



2017 LG Professionals Australia National Congress

## GENDER DIVERSITY CO-DESIGN WORKSHOP

### **WHY ARE WOMEN SO POORLY REPRESENTED IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT ADMINISTRATIVE LEADERSHIP AND WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?**

Workshop Report

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**50|50 BY 2030**  
**FOUNDATION**  
AT THE UNIVERSITY OF CANBERRA

## CONTENTS

About the 50/50 by 2030 Foundation	4
Summary	5
The problem	6
Why should we care?	6
Our purpose and method	7
1. What is co-design and how do we use it?	8
How does it work in practice?	9
2. Pre and post event surveys – how gender diverse is Australian Local Government?	10
Appendix 1: receptions of barriers to change	11
3. Discovering the barriers to change	12
Critical barrier 1: A dominant culture reflected in unconscious bias against women	12
Critical barrier 2: Unfriendly working practices for women	12
Critical barrier 3: Myth busting – perceptions around 'male' and/or 'female' work	12
Critical barrier 4: Inequitable recruitment practices for senior officers	12
Critical barrier 5: 'women's' lack of ambition, confidence, and desire to lead	12
4. Making the change	13
5. Proof of concept: how do these findings compare with international evidence?	16
44 strategies for 50/50 by 2030	
Women and local government – leadership for our times	17
References	18



## **ABOUT THE 50/50 BY 2030 FOUNDATION**

Our vision is singular and uncompromising: by the year 2030 men and women will be equally represented in leadership and key decision making roles at all levels of government and public administration throughout Australia, and across our region. Backed by world class research expertise at the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis, we aim to develop evidence based research on the role of women in strengthening public administration and improving governance and national wellbeing. We delight in partnership and collaboration and we excel in innovative learning and development program design which challenges the prevailing discourse around women, power and public leadership. As such, the 50/50 Foundation will be a rich resource for local, national and international governments; political parties; public sector and civil service administrations, in supporting their efforts to achieve gender parity in leadership by the year 2030.

For further information visit our website at:

**<http://www.5050foundation.edu.au>**

## SUMMARY

This 50/50 by 2030 Foundation brief reports the findings of a workshop convened by LG Professionals Australia on *why are women so poorly represented in local government administrative leadership and what can be done about it?* The purpose of the workshop was to co-design a draft action plan for renewing LG Professionals Australia's commitment to gender equality in local government administrative leadership. Using co-design tools that local governments will need to foster to access funding through City Deals, Smart Cities and the Try, Test and Learn Fund, workshop participants scoped and defined the problem; co-designed possibilities of change; and produced an action plan for making progress on the issue for presentation to the Board of LG Professionals.

Five critical barriers to progress were identified:

*Critical barrier 1: A dominant culture reflected in unconscious bias against women*

*Critical barrier 2: Unfriendly working practices for women*

*Critical barrier 3: Myth busting – perceptions around 'male' and/or 'female' work*

*Critical barrier 4: Inequitable recruitment practices for senior officers*

*Critical barrier 5: 'women's' lack of ambition, confidence, and desire to lead*

And 44 strategies presented for navigating these barriers and achieving 50/50 by 2030. It was observed that top-down masculine leadership styles are no longer relevant to solving the problems that local communities face. These require co-production with citizens and stakeholders, the ability to listen and empathise, skills of negotiation and compromise and above all the ability to work collectively and cooperatively towards the achievement of publicly valued outcomes – leadership attributes and qualities largely associated with women. In short, local government has a historic opportunity to be the employer of choice for women and at the same time improve the quality of its products and services through embracing senior women as natural leaders for our times. It is time to make the change.

## **THE PROBLEM**

At a time when the Australian government is committed to increasing the number of women in leadership positions in the public and private sectors, including meeting its gender diversity target of men and women each holding 50 per cent of Australian government board positions from 1 July 2016, gender equality advances have stalled across Australia's local government sector. The rates of women in senior positions are far lower than any other tier of government. At the last round of local government elections, women accounted for just 32 per cent of all candidates and were elected to 30 per cent of positions. Even fewer (24 per cent) of mayoral candidates were women but, again, almost all were elected. Women account for a higher proportion of staff positions (46 per cent) but this falls as the management level rises. Only 11 per cent of council chief executives are women.

