

Closing the Gender Gap – principles, commitments, actions

Victorian Local Government Women's Charter 2010 Project Report: Ideas, Action Plans – Models that work

62 Councils have endorsed the Women's Charter principles gender equity, diversity and active citizenship (as at end October 2011)

Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition

The Women's Participation in Local Government Coalition is a non-party political coalition formed in 1996 between Victorian local government peak, philanthropic and community organisations, with support from individual women.

Further details about the Coalition and the Women's Charter Awards can be found at:
www.women.vlga.org.au
www.thinkwomenlg.org.au

To contact the Coalition Secretariat, email linda@vlga.org.au

Metropolitan (23)	Regional (8)	Rural (30)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bayside Boroondara Cardinia Casey Darebin Frankston Greater Dandenong Hobsons Bay Kingston Manningham Maribyrnong Maroondah Melbourne Melton Monash Moonee Valley Moreland Nillumbik Port Phillip Whitehorse Whittlesea Yarra Yarra Ranges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ballarat Greater Bendigo Greater Geelong Greater Shepparton Latrobe Mildura Swan Hill Warrnambool 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ararat Bass Coast Baw Baw Benalla Buloke Campaspe Central Goldfields Colac Otway Corangamite East Gippsland Gannawarra Glenelg Golden Plains Hepburn Hindmarsh Horsham Hume Macedon Ranges Moira Moorabool Mornington Peninsula Mount Alexander Moyne Murrindindi South Gippsland Southern Grampians Strathbogie Towong Wangaratta Wellington Yarriambiack

Executive Summary

Outcomes

- As at October 2011, 62 Councils in Victoria have endorsed the Victorian Local Government Women's Charter
- 43 Charter Champions have been nominated in 34 Councils, with many more councillors and officers included as direct contacts for gender equity activities
- Many Councils are putting in place action plans to implement the principles of the Women's Charter
- Information sharing is occurring, with a number of Councils working collaboratively through a regional approach
- Challenges in developing 3x3 Actions Plans have been identified, particularly for small rural Councils, however a number of strategies have been developed
- Benchmarks have been documented, with the main theme being the importance of taking a developmental approach – start, no matter how small the first step
- A variety of tools and information have been developed, including a Checklist, Information sheets, sample actions plans, 3x3 action plan templates, ideas for how to implement the Charter and case studies (see the WPILGC website at www.women.vlga.org.au for details).

Recommendations

1. Benchmarks need to continue to be developed based on local government actions.
2. The Women's Charter Awards continue to be a vehicle for recognising, publicising and encouraging Councils to enact the Charter.
3. Networking continues to be important.
4. Tracking and sharing Women's Charter Action Plans can continue beyond the project undertaken in 2010 through the biennial Women's Charter Awards.

The Women's Charter Project

WPILGC received funding from the Victorian Government under the 2010 Women's Leadership Grants Program offered by the Office of Women's Policy. The project was auspiced by the Municipal Association of Victoria. It aimed to:

- request Victorian local governments to endorse the Women's Charter and nominate Charter Champions
- work with Victorian Councils to develop action plans directed at increasing women's participation and leadership in local government prior to the 2012 local government elections.

The WPILGC Women's Charter Project Consultant was available as a resource to provide information, advice, and support to local governments over 12 months.

Although the project was for 12 months, WPILGC and Councils will continue the work to promote the Women's Charter and encourage councils to develop 3x3 Action Plans.

Finalists for the Inaugural 2010 Sally Isaac Young Woman Community Activity Award (winner Catherine Reidy first from left)



The Women's Charter and reasons for this project

What is the Women's Charter?

The Victorian Local Government Women's Charter is a document that when endorsed by a Council signals that it will work to support its principles of gender equity, diversity and active citizenship. It was endorsed by WPILGC, MAV and VLGA and the Victorian Local Government Minister in 2002.

Victorian Local Government Women's Charter

3 Principles

Gender equity –

Women and men have an equal right to be representatives in local governments, committees and decision-making positions

Diversity –

Inclusion of different experiences and perspectives in local governments and community decision-making strengthens local democratic governance and helps build cohesive communities. Councils and communities encourage and welcome the participation of all women

Active citizenship –

Local governments will work with the community to increase the numbers and participation of women in public life, so that decision-making more clearly represents and reflects the interests and demographics of communities

Why did the Women's Charter Project 2010 come about?

