

# MISSING IN ACTION

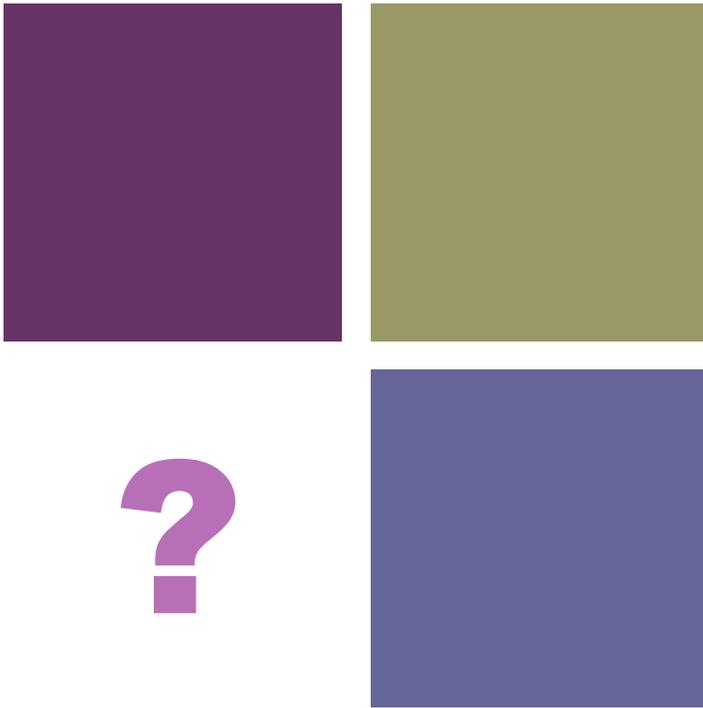
## FINAL REPORT



### 2013 Community Action Project

Increasing female participation as elected members  
in South Australian Local Government

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## Missing in Action - Community Action Project

Our Community Action Project (CAP) tackles a major adaptive challenge facing Local Government in South Australia - increasing the representation of women as elected members.

Half of South Australia's population is female, yet women currently represent only 27% of elected members in Local Government, and current trends suggest this will remain stagnant. This challenge is not exclusive to Local Government – it is a reality across all tiers of Government and on private boards.

South Australia's next Local Government elections will be held in November 2014, making it timely to review why women are 'Missing in Action' from elected positions in Council, the subsequent impact on local communities and how this can be addressed.

Following consideration of a range of possible interventions, the CAP team agreed to run three World Café forums to explore two pivotal questions with women from diverse backgrounds:

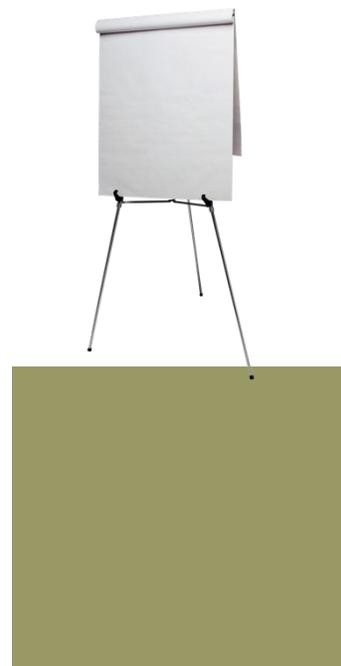
- What does effective community leadership look like to you, and
- What message would inspire you to become involved in community leadership

Consolidated findings for what effective community leadership looks like includes a focus on community that is clear, relevant and optimistic. Leaders are expected to be capable, confident, assertive and resilient.

The four key elements that would encourage women to become involved in community leadership are: understanding relevance and the value individuals can add, an inviting and encouraging culture, opportunity for dynamic and innovative change and support and mentoring to succeed.

Essentially the key to encouraging greater participation by women is in the messaging that the LGA and Local Councils provide. In particular, it needs to show:

- relevance of local councils to communities
- new people and ideas are welcome
- support and information is readily accessible, and
- local councils provide genuine and positive leadership opportunities.



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# PROJECT BACKGROUND



## Fact:

Women are currently under-represented as elected members in South Australian Local Government.

## Proof:

Women represent half of all South Australians aged 18+.

Women represent 27% of all elected members in South Australian Local Government.

## Project Background:

Governor's Leadership Program participants are required to work on a complex Community Action Project (CAP) – for which there is no simple solution. Our CAP tackles a major adaptive challenge facing Local Government in South Australia - increasing the representation of women as elected members. During 2013 we undertook comprehensive diagnosis, which brought a fresh perspective to this complex issue, and identified a range of barriers limiting female participation in Local Government. We undertook to provide the Local Government Association with recommendations to address this issue.