In 2009, the Australian Local Government and Planning Ministers' Council endorsed a target for 2020 of 30% of local government senior managers being women but it appears highly doubtful that the very modest goal of 30% (by 2020) will be achieved. These figures contrast with Commonwealth experience where women's representation has increased progressively and continuously at all levels of the Senior Executive Service and now sits at 37 per cent overall (compared to 4.7 per cent in 1984). Currently, five of the APS Secretaries are women (see: <https://www.dpmc.gov.au/office-women/leadership>).

## **WHY SHOULD WE CARE?**

It is well understood in mature liberal democracies that gender equality is a key measure of the quality of democratic life. Further that democratic rights are women's rights. But even if you look beyond notions of democratic rights, existing research evidence on public sector productivity strongly demonstrates that gender diversity in leadership delivers stronger outcomes for individuals and organisations, and supports economic growth. Moreover, the acquisition of federal funding and in certain instances state funding is increasingly being linked with the achievement of diversity targets. In a time of diminishing resources and growing mistrust in government, local government ignores these factors at its peril. If local government is to be taken seriously as an equal partner in Australian governance it must urgently redress the present imbalance.

## OUR PURPOSE AND METHOD

The purpose of this workshop was to co-design a draft action plan for renewing LG Professionals Australia's commitment to gender equality in local government administrative leadership. Using co-design tools that local governments will need to foster to access funding through City Deals, Smart Cities and the Try, Test and Learn Fund, the workshop aimed to: a) scope and define the problem; b) co-design possibilities of change; and c), prototype an action plan for making progress for presentation to the Board of LG Professionals Australia.

The workshop attracted 105 participants who were organised into seven smaller groups of 15 people. This was a particularly large number to work with. We would normally work with between 15 and 40 participants.

Each group nominated a facilitator to guide discussion and implement the rules and a rapporteur to document and provide feedback to the plenary. Each group was asked to engage in respectful discussion – “give space to give voice” – and were encouraged to be curious and analytical:

Do interrogate your ideas and unpack them in detail – what are the norms and values that are getting in the way? What are the big unstated questions that we are not tackling?

This report provides an overview of our key findings and is organised into four parts.

Part one provides an introduction to co-design as a deliberative method and outlines how we use it to conduct our core task.

Part two presents the findings from pre and post event surveys on broad participant perceptions on the change objective.

Part three identifies the key barriers to change as perceived by participants and part four identifies their preferred ways forward and compares their recommendations with leading international practice.



# 1 What is co-design and how do we use it?

Co-design is a methodology of research and professional reflection that supports inclusive problem solving in policy development, and service design. It places the citizen or stakeholder at the centre of a planned process of collaborative learning which focuses on the achievement of very specific outcomes. It draws on ways of working that are commonplace in product design and formulates interventions through understanding the lives of others and sharing power. Codesign has been widely used in the development of on-line services, interventions to combat various forms of marginalisation, new governance practices or policy innovation (Leadbeater 2003 and 2004; Mulgan, 2009). In recent years there has been a proliferation of governmental and non-governmental bodies devoted to applying design methods to public sector problems both at home and overseas (see Box 1). In sum, design thinking has become a fundamental tool of public policy design and analysis.

*Box 1. Selective list of governmental and non-governmental organisations devoted to design and innovation (all websites last accessed 8 April 2017).*