There was a need to create momentum in Victorian local governments. A disturbing trend had been observed in the late 1990's that the percentage of women being elected to Victorian Councils was dropping rather than incrementally increasing as it had been for years. Following the last elections in 2008, 183 or 29.5% of Victoria's 620 councillors were women. Five Councils have no elected women councillors.

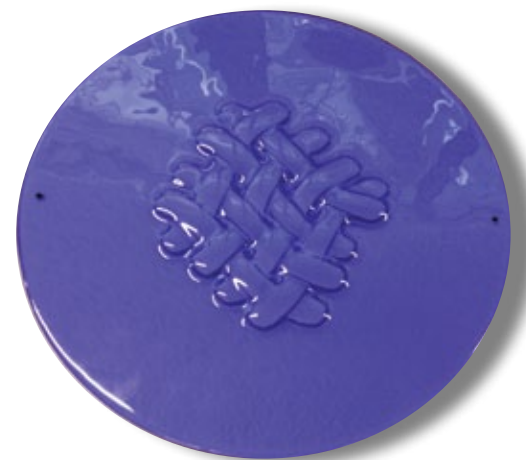
Women's Charter Awards have been made every second year since 2004. The winners have included:

2004 Yarra City Council and Swan Hill Rural City Council

2006 Moreland City Council and Port Phillip City Council

2008 Darebin City Council and Latrobe City Council

2010 Yarra City Council and Baw Baw Shire Council



Darebin City hosted the 2010 Charter Awards



Models that work

Approaches to successfully implement the principles of the Women's Charter vary across Councils. In some cases mechanisms are required to drive the implementation process. For effective

implementation of the Women's Charter it is important to have specific activities that publicly demonstrate the Council's commitment to women's participation.

The following activities have been identified through the Women's Charter Project as ways Councils can support the principles of the Women's Charter.

Women's Charter endorsement by Council

Endorsing the Women's Charter publicly commits the Council to the principles. This provides an environment that enables interested people to take action.

Committees to increase Women's Participation

A Women's Committee chaired by a Councillor championing the Women's Charter and involving a cross section of Council departments (Governance, Organisational Development, Community Development) and some community members is a good model.

Women's Networks

Where resources are scarce, involving interested women from the community who can connect with community networks and women's groups is an effective way to begin action on implementing the Women's Charter.

Senior Executive Support

Support from the Senior Executive level in local government is an enabling factor for implementation of the Women's Charter. Having the support of the CEO and several Directors could assist with staff resources being made available to work on actions for the Women's Charter.

Collaborative models where a group of Councils work together

Limited resources to work on the Women's Charter were identified by several rural local governments. Collaborative models enable resource sharing and provide support. It also builds capacity by having a larger group to work with and call on therefore reducing the impact of limitations facing someone working alone within their Council.

Awards that celebrate women's achievements

Councils have various opportunities where they can recognise the role and contribution of women in local government – community, Councillors and Officers.

Involving young people in recognising the Women's Charter through the Mayor of the Youth Council.

— WELLINGTON

Taking a collaborative regional approach – Great South West Coast Group of Municipalities

— CORANGAMITE

Organisational Development and Community Development Departments working together to raise awareness of women's roles. Women in Leadership Program scholarships.

— WHITEHORSE



WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION
IN LOCAL GOVERNMENT
COALITION
STRENGTHENING COMMUNITIES
THROUGH WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Women invited to observe the Council Chamber at work.

— FRANKSTON

Committees to increase women's participation.

— YARRA COMMITTEE FOR WOMEN

— DAREBIN'S WOMEN'S ADVISORY COMMITTEE

Developing the 3 x 3 Action Plan collaboratively at a forum engaged both the Council & community.

— GREATER GEELONG

3 x 3 Action Plans

Having Action Plans allows Councils to track progress on women's participation and enables them to reflect on what factors may be impeding progress.

Council Endorsement of ALGWA's "The Way Forward"

Leverage off other work around women's participation that is happening in the local government sector.