## Our Vision

For Councils to be more representative of their communities.



# Project Background

## Our Motivation

Our work on this project is purely voluntary. As a team of four women working full time, with strong family commitments it has been important for us to remain focused on our underlying motivator in order to maintain the momentum needed to complete this project.

Our motivation to increase female participation is not about 'women for women's sake'. Research has shown there are a number of key benefits from female representation in government:

- Women are creative, offering a different, more holistic perspective on community issues [1].
- Women build strong collaborative working relationships in local communities [1].
- Representation that reflects the broader community positively impacts on how the community perceives their inclusion in policy [2].
- Women raise and give focus to women and children's issues [3].
- An increase in social capital for the community and positive attitudes towards the political process. 'Social capital refers to dense networks of civic engagement that produce a capacity for trust, reciprocity and co-operation (social capital)' [4] [5]

## Research and Methodology

Our research showed a strong correlation between the proportion of women nominees and the proportion of female elected members in Local Government elections. Evidence suggests that by encouraging a greater number of female nominees in South Australia's upcoming election, we can expect to achieve increased female representation as elected members in Local Government.

Following consideration of a range of possible strategies, the CAP team agreed, in conjunction with the Local Government Association (LGA) of SA, to focus on uncovering a powerful value proposition for why women should consider nominating for Council through a series of World Café forums with women not currently engaged with local government.

Findings and key recommendations from these forums are intended to provide a key input into the Local Government Association's candidate attraction campaign for the 2014 Local Government elections.

For us, project success will be two-fold:

1. The LGA finding genuine value in our work and considering it during their campaign development.
2. An increase in the number of female candidate nominating for the 2014 and subsequent Local Government Elections.

# WORLD CAFÉ FORUMS

Three 'Women in Community Leadership' world café events were held between 30 March - 6 April 2014, across three metropolitan locations (Mawson Lakes, Adelaide, Marion). The events were promoted for nil cost through:

- personal networks (family, friends, colleagues)
- professional networks (e.g. Leaders Institute of South Australia, Women in Innovation and Technology, National Council for Women SA)
- Community Centres
- pre-promotion at venues (flyers and signage)
- media release (distributed by LGA SA)
- online (Council and LGA websites)
- social media (Linked In and Facebook)

99 people registered for the events and 71 attended (an attendance rate of 72%). All attendees were female, predominantly aged between 35-54 years (64%) and employed full-time (61%). Residents from 19 Local Government areas were present across the three events. (See Attachment 1 for participant details).

## Process

The events were run using the world-café format - a simple, effective, and flexible format for hosting and encouraging large group dialogue. Key elements of the world café events are outlined below:

**Ambience:** Ensuring the environment is relaxed and welcoming is core to a successful world café. Ambience was created through the use of small intimate tables, flowers, candles, mood music and the tapas/high tea catering

**Scene setting:** Ensuring people feel comfortable and relaxed is an importance element of a world café— as it promotes honest and open communication between a diverse group of participants. The participants were seated in small groups (approximately four) around individual tables. A member of the CAP team welcomed participants, explained the purpose of the events and handed over to experienced facilitator, Josie McLean, to explain the world café process and etiquette.



# WORLD CAFÉ FORUMS

## Focused conversations

The process began with the first of three twenty minute rounds of conversation.

The first round was prefaced with the question ***'What does effective female community leadership look like to you?'*** This question was designed to warm the group up and focus their thinking on females in community leadership roles. Whilst discussing the topic all group members were encouraged to capture their thoughts and key words on the butchers paper on each table. At the end of the twenty minutes these were collected and everyone moved to a new, different table.



The second conversation round focused on the question ***'What message would inspire you to become involved in community leadership?'*** Once again people captured their thoughts on communal paper throughout the conversation. At the end of the twenty minutes each group nominated a table host to remain at the table, and all other members moved to a new, different table.

common threads, connections and linkages from their previous conversations. The purpose of this third round was to deepen the conversation and identify connecting themes, commonalities or surprising differences from across the entire group.

**Harvesting:** At the end of the third round themes were harvested from across the group. Each table host summarised the key insights from their group, and these were captured and displayed on pin-up boards around the room. There was a lot of commonality in the messages presented by each table, and indeed across the three sessions.

**Prioritisation:** All participants were then given three coloured dots and invited to vote for the messages they believed were most important - the ones that would genuinely inspire them to become involved in community leadership. Participants could allocate their votes in any way they liked – all three to one message or across two or three messages.