Ash Center for Democratic Governance and Innovation, Harvard University (US) – <http://ash.harvard.edu/>  
Australian Centre for Social Innovation – <http://tacs.org.au/>  
Big Innovation Centre (UK) – [www.biginnovationcentre.com](http://www.biginnovationcentre.com)  
Design Council (established in 1944) (UK) – [www.designcouncil.org.uk](http://www.designcouncil.org.uk)  
Design for Europe – [www.designforeurope.eu](http://www.designforeurope.eu)  
Design Manager's Australia – [designmanagers.com.au](http://designmanagers.com.au)  
Digital Transformation Office (Australia) – <https://www.dto.gov.au/>  
Helsinki Design Lab – [helsinkidesignlab.org](http://helsinkidesignlab.org)  
Human Experience Lab, Singapore  
Office for Design and Architecture, South Australia – [odasa.sa.gov.au/](http://odasa.sa.gov.au/)  
Involve (UK) – [www.involve.org.uk](http://www.involve.org.uk)  
La 27e Region (France) – [www.la27eregion.fr](http://www.la27eregion.fr)  
Danish Agency for Science, Technology and Innovation (Denmark) – [ufm.dk/en](http://ufm.dk/en)  
MindLab (Denmark) – [mind-lab.dk/en/](http://mind-lab.dk/en/)  
Social Innovation and Entrepreneurship Research Centre (New Zealand) – [sierc.massey.ac.nz](http://sierc.massey.ac.nz)  
Project H Design (US) – [www.projecthdesign.org/](http://www.projecthdesign.org/)  
Public Policy Lab (US) – [publicpolicylab.org/](http://publicpolicylab.org/)  
Thinkplace (Australia and New Zealand) – [thinkplaceglobal.com/](http://thinkplaceglobal.com/)  
Cabinet Office Policy Lab (UK) – <https://openpolicy.blog.gov.uk/category/policy-lab/>  
United Nations Research Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) – [www.unidir.org/](http://www.unidir.org/)  
UNDP Development Unit, Knowledge and Innovation – [www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/.../development.../innovation.html](http://www.undp.org/content/undp/en/home/.../development.../innovation.html)



## How does it work in practice?

The Australian Commonwealth Government has become a major user of co-design methods. For example, the Digital Transformation Agency, Data 61, Smart Cities, the Try, Test and Learn Fund and the National Innovation and Science Agenda Delivery Unit all use co-design methods such as Agile (see Figure 1). Most co-design approaches use three stages of investigation: 1) the discovery stage focuses on listening to your target group and identifying possibilities of change; 2) the prototyping stage involves co-designing products or services; and 3) the experimentation stage is about testing and learning, scaling up or failing fast.

Figure 1. Agile service design deployed by the National Innovation and Science Agenda Delivery Unit

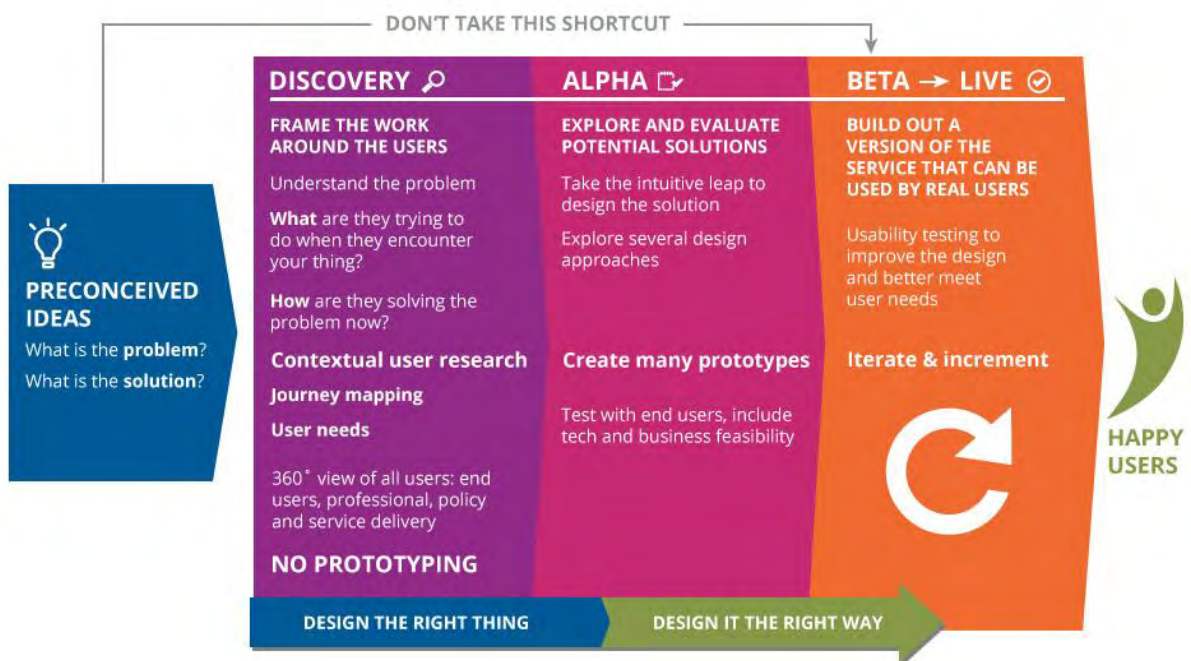
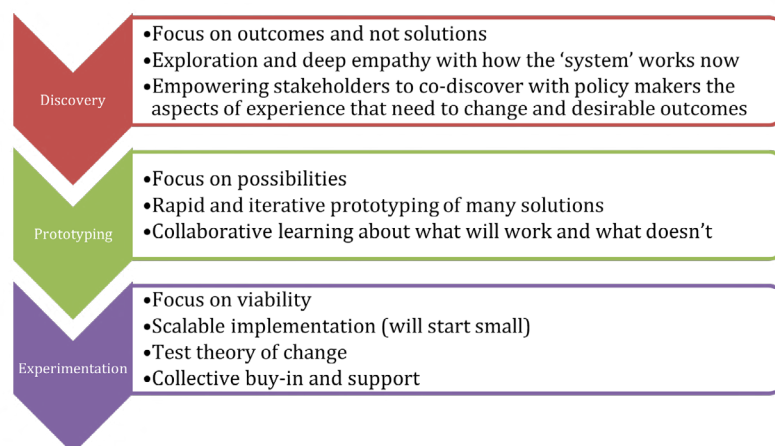


