



TOWARD PARITY

INVENTORY OF STRATEGIES, IDEAS, AND ACTIONS

How can we begin to overcome the countless obstacles that are preventing women from fully participating in municipal politics? Our options for action are countless—as the following detailed list of ideas illustrates. These inspirational suggestions were compiled based on consultations carried out across Canada, and informed brainstorming through FCM's Toward Parity Project. These actions are not official FCM recommendations. They are potential strategies that would first need to be assessed for feasibility and relevance to local contexts. But since each is flexible, they could certainly be adapted to fit local realities and opportunities.

Increased mentorship and encouragement

1.1

ENCOURAGING FORMAL MENTORING ARRANGEMENTS IN MUNICIPAL POLITICS



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Online training programs on key skills including impactful communication and conflict resolution

Share and seek out new perspectives

Include empathy in decision-making processes

Focus on strong communication between mentee and mentor

Seek out mentors from alternate sectors for complementary skills

Ensure you are not mentoring or championing people “just like you”, look for unique talents in others

Be willing to challenge your assumptions, to be curious about other styles, and adapt behaviours to meet others partway



LOCAL LEVEL

Set up formal mentorship networks of female and male mayors and councillors (past and present) who can mentor each other

Pair women with someone from a similar-size community and with similar personalities to increase diversity of views

Increased training and information for new councillors



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Set up formal mentorship networks of female mayors and councillors. Both those who want to mentor, and mentees who are looking for support across the region

Training videos and procedures to be shared online to help build practical skills

Host mentoring workshops to give current elected officials the skills they need to mentor women effectively

Facilitate seminars on mentorship

Mandatory workshops that speak to good governance and respectful workplaces

Encourage women to chair committees and speak at conferences

Encourage mentorship between municipalities of similar size

Encourage provincial or territorial committees to promote and facilitate female involvement

Create and support women's caucuses or tables



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

Set up formal mentorship networks of female mayors and councillors who will agree to be a mentor across the country

Provide tools and examples to provincial/territorial entities to improve women's representation

Implement national mentorship programs based on municipalities' size, economy base or other characteristics

Provide tools for local or provincial women's caucus before elections

1.2 PEER- AND THEMATIC-BASED MENTORING



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Increase understanding that encouraging women to run doesn't mean more competition but an opportunity to strengthen council

Plan to approach potential candidates multiple times as some women need to be asked many times before they consider the possibility

Don't just ask women to run, give them the tools they need to get started

Mentorship should be ongoing

Change agents are effective at breaking barriers by showing leadership and by being a well-spoken, knowledgeable person

Aim to inspire the next generation of leaders through good leadership and engagement



LOCAL LEVEL

Identify supports (former officials, women's groups etc.) that can be provided to female candidates who have announced they are running

Budget support to have seasoned mentors speak to possible future candidates

Offer additional training and courses on work-life balance to everyone on council

Work with women from other communities to share best practices

Look for mentors outside of council—community leaders, successful businesswomen or in other fields. Many challenges are not unique to politics

Ask council members to engage with women's groups and individuals to help dispel misconceptions

Showcase mentors

Encourage open discussions that address concerns and struggles around barriers

Identify local experts on a variety of topics that could be accessed by officials on an ongoing or as-needed basis to provide technical support. (e.g. LGBTQ2S experts, In reconciliation, private sector negotiations, inclusivity)



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Create a group that can collectively meet at larger events through provincial bodies or at annual conferences

Celebrate and identify individuals publicly to raise awareness

Create peer mentor or thematic groups where women can connect and discuss similar realities

Collect and distribute best ideas and practices, especially from municipalities who have achieved higher partnership from women on their council

Develop information sessions geared towards women

Develop provincial campaign schools

Share examples of new and past participants of council and how they have managed it

Encourage mentorship and create a committee

Encourage women to chair committees and speak at conferences



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

Provide best practices on diversity and inclusion for consideration by members

Continuous training offered on emerging and key trends

Promote members who are taking leadership roles or addressing diversity and inclusion in innovative and engaging manners

1.3 ENGAGING WITH MEN



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Encourage men in office to consider making themselves available to mentor young women