# WORLD CAFÉ FORUMS

## Key findings

### Question 1 – What does effective community leadership look like to you?

Showing a genuine concern for the community is very important. All groups desired leaders that seek to improve their communities, rather than achieving personal agendas. There were a number of common qualities considered essential to be effective in a leadership role. The key criteria for an effective community leader are:

- Community focused
  - Passionate, visible and inspirational
  - Authentic, has integrity
  - A role model for everyone (not just women)
- Clear, relevant and optimistic vision
  - Strategic, takes calculated risks, e.g. social entrepreneur
- Capable leader - Confident/assertive/resilient/energetic
  - Able to collaborate and engage others through diverse networks
  - Effective communicator
    - Active listener, supportive and inclusive of others, 2-way exchanges
  - Adaptable, flexible, compassionate, open to new ideas and wears many 'hats'



### Question 2 – What message would inspire you to become involved in community leadership?

All three groups raised closely linked points with four clear message themes that would generate greater consideration of nominations for local government:

- Relevant: Greater awareness of local governments & their role in the community and how participation can make a difference
  - Big picture view of local government and issues faced
  - Role requirements and expectations
- Inviting: Welcoming and encouraging culture that values collaboration
  - New ideas and people welcomed
  - Diverse perspectives and cultural backgrounds
- Opportunity:
  - To be a respected voice for the community
  - Potential for dynamic and innovative change ('to make a difference')
    - Effort worthwhile
    - Challenges require their skills/abilities
    - Ability to shape 'big decisions'
- Support to Succeed: Mentoring and development opportunities
  - Support with nomination and election campaign processes
  - Development to be an effective community leader
  - Broad supportive network (across and within LGAs and external groups)

# WORLD CAFÉ FORUMS

## Key findings

### Question 2 – Deepening the conversation

It was also clear that whilst these are the messages that would encourage women to consider nominating, they describe an aspirational council environment. There was significant debate on whether leadership in local government can currently provide such conditions. Concerns relate to the current culture of not inviting new perspectives (or councillors) and that the culture does not provide an opportunity to be a respected voice in the community. The northern discussion group shared a view that southern metropolitan councils provided a more inviting culture than their local councils. This was considered to be due to supportive programs and leadership from the Mayors of Marion and Onkaparinga.

Differences across councils require different messaging. Hence, it is not possible for the LGA to create a general message based on all four themes to use for Local Government elections in 2014. Instead, we propose two distinct levels of messaging on Local Council elections:

- Local Government Association (LGA)
- Individual Councils

The themes provide a start-point for each council and the LGA to consider the presence (or absence) of these elements and to tailor messages accordingly. For councils that are seeking to encourage greater nominations from women (and other groups), the themes identify where change is required prior to the 2018 elections.

Groups noted that there are existing role models and that sharing their stories can inspire others to consider nomination for council. Dr Felicity-Ann Lewis, Mayor of Marion and National President of the Australian Local Government Association, and the late Joy Baluch, long-term Mayor of Port Augusta, were two women mentioned as being well-known and providing role models for council leadership.



# RECOMMENDATIONS

## **Recommendation 1**

*The LGASA take the lead on generating messages for the first theme of relevance on behalf of all LGs in SA.*

This is an essential message as all groups agreed that there was a lack of general information that shows the relevance of local councils beyond 'roads, rates and rubbish', and the roles and expectations of councillors. Whilst the LGA has provided this type of messaging in the past the lack of awareness by participants shows a need to consider how to reach more people with a message that educates whilst inspiring nominations for council. The brand of 'Local Government' needs a makeover and the theme of relevance has never been more important.

Each council can enhance this message with more specific local examples of the key issues and challenges faced by their community, highlighting the potential to help shape the unique future of their community.

## **Recommendation 2**

*Messages must include a call to action, i.e. to make contact via the LGA website or their local council to learn more about nomination and the role of Councillors.*

Provide positive and supportive material in a variety of formats and options, including the opportunity to meet with someone to better understand the role and process of nomination well before nominations open as well as once women begin to consider nominating for council. This should include, for example, highlighting the new childcare provisions.

Messages need to highlight the skills and abilities required of councillors to contribute positively to Local Government; qualities and characteristics identified in question 1 together with real-life examples from councillors can help to shape this aspect of the messaging.

## **Recommendation 3**

*Provide opportunities for female role models to inspire other women to nominate for council.*

As previously mentioned, current and past female Mayors were mentioned by participants and sharing their stories can be inspiring. This was identified by the groups as a significant component in helping potential female nominees discuss Council roles in a safe setting. It is also consistent with the findings of the VLGA when they undertook a two-year campaign specifically targeted at increasing female nominees in their 2012 elections and which resulted in a 10% increase in female nominations and elected Councillors.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation 4

*Messages should demonstrate the opportunity for Councillors to 'make a difference' in their community.*

It is important that this message be about the opportunity to serve the community, not to serve oneself. One point that resonated with participants was that there are many opportunities to volunteer for the community, so why is Council different, why should they put their energy into Council instead of other volunteer activities?