Figure 2 illustrates how we applied this thinking to the problem of achieving gender equality in local government leadership.



Here we have focused on the first two stages in the co-design process: 1) discovering with participants their perceptions of the five critical barriers to progress; and 2) prototyping – making an action plan to address these dilemmas.

## 2 Pre and post event surveys – how gender diverse is Australian Local Government?

We asked participants in pre and post event surveys a series of questions about their perceptions on the current state of play in the sector. The first question we asked was do you think men and women are equally represented at senior/executive leadership levels? As Table 1 illustrates, the vast majority of participants have a pretty accurate understanding of the current situation (80: 20, 70: 30 or 60: 40). There are differences between states with Victoria (38%) leading the way in women elected to local government and New South Wales (27%) lagging behind (see Table 2). This is in spite of the 2004 New South Wales Local Government Women’s Charter which enshrines principles of equal rights and opportunities for women as central to achieving good local governance. South Australia’s Strategic Plan also set a target to increase the percentage of women nominating for elections in South Australia to 50% by 2014. In 2014 a record percentage of women stood for and were elected to local government but it was still well below target (29%).

How does this compare with international trends in Westminster style democracies? The picture is pretty bleak overall but Australia is still lagging behind. Canada and New Zealand appear the better performers and it is notable that Canada currently views its main problem to be the advancement of women to leadership positions from visible minorities.<sup>1</sup>

We also asked participants a series of questions about their attitudes towards change (see Table 3). The vast majority of participants are champions of change and think that:

- “diversity should be a key focus for local government” (35/37);
- they would “like to see more women in senior roles in local government” (34/37)
- they would “like to see a national campaign to improve gender equality in local government” (35/37)

However, they were less convinced that the “general public would support improved efforts to increase the number of women working in local government leadership” (28/37) which suggests that there is still work to do with their communities. Table 3 demonstrates strong support for change, although a healthy degree of scepticism about the ability of the sector to make progress. Free form commentaries in questionnaire responses expose the rationale behind this cynicism:

“We’ve been here before many times – will this time be any different?”  
“The only way things will change is if the boys make the change”.  
“Unconscious bias isn’t happening. This is highly conscious bias.”  
“A lot of people have given up; too tired to fight”.