Women's Portfolio – Councillor & Officer level

Having a Women's Portfolio identifies that a Council is prepared to dedicate resources and regularly report on their activities connected to women's issues, including participation and active citizenship.

Pre-election workshops

These provide local governments with a significant opportunity to encourage women to stand for local government.

Working with external women's organisations

Organisations with an interest in women's issues, such as women's health services or community leadership programs, can create an external impetus to Councillors and Council staff becoming committed to initiatives for women and endorsing the Women's Charter.

Council operational programs and system driven changes

There are many examples of ways councils can instil gender equity into their programs and daily work. Develop 'gender lens' tools, gender equity training, gender reporting, toolkits. One woman Councillor in a small rural Council championed the addressing of incidences of violence against women in her community. Various activities were undertaken which in turn gave momentum and created an environment where it was possible to achieve Council endorsement of the Charter.

Women's Forums, hosted by women Councillors, held to create awareness and interest.

— HOBSON'S BAY

— WHITEHORSE

— GREATER GEELONG

An on-line Women in local democracy (WILD) Forum Jan 25 to Feb 18 had 268 visitors, 65 comments, 38 downloads of documents including the Women's Charter.

— YARRA RANGES

Development of a Sports Ground and Pavilion Allocation Policy to improve gender equity in sport

— MORELAND

Charter Champions

The importance of at least one person – be that a Councillor, an executive or an officer – being actively involved by following through and continually raising the importance of recognising the Women's Charter is critical to a successful implementation of the Charter. Where there is no champion within Council, response and action are regularly delayed and deferred.

As a result of the Women's Charter Project, 43 champions were nominated by 34 councils in 2010/11. Where Councils did not nominate a Charter Champion they often provided an interested contact person, usually a Council officer.

In a Council with no elected women Councillors, two male Councillors are the Charter Champions, demonstrating that men can champion the Charter too.

— CARDINIA

Driven by a Councillor championing the Women's Charter within Council.

— BAW BAW
— STRATHBOGIE
— SWAN HILL

Women's voices in Council - how do you get involved

— HUME

Supporting Women in Business networks & events.

— MORELAND
— WHITEHORSE

Charter Champions

Councillor(s)	CEO	Council Officer & Position / Department
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ararat • Baw Baw • Campaspe • Cardinia • Casey • Corangamite • Darebin • Glenelg • Greater Geelong • Greater Shepparton • Hobson's Bay • Hume • Kingston • Manningham • Maroondah • Melbourne • Moira • Monash • Moorabool • Moreland • Nillumbik • Strathbogrie • Yarra Ranges 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whitehorse 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Central Goldfields - Manager, Governance • Greater Dandenong - Manger, Governance • Hindmarsh - Director, Community Development • Moorabool - Co-ordinators: Customer Communications, Environmental Health, Community Development, Executive Officer – Corporate Projects • Mornington Peninsula - Corporate Governance • Moyne - Human Resources • Southern Grampians - Manager, Organisational Development • Warrnambool - Manager, Organisational Development • Yarra - Community Planner

Geelong WILD Forum



Gathering strength by doing it together – endorsement of the Women's Charter. By setting a rolling order in which the six individual Councils would consider adoption of the Charter they were able to focus initially on the more supportive Councils as a way of showing what was possible.

— GIPPSLAND GROUP OF COUNCILS

Challenges

A number of challenges were identified through the Women's Charter Project. Some strategies to deal with these are outlined below.

Challenges	Strategies
Insufficient resources at Officer level	Do what is doable Two events a year that you can build on such as International Women's Day, White Ribbon Day
Insufficient funding at Council for new initiatives	Do what is affordable and time possible Build recognition into Council's existing awards structure such as Australia Day Awards, Citizen of the Year
Lack of resources and time	Do it as a partnership with community Interested women can contribute their time and resources from the community, e.g. Greater Geelong
Starting from scratch	Adapt material that other Councils have developed, e.g. Terms of Reference for Women's Committees
Competing demands	Embed the actions in Council's reporting cycle for its strategic planning and action plans Approach taken by the City of Boroondara
Getting started	Build on work Council is already doing, e.g. prevention of violence against women projects
Councils with 1 or no women Councillors	Work with adjoining Councils Increase the pool of role models Garner support from others – provide examples of how others are approaching working on the Women's Charter
Small rural Councils - capacity issues: officer availability	Work with adjoining Councils Share the work so that people are not 'reinventing the wheel'

3 x 3 Action Plans

The following is a list of Councils which have developed or are in the process of developing 3 x 3 Action Plans to implement the principles of the Women's Charter. This includes Councils which have embedded actions in existing plans, strategies and initiatives.