To address this aspect, the message needs to highlight that Councillors have the chance to shape big decisions, to contribute to innovative and inspiring changes for the good of the community. Real-life examples (e.g. case studies) would help to enhance this message.

## Recommendation 5

*The LGA facilitate broad networks, mentoring and succession planning.*

The fourth message theme (support to succeed) is likely to be an area where further work can be undertaken for the 2018 election both by the LGA and individual councils. The value placed on mentoring and development opportunities was very high and confirms the need for the LGA to demonstrate that they already exist or to support and develop these opportunities.

It was considered by many participants that succession planning for Councillors appeared not to happen at all, so demonstrating that it does happen and that potential nominees could get involved would be valuable.

## Recommendation 6

*Encourage women to encourage other women.*

Most women are naturally good networkers and communicators but the female psyche generally is not particularly confident and this results in many women believing that they do not have all the skills or ability to tackle community leadership, such as being a Councillor. When coupled with inexperience with campaigning and the fear of putting oneself 'out there' in public, this creates significant barriers for many women. Experience supports the view that a woman who has campaigned, regardless of the outcome, is more likely to try again, so it is important that women:

- are encouraged to seek out other women in their networks to help them with their campaign
- encourage other women leaders to consider nominating for council
- be given the opportunity to participate in campaigning.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## Recommendation 7

*The LGASA take over a LinkedIn group (Women in Community Leadership) that was set up out of the momentum and interest garnered through the workshops.*

Many women expressed interest in being kept in touch about the results of this project and wished to continue the conversations they had started at the world café sessions. A LinkedIn group was suggested and set up and all world café participants, as well as other women who had expressed interest in the project were invited to join the group. A total of 65 participants have requested a summary version of our report – a clear indication of interest.

These groups are an excellent way to facilitate long-term dialogue, to share resources, promote events and build networks.

## Summary

Female representation is a key issue across all tiers of government in Australia and on private boards. The focus of this study was to assist the Local Government Association of SA to improve representation of women on Councils, by considering candidate promotional messaging.

In summary, information gathered from the World Café forums suggests messaging needs to show:

- the relevance of local councils to communities
- that new people and ideas are welcome
- that support and information about councils and the role of councillors is easily accessible
- that local councils provide positive leadership opportunities. (Not all councils may be in a credible position to provide this message. If this is the case then no messaging encouraging women to nominate can be made. Instead, councils can consider ways that they can credibly provide this message in 2018.)

While the LGA is in a good position to help develop some of these messages and activities, it is also recommended that this be done in partnership with other female oriented organisations such as the Women's Leadership Institute Australia, the National Council for Women, the Australian Local Government Women's Association, Women and Leadership Australia, and the Australian Centre for Leadership for Women.

## ATTACHMENT 1

Participant profile information is outlined below:

Figure 1 – Participation Age Profile (predominantly 35-54 years old)

Age Range	Percentage
Under 18	0
18-25 years	4
26-34 years	10
<b>35-44 years</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>45-54 years</b>	<b>27</b>
55-64 years	16
65+ years	6

Figure 2 – Participant Employment Status (predominantly employed)

Employment Status	Percentage
<b>Full-time employment</b>	<b>61</b>
Part-time employment	20
Full-time student	1
Full-time home-maker	1
Not currently employed	1
Retired	9
Full-time volunteer	1
Prefer not to say	4

Figure 3 – Local Government Areas (LGAs) Representation (19 LGAs)

Local Government Area	Percentage
Adelaide	7
Adelaide Hills	3
Burnside	4
Campbelltown	6
Charles Sturt	13
Holdfast bay	9
Marion	4
Mitcham	6
Norwood/Payneham/St Peters	7
Onkaparinga	7
Port Adelaide	9
Salisbury	1
Unley	6
Tea Tree Gully	1
Walkerville	3
West Torrens	6
Yankalilla	1
Mallala	1
Peterborough	1

## ATTACHMENT 2

### REFERENCES

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2. Bochel, C. and H. Bochel, *Women 'leaders' in local government in the UK*. Parliamentary Affairs, 2008. **61**(3): p. 426-441
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4. Shortall, S., *Are rural development programmes socially inclusive? Social inclusion, civic engagement, participation, and social capital: Exploring the differences*. Journal of Rural Studies, 2008. **24**(4): p. 450-457.
5. Karp, J.A. and S.A. Banducci, *When politics is not just a man's game: Women's representation and political engagement*. Electoral Studies, 2008. **27**(1): p. 105-115.