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1. See the Diversity Institute’s (2012), *Diversity Leads: Women in Senior Leadership Positions*, Toronto, Ryerson University: <http://www.ryerson.ca/diversity>

## Appendix 1: receptions of barriers to change

Table 1. Women in senior positions in Local Government

Office	Australia	New Zealand	Canada	England
Mayors/Shire President	15	31 (17) <sup>2</sup>	18	15
CEO/General Managers	11	24	32	23
Elected Councillors	30	30 (33)	28	33
Women Staff	46	57	51	74

Table 2. Women elected to Australian Local Government by State

State	%
Victoria	38
Queensland	33
Western Australia	32.5
Tasmania	31
South Australia	29
New South Wales	27

Table 3. Participant attitudes to the gender equality issue in local government (N=37)

	1	2	3	4	5
Do you think diversity should be a key focus for local government?	0	1	1	11	24
Would you like to see more women in senior roles in local government?	0	0	3	9	25
Do you think the general public would support improved efforts to increase the number of women working in local government leadership?	0	0	9	14	14
Would you like to see a national campaign to improve gender equality in local government?	0	1	1	10	25

Scale: 1: "No" 2: "Not really" 3: "I don't know" 4: "Somewhat" 5: "Yes"

2. Numbers given for Urban/District areas.



### 3 Discovering the barriers to change

Participants identified a long list of barriers to change (see Appendix 1) which we have organised around five main (but overlapping) barriers.

#### *Critical barrier 1: A dominant culture reflected in unconscious bias against women*

What do we mean by unconscious bias? Unconscious bias refers to “a bias that we are unaware of, and which happens outside of our control. It is a bias that happens automatically and is triggered by our brain making quick judgments and assessments of people and situations, influenced by our background, cultural environment and personal experiences” (see <http://www.ecu.ac.uk/>). In this context we are talking about how men (and sometimes women) have biased perceptions about the capacity of women to lead. Iris Bohnet presents a telling illustration of the problem of unconscious bias in her book (2016) *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*. She notes that as late as 1970 only five percent of musicians in the top five orchestras in the United States were women but today women comprise more than 35 percent of those same orchestras. The change happened through the introduction of blind auditions. The Boston Symphony Orchestra was the first to introduce auditions behind a screen and then the others followed. The policy change was a formal recognition of the behavioural insight that all human beings are bearers’ of bias and that we need to actively mitigate such biases to ensure workplace equality. Unconscious bias underpins each of the other critical barriers identified by participants.

#### *Critical barrier 2: Unfriendly working practices for women*

Unconscious bias stimulates the development of unfriendly working practices for women. Local government work is at odds with women’s life-cycle patterns of work and tends to privilege male norms and values. Such working practices marginalize women and undermine career advancement and work against aspirations for work/life balance.

#### *Critical barrier 3: Myth busting – perceptions around ‘male’ and/or ‘female’ work*

Unconscious bias underpins the dominant view that local government work is male work and the local government professions are male dominated. This observation seems at odds with the fact that women make-up 46% of the local government workforce.

#### *Critical barrier 4: Inequitable recruitment practices for senior officers*

Unconscious bias is reflected in inequitable recruitment practices and the tendency for male dominated recruitment panels to recruit “people like us”.

#### *Critical barrier 5: ‘women’s’ lack of ambition, confidence, and desire to lead*

The aforementioned barriers undermine women’s confidence in the application of meritocratic principles in recruitment and promotion and unconscious bias is also reflected in the relative absence of patronage and mentoring systems for women in local government.

## 4 Making the change

### Critical barrier 1:

#### **A dominant culture reflected in unconscious bias against women**

*“Women are perceived not to have the necessary leadership qualities or pretend to be men” (Workshop participant).*

*“An overview of more than a hundred studies involving evaluations of leaders indicates that women are rated lower when they adopt masculine, authoritative styles” (Deborah L Rhode, The Difference Difference Makes).*

How do we recognize the behavioural insight that all human beings are bearers’ of bias and how can we actively mitigate such biases to ensure workplace equality?

#### **Values**

1. Ensure that a commitment to gender equality is front and centre of local government values and actively mitigate bias in the workplace.

#### **Learning and Development**

2. Build an induction program for new staff aimed at developing an inclusive culture through education and raising awareness, training and mentoring systems.
3. Develop an emerging women leaders program to identify, nurture and support the career development of high performing women.
4. Provide ongoing unconscious bias training for officers and elected members.
5. Investigate and where appropriate implement international best practice experience e.g. Nordic countries.