Ensure women are publicly given credit for ideas, actions, and efforts

Show active support for female colleagues and peers by endorsing plans or ideas, making women the spokesperson for key files and attentive listening

Encourage young women to run

Make “space” for female colleagues by not dominating council meetings or committee discussions, soliciting input, handing over the focus to female colleagues

Ensure you are not mentoring or championing people “just like you”, look for unique talents in others



LOCAL LEVEL

Champion female colleagues, add your voice to theirs

Actively make space for women during council and committee meetings

Ask active community members to consider municipal politics

Be ambassadors for the sector



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Acknowledge and promote the benefits and value of diversity

Mandatory workshop that speaks to good governance and a respectful workplace

Conduct interviews (or short recordings) with male spokespeople to speak about the positive influences, value, and positive impacts of female colleagues

Share examples of new and past participants of council and how they have managed it

Encourage mentorship and create a committee



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

Engage male leaders who want to be mentors for female councillors and/or mayors

Provide tools for male champions to provide support

Link leaders of all genders to support one another

Videos of testimonials on the positive impacts of women on council

Amplify positive messages

1.4 BUILDING A PIPELINE OF CANDIDATES AND LEADERS

Help young women access information and mentoring about municipal and political processes

Invite students to meetings to witness strong female politicians in practice

Encourage women to run for the association board and committees to increase number of people exposed to and engaged on various issues

Develop programs to get youth inspired to be in politics

1.4 Building a pipeline of candidates and leaders



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Pay attention to who is in your audience at council meetings and connect with them on a personal level to encourage involvement

Support girls' learning from an early age: make yourself available for school presentations, or get involved with Girl Guides

Speak candidly about challenges and successes of the role

Run mock councils for female students

Develop a junior achievement program

Work with high schools to create political tables or young working groups to offer suggestions to council on specific topics

Mentor and encourage girls at a young age to participate in municipal politics

Celebrate and identify women community members and leaders

Be a role model for the next generation of women. The more role models young women have the easier it will be for them to run

Recognize that young, racialized and diverse women face additional barriers—offer mentorship



LOCAL LEVEL

Organize mentorship meetings to chat about their campaigns, challenges, and opportunities

Provide opportunities for councillors and mayors to speak about challenges and successes

Encourage open and supportive discussions that address concerns and struggles around being elected

Provide education and support opportunities for professional development

Celebrate and identify female community members and leaders

Youth budget exercises and grants to engage young people on opportunities and realities of the job

Ensure diversity on an advisory council, which may lead to generating more interest in running for council



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Lobby for more provincial funding to support programs

Celebrate and promote regional female leaders, including mentors, who have made positive impacts to increase women's participation in municipal politics—especially Indigenous, Black, racialised, religious or cultural minorities, and women with disabilities

Showcase mentors



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

Celebrate achievements and recognize women who are successful in their roles as leaders

Celebrate successful women at the national level, including mentors, showcasing positive impacts of electing more women in municipal government

Celebrate successful female leaders of diverse backgrounds to promote them as role models—especially Indigenous, Black, racialised, religious or cultural minorities, and women with disabilities

Showcase good leadership and highlight strong women to acknowledge leadership

Recognize and value talented mentors

Breaking down informal decision-making and favouritism

2.1 ENGAGE MEN IN THE PROCESS OF ADVOCATING AGAINST EXCLUSIONARY ACTIONS



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Engage men as advocates and allies

Partner senior men with young women for mentorship

Recognize and attribute value to decision-making processes other than your own

Value and showcase positive role models

Be cognizant of language choices



LOCAL LEVEL

Engage men in the identification of potential leaders and encourage men to recruit women

Encouragement of advocates and male spokespeople on the value and positive contributions of a gender-diversified council

Identify inclusive retired elected officials to act as mentors and advocates



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Engage men as advocates and allies at the association and across the region

Build, recruit, and identify future leaders



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

Encourage men as advocates and allies at all levels

Build tools to promote the identification and support of future leaders

Canvas membership for mentors

Provide training in how to be a mentor (or mentee)

