person has and their potential to contribute in business, farming and community work. It is important to fully recognise the potential for participation by everyone.

Manifestations of sexism

Social attitudes regarding appropriate gender roles can influence women's decisions regarding leadership and participation. Preconceptions about women can be so deeply ingrained that many who hold them are not even aware of them. Beliefs can be that women leaders are less capable, less competitive or less productive than men, are not task-oriented enough, are too dependent on feedback and evaluations of others or lack independence.

Individual barriers

Balance of work, family and lifestyle

Both men and women have family responsibilities. However, women continue to assume greater responsibility for caring for children, as well as for their partners, parents, and other family members. This is reflected in women's lower levels of leadership participation.

Anyone with family responsibilities faces challenges in trying to assess the potential personal and family impact of a leadership role. The complexities and tensions of the role, the size of the additional workload and the need to attend additional meetings increase the complexity of balancing family life commitments. The decisions women are making in relation to work and family are influencing how and when they participate in leadership roles. Organisations that support family obligations and provide flexible arrangements can improve their attraction and retention of top male and female leaders with valuable

skills. This can improve all their business outcomes enormously.

Male and female leadership styles

Women leaders face different expectations about leadership styles and approaches. Women leaders are expected to display greater inter-personal skills and adopt more participatory, democratic styles, while men are expected to adopt more directive approaches. Research involving evaluations of leaders by supervisors, subordinates, and peers in real world settings does not support these perceived differences.

An individual leadership style is developed through social, historical, and cultural contexts. Organisations may tend to hold stereotypical views of leadership involving characteristics which are stereotypically masculine behaviours. Some women are reluctant to take on leadership roles in these organisations as the behavioural expectations are incompatible with their world views and life experiences.

More rigid views of leadership styles can constrict women, and men, who prefer to exercise a different form of leadership. Leadership skills are not gender specific. It is important for organisations to recognise and validate a variety of leadership styles.

Cultural barriers

Culture plays a significant role in defining leadership. Different cultures can value different leadership roles and styles and the process of leadership can take many different forms. Many cultural community leaders face the additional challenge of trying to balance decision making across two cultures, that is, trying to reconcile Australian leadership expectations with traditional cultural models.

Barriers to leadership and participation are compounded when women have limited English language skills or are representing specific disadvantaged or marginalised communities. Therefore, women community leaders from diverse cultures face a number of challenges in having their skills recognised regardless of their leadership capacity or their standing in the community.

Organisational barriers

Skills recognition

Australian research suggests that many women wish for a greater role in decision making and leadership¹³.

Leadership skills are often defined in relation to people's professional experience in paid employment. It can be difficult to translate skills derived from voluntary community work into a formal employment application.

Most women have decision-making and leadership skills, and these skills are valuable. Unfortunately, it is often the case that women and their work are not valued and this impacts negatively on their self-confidence.

Leadership requirements from women’s perspective

At a Multicultural Women’s Summit in June 2005, approximately 90 women of all ages from culturally diverse backgrounds discussed community leadership and leadership qualities. The summit participants identified the following qualities and skills as requirements for effective leadership:

- being able to effectively communicate a vision
- being able to influence others to work towards shared goals
- having skills in and a commitment to mentoring and empowering others
- having respect for difference and diversity
- having a commitment to social change.

The participants agreed that women already use many of these skills on a routine basis in their family, workplace and community responsibilities and commitments. These skills can be developed to take on other forms of leadership (community, business, industry, government). Participants identified the following ways for women to further develop these skills and strengthen leadership capacity:

- networking
- advocacy – by joining peak organisations
- actively participating in cross-cultural groups
- attending seminars and forums to raise issues
- claiming ownership of issues and agendas.

Women have complex lives and their capacity and contribution to leadership can vary at the different stages across their life. The summit participants also considered leadership in three age group categories – young women, mid-life and later life.

The **young women’s groups** emphasised the leadership qualities of being:

- open to change
- flexible
- willing to undertake continuous learning to develop new skills.

The focus of the **mid-life groups** related to:

- networking strategies
- participation in umbrella organisations
- developing shared visions with allies
- understanding the sector
- skills to link with government
- ability to access financial and other support
- working across generations by mentoring and supporting young women as they enter the sector seeking leadership opportunities.

Key themes raised by the **older women’s groups** included:

- a need for consultative leadership
- having a voice
- having ownership of the agenda and goals that are pursued.

Checklist for women leaders¹⁴

This section provides a checklist for women considering taking on a leadership role in their sector or that currently have a leadership role in their community, business or industry.

Are you informed about

- your rights (see *Equal Employment Opportunity Guidelines* and the *Anti-Discrimination Act 1991*) www.legislation.qld.gov.au
- the interests and cultures of those people you are representing and those you will be working with
- relevant networks, government, education, training and community services
- other women leaders as role models
- tensions which may result from cultural differences
- opportunities for continued learning?

Have you developed communication skills

- to speak in public with confidence
- to protest/object/agitate/dissent with respect
- to facilitate and coordinate meetings?

Do you balance family, life and work commitments by

- gaining support from family, friends, professional and community contacts, and mentors.
- trading off with your partner and children (e.g. childcare, household chores)
- taking your children with you
- setting aside time for family?