#### **Performance and Management**

6. Use co-design to mainstream gender blind working practices.
7. Design a high performance framework (sector wide) that ensures management delivery of gender equality policy.
8. Rotate executive portfolios to provide more opportunities for high performing women.
9. Ensure expertise in HR gender equality practices.
10. Evaluate progress on an ongoing basis.

### Critical barrier 2:

#### **Unfriendly working practices for women**

*“To be successful women have to choose between careers and having children” (Workshop participant).*

How can we ensure that local government working practices empower women, promote career advancement and allow for work/life balance?

A friendly workplace requires:

11. women role models;
12. managers that model inclusive behaviours such as good work/life balance;
13. flexible work enabled digitally where appropriate to allow for remote “smart work”;
14. removal of short-term contracts to ensure workplace inclusion;
15. recognition of work as a social process;
16. support for carers – young or elderly;
17. guarded professional development days and thinking space for innovation;
18. home communication strategies;
19. mandated and accountable diversity practices;
20. male champions that “walk the walk” and “talk the talk”;
21. opportunities for mentoring, sponsoring, and access to external professional coaches; and,
22. inclusive organizational language.

### Critical barrier 3:

#### **Myth busting – perceptions around ‘male’ and/or ‘female’ work**

*“Local government work is perceived to be men’s work” (Workshop participant).*

*“Historically local council work has focussed on infrastructure which has been predominately male based” (Workshop participant).*

How do we bust the myth that local government work is male work and the local government professions are male dominated?

#### ***The importance of strategic intent***

23. Demonstrate leadership commitment – sign pledge, develop an action plan.
24. Set measurable/reportable targets for inclusion.
25. Identify male champions of change.

#### ***The power of knowledge***

26. Support public education programs at the primary and high school levels to promote gender equality from the classroom to the workplace.
27. Conduct a workplace survey to establish a rigorous evidence base.
28. Change perceptions through professional development, awareness programs, the adoption of best international best practice.
29. Celebrate high performers in non-traditional roles.

#### ***Keep the work exciting***

30. Job swops to re-energise employees.
31. Provision of project rotation and community engagement opportunities.



#### Critical barrier 4:

##### **Inequitable recruitment practices for senior officers**

*“117 studies that compared men and women who were equally matched on all criteria, other than gender, found that women were consistently assessed as being inferior to their male colleagues in areas such as professional competence, and leadership ability” (Hutchinson and Walker, 2014).*

How can we mitigate unconscious bias and ensure that local government recruitment practices are equitable and meritorious?

##### ***The importance of strategic intent***

32. Demonstrate leadership commitment to gender equity in recruitment materials.
33. Set measurable/reportable targets for inclusion.
34. Co-design communication strategy with high performing women.
35. Promote local government as employer of choice for women.

##### ***Mitigating bias***

36. Training for recruitment panels on bias mitigation.
37. Use design tools to ensure gender neutral language of ads, remove names on cvs, mandate balanced recruitment panels.
38. Head hunt women and identify strengths based career development pathways.

#### Critical barrier 5:

##### **‘Women’s’ lack of ambition, confidence, and desire to lead**

*“People think that a performance of leadership is a heroic one: a performance of tough, out front decisiveness or ‘greatness’. And ‘greatness’ is an adjective that is almost always applied to men. On the other hand, the attributes and qualities that are associated and expected of women such as cooperation, kindness, warmth, care and gentleness, are not the traditionally ascribed characteristics of a leader, but are more akin to subordinate and support roles” (Hutchinson and Walker, 2014).*

How do we ensure patronage and the use of supportive mentoring systems for women in local government? Several interventions identified above would help ameliorate this problem (see recommendation 23, 24, 25, 32, 33, 34, and 35). In addition, our participants also suggested the need for:

39. cross sectoral mentoring and coaching programs which could be designed in partnership with other public, private and third sector organisations experiencing similar problems;
40. all male leaders to receive training on how to mentor and support women and men at different stages of the life cycle;
41. affirmative action (quotas) on the Indian model<sup>3</sup>;
42. the need for job redesign based on skills-based criteria; and,
43. the development of a women’s leadership network to problem share, identify and diffuse better practice.