2.2 ADDRESSING “OLD BOYS CLUB” BEHAVIOUR BY ALL DEMOGRAPHICS

Encourage a paradigm shift from, “this is how things are done and will remain” to an openness to new ideas and positive change

Steer conversations of “old boys club” towards the overall benefits of inclusion and the problems that arise from exclusionary practices

More opportunities to debate and share policy ideas prior to and during campaigns

Ensure all members of the community—when considering running—have access to the tools and knowledge required

Provide statistics and information to ensure information dialogue and facts are available

Training for member municipalities on how to spot exclusionary practices and how to address them in an effective manner

Provide statistics and information to ensure evidence is available

Share national and international best practices

2.2 Addressing “old boys club” behaviour by all demographics



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Call out bad behaviours or comments to change the narrative of what is acceptable

Use inclusionary language

Lead by example

Avoid using acronyms and nicknames when talking about people, processes, or policies to ensure all understand

Recognize and evaluate how our perception of “old boys club” could reinforce the issue



LOCAL LEVEL

Ensure council has a strong chair who recognizes and addresses discriminatory behaviour and actions

Municipalities to create Women’s Advisory Committees to reach out to communities

Ensure support mechanisms are in place to help women address the impact of negative mental health resulting from negative behaviours

Have consequences in place for people who employ exclusionary practices



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

2.3 ACTIONS TO ADDRESS UNCONSCIOUS BIASES AND STEREOTYPES

Get informed and trained on unconscious biases

Be aware of our own biases

Presentation or discussion on how the “old boys network” works

Call it out when you see it

Tackle perceptions early on through the education system

Training on unconscious bias and how to purge it from thinking

Raise the issue when committees or councillors lean on stereotypes or traditional role expectations (e.g. snowplowing, maintenance, library committees equipment etc.)
Look for non traditional representatives

Ensure diversity of representation on all committees

Training on unconscious bias and how to get rid of it

Introduce policies (conduct, etc.) that give those outside the sphere of the old boys club something concrete to point to when transgressions occur. The idea that “we don’t need something like that” only serves to silence quieter voices

Training on unconscious bias and how to purge it from thinking

Best practices for inclusive language, or a tool for inclusive language

Speaker series from impressive women to better understand others’ experiences, impact and opportunities

Capture lessons learned from diverse candidates, successful or not, to learn from their experiences

2.3 Actions to address unconscious biases and stereotypes



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)



LOCAL LEVEL

Collect and share disaggregated data from all municipalities regarding candidates and elected officials

Form “positive women’s club” instead of “old boys club”

As part of a municipal orientation to new councillors, arrange a buddy-system of veteran female councillors to support them

Offer By-stander training for councillors and staff



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Have all candidates sign code of conduct at the time of submission of the candidacy forms (including during the campaigning period) to ensure anti-harassment, anti-bullying, and promote respectful dialogue

Ensure that there are consequences for violating code of conduct



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

2.4

BUILDING A PIPELINE OF CANDIDATES AND LEADERS

Encourage women to run, but do not reduce them to their gender. Emphasis should be on the fact that they are qualified for the role

Positive role models

Create opportunity for other women (bring someone along)

Empower women to build their confidence

Explore the use of other mediums such as art and dance as spheres of influence, draw attention to “old boys club” barriers, theatre element of politics, or grassroots movements

Actively seek new people in the community to help on committees and community groups

Collect disaggregated data and share local statistics and information

Post inclusive guides such as FCM/ Equal Voice “Getting to the Gate” on their websites before elections

Have a “women in politics” session or women’s caucus at regional gatherings

Create a provincial (and municipal) campaign school for women interested in wanting to run, able to mentor, etc.

Build leaders (mentorship by successful leaders, both men and women)

Strengthen spaces at annual conference for “women in politics” sessions and women’s networking

Create and share municipal campaign school programs for women interested in running and able to mentor

Improved access and sharing of knowledge

3.1

CORRECT INFORMATION GAPS AT ALL STAGES—FROM ATTRACTING POTENTIAL CANDIDATES TO RUNNING SUCCESSFUL CAMPAIGNS TO TRANSITIONING INTO THE ELECTED ROLE



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Women often need more information to feel comfortable putting their name up for election.