Do you manage resources efficiently by

- using the answering machine (don’t allow the telephone to dominate all else)
- writing letters
- using existing networks
- empowering others that offer to help
- prioritising tasks
- being a good listener?

Are you staying healthy by

- scheduling regular breaks
- ensuring good nutrition?

Do you assert yourself by

- focusing on facts
- knowing your rights
- confronting issues with an attitude towards resolution rather than confrontation
- having a list of useful catch phrases or ‘I’ statements when assertion is required (e.g. I feel frustrated when you talk to me that way)
- being prepared to stand up for what you believe in, even if it means standing alone
- not being apologetic about your values
- looking for allies
- affirming the good things people do
- talking to people directly about your concerns?

Opportunities to strengthen women's leadership in Queensland

This section sets out opportunities provided by various State Government agencies for women to develop leadership skills and capacity. It also includes references for obtaining further information.

Women on Boards

The Queensland Government is moving to increase women's representation and leadership on government and private sector boards. The *Register of Nominees*, which incorporates the *Register for Women* and *Register for Indigenous Women*, contains the details of self-nominated women who wish to get involved on boards. This information is used by government agencies to identify suitable candidates when proposing nomination for boards and committees. For more information visit: www.premiers.qld.gov.au/getinvolved/Qld%5FRegister%5Fof%5FNominees/

Women in Business Coaching Scheme

The *Women in Business Coaching Scheme* by the Department of State Development and Innovation (DSDI) aims to help Queensland female business owners and operators identify and implement strategic, practical, and cost-effective solutions to issues and challenges confronting their business. www.smartsmallbusiness.qld.gov.au/dsdweb/v3/guis/template/s/content/qui_cue_cntnhtml.cfm?id=17705

Smart Women Communicate, Motivate, Activate

This workshop of the DSDI *Smart Women Workshop Series* helps women to build better business relationships. www.smartsmallbusiness.qld.gov.au/dsdweb/v3/guis/template/s/content/qui_cue_cntnhtml.cfm?id=17701

Women and e-democracy

Women are encouraged to actively participate in the political decision-making process through accessing programs such as the Office for Women's e-democracy classes. These classes teach women skills enabling them to participate politically through internet technologies. For more information visit: www.women.qld.gov.au/?id=99

Smart Women Seminar Series

The Office for Women's *Smart Women Seminar Series* delivers quarterly seminars to women across Queensland. These seminars celebrate innovation and entrepreneurship by women in policy, business and service delivery. They also provide women with access to exciting developments by other women. For more information on upcoming events visit: www.women.qld.gov.au

Women and Girls in Sport seminars and forums

Sport and Recreation Queensland in partnership with the Australian Council of Health, Physical Education and Recreation Queensland branch (ACHPER) and Womensport Queensland Association Inc (WQA) is delivering a series of breakfast seminars and networking forums throughout Queensland during 2005. www.srq.qld.gov.au/whats_new.cfm?item=255.00

Enterprising Women in Rural Industries

This Department of Primary Industries and Fisheries program is working to ensure there are more women working in rural industries developing and expanding profitable and sustainable businesses. The program aims to:

- support and promote the work of innovative businesswomen
- create opportunities for businesswomen to make new contacts in government, industry and the private sector
- create opportunities for businesswomen to network, share information and learn from each other

For more information visit:

www.dpi.qld.gov.au/business/13043.html#about

The Commonwealth Government also provides a range of leadership and capacity building opportunities for women. There are also many private sector and community organisations that provide leadership information, training and networking opportunities for women across various sectors.

For additional information regarding leadership and leadership opportunities please consult:

www.women.qld.gov.au
www.opsme.qld.gov.au
www.dir.qld.gov.au
www.ofw.facs.gov.au/

Conclusion – the future

Future leadership opportunities for women in Queensland will continue to expand. The Office for Women is committed to promoting leadership opportunities and advancing the interests and status of all women in Queensland. Women in Queensland need to be part of the discussions and processes that determine the quality and direction of our lives. Women should not only be represented in government and civil society, but should be able to participate fully and meaningfully in decision-making processes.

¹ Engaging Queensland: The Queensland Government Policy on Volunteering.

² United Nations Development Fund for Women, 2002.

³ Queensland Government Executive Directory, 2003.

⁴ www.aph.gov.au/senate/index/htm.

⁵ www.aph.gov.au/senate/index.htm.

⁶ Office of Public Service Merit and Equity (2001) EEO Statistical Information Survey.

⁷ www.qed.qld.gov.au.

⁸ Equal Opportunity for Women in the Workplace Agency Report 2003, Australian Government.

⁹ www.leadershipforwomen.com.au/questionnaire/12insights1.htm.

¹⁰ Women in the Smart State Directions Statement 2003-2008.

¹¹ Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001. *Voluntary Work, Australia*. Cat. No. 4441.0 Canberra.

¹² Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2001. *Voluntary Work, Australia*. Cat. No. 4441.0 Canberra.

¹³ *Women in the Smart State Directions Statement 2003*.

¹⁴ These suggestions are based on "Helpful tips for intending candidates" in *Local leaders Local women – Stories of women in local government*, Queensland Department of Local Government and Planning 2001, pp 66-67.