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3. India’s experiment with affirmative action is the world’s oldest. Known locally as “reservation” policy it is an elaborate quota system for public jobs, places in publicly funded colleges—like the Indian Institutes of Technology (IIT)—and in most elected assemblies. These are filled by members of designated, disadvantaged groups.

## 5 Proof of concept: how do these findings compare with international evidence?

As noted previously, one of the more interesting recent syntheses of the international academic and practice-based literature on how to navigate the barriers to gender equality in leadership is Iris Bohnet's (2016) *What Works: Gender Equality by Design*. Bohnet is a behavioural economist at Harvard University and Director of the Women and Public Policy Program. Her work iterates very strongly with the findings of our participants. Firstly, she identifies unconscious bias and by implication the need to de-bias organisations as a fundamental challenge for most public organisations and a problem of organisational design. She then provides a series of detailed recommendations on how to design diversity and mainstream diversity practices in public organisations. These include:

- orchestrating smarter evaluation procedures for recruitment that draw on what we know about human behaviour;
- creating role models;
- prescribing and embedding inclusive social norms through design;
- increasing transparency through clear accountabilities for promoting and protecting gender equality and target setting; and,
- crafting work groups.

In the main then participant findings are aligned with international best practice with one exception. The importance of crafting work groups did not emerge in our conversation and requires more detailed explanation.

44. The core insight is that work groups tend to reflect the dominant norms and values of an organization. By implication they are an obvious source of unconscious bias. Bohnet argues that we can use work groups as an instrument for creating collective intelligence which can enhance the quality, in this case, of local government work. She identifies three conditions for creating collective intelligence: "1) combine average ability with complementary diversity of perspectives and expertise to maximise team performance; 2) include a critical mass of each sub group in teams to avoid tokenism; 3) create inclusive group process to allow for diverse perspectives to be contributed and heard, for example, by introducing unanimity rules..." (2016: 243). This is potentially a powerful addition to our change strategy.

## 44 STRATEGIES FOR 50/50 BY 2030

### WOMEN AND LOCAL GOVERNMENT - LEADERSHIP FOR OUR TIMES

Technocratic, silver back, top-down masculine leadership styles of the type associated with Winston Churchill and Margaret Thatcher are no longer relevant to solving the problems that local communities face. These require co-production with citizens and stakeholders, the ability to listen and empathise, skills of negotiation and compromise and above all the ability to work collectively and cooperatively towards the achievement of publicly valued outcomes. These are the leadership attributes and qualities associated with women. Women are the natural leaders for our times.

This value proposition needs to be asserted on an ongoing basis. This is not just a matter of equal rights and social justice it is a matter of delivering better local government that is responsive to the needs and aspirations of Australian communities. Moreover, local government will simply not be a competitive sector if it continues to ignore talented Australian women.

This document has identified the key challenges for achieving gender equality in local government leadership and presents 44 strategies for achieving 50/50 by 2030. Local government has a historic opportunity to be the employer of choice for women and at the same time improve the quality of its products and services. It is time to make the change.





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## ABOUT THE AUTHORS

**Professor Mark Evans** is the Director of the Institute for Governance and Policy Analysis. His research and practice focuses on better governance and policy analysis. He is the author or co-author of 25 books including the best-selling politics book in Australia in 2011; *The Rudd Government*. His most recent book is *Methods that Matter* (The Policy Press, 2016) with Gerry Stoker. Mark was previously, Professor of Government, and Head of the Department of Politics at the University of York, UK and the inaugural coordinator of the World-wide Universities Public Policy Network. He has edited the international journal *Policy Studies* since 2005. Mark has acted as a senior policy advisor, delivered leadership training and managed evaluation projects in 26 countries including Australia, Brazil, China and the United Kingdom and for international organisations including the European Union, the UN and the World Bank. Mark has worked closely with LG Professionals Australia and several Commonwealth departments over the past five years on change governance issues using codesign methods including the Try, Test and Learn Fund, and The Innovation Fund and is a jury member of the PM's Innovation Awards. He has been awarded honorary research positions at the Universities of Bath, Gadjah Mahda, Hull, Renmin and York and is a Council member of IPAA.

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