Create a document, “things to know before you run for council,” outlining rights and responsibilities that might help women on the fence decide whether they can commit

Encourage potential candidates to participate in general question and answer period at council meetings for a few months prior to an election so they can see council in action

Address additional barriers for young women by providing them with mentors

Identify potential mentors and dynamic leaders for candidates to approach —recognizing that mentors can also be leaders from other sectors

Engage in face-to-face mentoring meetings (more powerful than distant meetings)

Online training to learn more about policy in general



LOCAL LEVEL

Enhanced mandatory training for newly-elected council (male and female)

Training for those running for council on council roles, responsibilities, key functions

Crash course in the basics (e.g. terminology, mechanics of water & sewer, road repair) at new council orientations, and provincial or federal conferences. Information increases access for all.

One-on-one and small group mentoring meetings

“Mock council meetings” with relevant issues to increase familiarity and offer a realistic sense of how to be effective

Provide funding for elected representatives to be trained on policy, technical elements, or other aspects of their role

Training on the local governance act, conflict resolution, human resources management and time management

More inclusive orientation for new councillors



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Offer provincial/territorial training sessions so it's easier for young and working women to attend

The municipal association conferences could offer a session where informal mentoring or peer support could be initiated

Structure school government council to mirror municipal sector

Work with curriculum and school boards to increase links and awareness of civics

Legislate parity for all representatives (a recommendation from stakeholders—not an FCM position)

Enhance politics courses in university curriculum; include in high school and primary school; work with school trustees and Ministry of Education to enhance civics teaching

Connect councillors based on municipal size

Facilitate mentor connections



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

Offer regional training sessions (and online or virtual) so it's easier for young and working women to attend

To facilitate duplication, gather models, tools, and examples to share costs, impacts, and benefits of each model

Ensure existing tools and guides are easily available

Offer media relations training to potential candidates and elected officials including practical Dos and Don'ts

3.1 Correct information gaps at all stages—from attracting potential candidates to running successful campaigns to transitioning into the elected role



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Use inclusive language and facilitation techniques to ensure all members have the space to ask questions and engage



LOCAL LEVEL

Increase number of youth councils and opportunities for youth to engage

General public meeting hosted by current council to increase accessibility

Information sessions for prospective council members

Promote committee positions with cultural communities and associations that represent the diversity of the community

Improve understanding by streaming council meetings for those who cannot attend

Promote open meetings and encourage attendance (offer child care for participants and councillors alike)

Offer debate and effective negotiating training

Diversity and cultural sensitivity training for municipal administrators and officials



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Prepare and provide a mentors' needs assessment

Offer media relations training to potential candidates and elected officials including practical Dos and Don'ts



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

3.2

INCREASED CIRCULATION AND SHARING OF EXISTING TOOLS—KNOWLEDGE HUB

Learn to recognize and value different styles of leadership so all people can equally share their perspective

Use webinars or online resources as training tools—they're cheap and far reaching

Create, update and manage a local Knowledge hub

Identify mentors

Mentor guides for federal training and best practices on how to provide mentorship

3.2 Increased circulation and sharing of existing tools—Knowledge hub



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Encourage women to speak their mind by ensuring the space is allocated for those who are not always first to offer their points of view

Online surveys and interviews for former advisory body members to ask them about barriers they saw, and suggestions on how to make it easier for women of visible minorities to become members

Continually solicit input from under-represented groups



LOCAL LEVEL

Ensure policy training is available for all stakeholders at accessible times and formats

Provide definitions of councillors' jobs

Tools and simple resources to increase understanding of the varied roles and ways to participate on council

There are a variety of good resources already available, make these resources widely known and available to women or interested groups

Talk about the rewards of making a difference in your community

Make the Elected Official Education Program (EOEP), or other similar training course, available to all staff, including part-time staff



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Peer mentoring should stick to provincial or municipal level (due to legislation)

Offering of technical training (provincial/territorial /national)



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

Work with national groups like Girl Guides to include civic badges to promote engagement and awareness at a young age

Provide examples and training on inclusive policies

Share existing models – easier to secure buy-in if a municipality can learn from another municipality's experience

3.3

ACTIVE PROGRAMS TO INCREASE AWARENESS AND POSITIVE PERCEPTIONS OF MUNICIPAL POLITICS

Educate people about the roles of councillors

Increase youth councils or positions

Personal approach—invite guest to a Q+A with people who are interested in sharing the journey of a candidate, elected official, campaign manager, etc.