List of Councils who have or are working on Women's Charter Action Plans

Metropolitan Councils

- Boroondara
- Darebin
- Frankston
- Hobson's Bay
- Hume
- Maribyrnong
- Maroondah
- Melbourne
- Monash
- Moonee Valley
- Moreland
- Nillumbik
- Whitehorse
- Yarra
- Yarra Ranges

Regional Councils

- Greater Geelong
- Greater Shepparton
- Swan Hill

Rural Councils

- Baw Baw
- Moira
- Southern Grampians
- Strathbogie
- Wellington

Baw Baw Shire Council was the winner of the 2010 Rural Council Award. Cr Diane Blackwood accepted the award on behalf of her Council



Rural Councils have found it particularly difficult to develop Action Plans, despite being very committed. Being small organisations with limited staff resources to work on the Women's Charter was a recurrent theme communicated to the Project Consultant.

Proposed state-wide benchmarks

Councils in Victoria are at different stages in their work in addressing gender equity and have differing levels of resources that they can commit to their work on the Women's Charter. There are, however, some basic benchmarks of recognition and acknowledgement around how they can start with this commitment to the principles. At the other end of the spectrum, local governments can measure gender equity within their policies and programs through annual reporting and allocation of resources.

Proposed benchmarks recommended by the project consultant include:

- Visible recognition of the Women's Charter through Council endorsement and public display of the Charter

- Acknowledgement of women's achievements
- Mechanisms that identify and track how work is being done on the Women's Charter and annual reporting on progress
- Councillor, Council Officer and community member involvement
- Programs, projects and initiatives that have a focus on women
- Resource allocation that supports gender equity, diversity and active citizenship.

A developmental approach for actioning the Local Government Women's Charter is set out below.

COUNCILS AT THE BUILDING AND RENEWAL STAGE

- Gender lens applied to policies and programs
- Policies and programs to address gender equity, eg in Sporting Grounds Allocation
- Women's Policy Officer Position
- Annual reporting

COUNCILS KEEPING UP THE MOMENTUM

- Mentor Program: pairing current and ex Councillors with women
- Provide gender specific training for women about active citizenship
- Develop a Growing Local Democracy Program

COUNCILS GETTING THERE

- Women get elected workshops
- Promote the Women's Charter with local groups and invite their input on ideas for Charter implementation
- Establish a Women's Committee

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COUNCILS AT THE START

- Endorse the Women's Charter
- Celebrate International Women's Day
- Hold an annual Women's Forum

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Looking towards 2012 and beyond

All Councils in Victoria will have elections in 2012 and then four-yearly thereafter, so the work of local government and communities will need to be ongoing.

The Victorian Local Government Women's Charter provides ways to celebrate achievements to date and highlight what Councils can do in the

lead up to the 2012 local government elections. WPILGC will continue to champion the Women's Charter and the 3 x 3 Action Plans and promote the Think Women for Local Government Project which is seeking to raise the numbers and diversity of women candidates in the 2012 Victorian local government elections. The next biennial

Women's Charter Awards will also be undertaken in 2012.

The Women's Charter Project has generated a database of contacts and Charter Champions in local government. This is a tremendous resource to draw on for communication and to generate interest in collective and collaborative action in looking towards 2012 and beyond.

Acknowledgements

WPILGC gratefully acknowledges the contribution of the project consultant, Jenny Ashby and Associates, Pty Ltd. Also the many Councillors and officers from Councils who have, and continue to, champion action within Councils to achieve greater women's participation in local government. We wish to acknowledge and thank the Victorian Government for its support and funding for the 2010 Women's Charter Project.

November 2011