Identify and support mentors

Provide funding for mentors to travel (so the burden does not fall on them), especially in rural areas

Funding for elected officials to pursue ongoing training—the available development budget is often insufficient

Provincial awareness campaign about elections and benefits

Promote and showcase what council does

Training in differentiation of roles and responsibilities of various positions (e.g. clerks vs. council)

Increased promotion of influential women leaders across communities, provinces, and territories

Amplify Women's History Month via Facebook profiles and recognition

3.3 Active programs to increase awareness and positive perceptions of municipal politics



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Facilitate a workshop that addresses gender equity

Address general disinterest in municipal politics: educate people about the value, impact, importance, and positive returns



LOCAL LEVEL

Require councillors to earn a certain number of learning or training credits each year and ensure that relevant learning opportunities are accessible

Provincial awareness campaign

Celebrate women's achievements—women councillors, mayors, and city staff/volunteers

Have community leaders take an active role in seeking out other leaders

Establish candidate schools or info sessions for women in preparation for next election

Offer campaign schools to encourage and support women who are interested in running

Hold information sessions for spouses and partners of candidates to build more familial support around women running

Conduct outreach with underrepresented groups, with training and awareness to prepare those interested in further engagement

Consider engagement activities that are open for women only

Develop permanent women advisory committees



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Anti-bullying and harassment campaign (develop templates)

Anti-harassment "Parity-bot" to counteract negative social media messages with positive

Roles and responsibilities training (professional development activity)

Host campaign colleges and info sessions in rural areas (use technology to make them accessible)

Develop permanent women advisory committees within PTA

Create an extensive "shopping list" of courses which councillors and members can choose from and that they can complete in their own time.



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

Bring more attention to FCM's Women in Local Government recognition award and scholarship programs

"Dear 20 year old me" campaigns by successful and unsuccessful candidates to share candid truths and words of wisdom

Support Anti-bullying and harassment campaigns led by PTAs (develop templates)

Capture data on who is campaigning, election successes and losses nationally to monitor trends

Conduct an analysis of the different campaigns to create a platform of best practices and tools to share before municipal elections

Look at tools and best practices internationally to share with members

3.4 COLLECTION AND SHARING OF DATA



INDIVIDUAL LEVEL

(Elected or members of the community)

Positive and informative use of social media posts by councillors or community members to better inform public and tackle misperceptions

Promote job shadowing by youth and others showing interest

Tweets by city councillors on the job. "a day in the life" exposure



LOCAL LEVEL

Better use of social media (information sharing) for positive and engaging support

Collect disaggregated data (broken down by age, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, etc) at the municipal level and distribute widely

Collect demographic info to identify underrepresented groups and proactively encourage participation

Tap into cultural experiences to speak to others of a similar identity (those of similar nationalities, newcomers, etc.)

Tap into culturally-appropriate messages to encourage participation

Translate the Municipal Act into predominant languages spoken in the community

Collect information, by gender, ethnicity, and identity to better showcase the gaps and how to address them



PROVINCIAL OR TERRITORIAL LEVEL

Translate municipalities act resource manual into new local governance

Ensure policies are inclusive to everyone

Capture and use demographic info about communities to allow for more programming

Capture intersectional data on who is campaigning, election successes and losses, duration of mandates

Translate the Municipal Act into predominant languages spoken in the region to increase understanding

Videos from councillors and mayors on why they like their job

Run a positive image campaign addressing negative public perceptions

Collect data on female candidates over time, interviews with women who ran, public forums, analysing policies of civic parties regarding women



NATIONAL LEVEL

(National bodies such as FCM or pan Canadian organisations)

Capture intersectional data on who is campaigning, election successes and losses, duration of mandates; examine provincial/territorial and national trends and gaps