

WOMEN'S PERSPECTIVES ON INCLUSIVE MUNICIPAL GOVERNANCE

The Peach Paper Re-Visited
June 2009

City for All Women Initiative – CAWI



The City for All Women Initiative (CAWI) is a partnership between women from diverse communities, community organizations, universities and the City of Ottawa. Our mission is to strengthen the capacity of the full diversity of women and the City of Ottawa to work in partnership so as to create a more inclusive city and advance gender equality. *We believe that our City can become a better place to live when the ideas and concerns of women of all backgrounds are taken into account.*

Opportunity

Ottawa City Council is currently engaged in the Mid-term Governance Review Process to review its governance structure to help shape future governance decisions and has invited public participation in the discussion. Given our mission, CAWI welcomes this invitation and presents the “Peach Paper Re-Visited” in response.

Why a Peach Paper?

When City Council held their Governance Review at the beginning of the 2006-2010 term, CAWI presented a document to City Council on what women in our network deemed to be important for inclusive municipal governance. We called the paper, a “Peach Paper” as peach is the colour of the scarf that is worn by women in the network when we present our views to City Council. This document is a continuation of our dialogue with City Council on governance.

Shared objective

Our aim is to assist City Council in achieving Objective 3 of the 2008-2010 Municipal Strategic Plan, Governance Priorities.

Objective 3: Commit to and develop a democratic, engaging and visible process to maximize input from residents in the work of Council and in policy development, while ensuring that seniors, new Canadians, women and the economically disadvantaged are included.

In holding a series of forums, women throughout Ottawa have identified the following actionable recommendations to enhance inclusive decision making in the City of Ottawa.

It is important to note, when we refer to women throughout this text, we mean all women in our full diversity, including Aboriginal women, immigrant, Francophone, visible minorities, lesbians, bi-sexual and trans individuals, those living on low-income or living with disabilities.

Create more inclusive practices for citizen engagement



There are many factors that influence women's experience of living in Ottawa, such as the community we live in, our cultural background, and our household income. Being more informed and responsive to the diversity of women's experiences in decision making offers the potential for better outcomes and results for the City as a whole.

Recommendation #1: Be proactive

- Establish mechanisms to put the Public Participation Policy into action (e.g., training and resources for elected representatives and city officials to facilitate public participation).
- Encourage staff at all levels to facilitate meaningful engagement.
- Have a staff person who is a resource for elected representatives and city officials to identify effective mechanisms for public participation.
- Create opportunities for public input at the initial stages of proposal (e.g. consult before drafting papers) so that residents can be proactive rather than reactive.
- Participate in discussions that are being facilitated by community members (e.g., CAWI's Women's Action Forums) – go into the community and simply listen.

Recommendation #2: Make the process more accessible

- Post staff reports 2 weeks prior to public consultation or Standing Committee, in both official languages, easy to understand text (plain language) and in different mediums (e.g., print, electronic).
- Use a variety of tools to maximize input from citizens and to encourage broader participation. New technologies present one way to support access, but it is important to recognize that many in our city do not have the capacity or inclination to share their perspectives this way.
- Include an allotted time for each agenda item in public meetings which respects the use of volunteer's time and allows the public to estimate time to be present.
- Hold public consultations at times when public is available (e.g., avoid summer or holiday seasons).

Share information

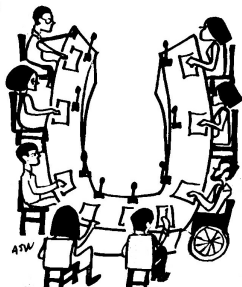


A challenge that often exists for women is that information on decision making processes is not shared in a timely and transparent manner. This limits our capacity to inform discussion and decisions being made. Across Canada, women represent only 12.9 % of mayors and 22.9% of City Councillors. (FCM). Visible minority women and Aboriginal women are 1%. The goal of FCM is to have women be 30% of City Councillors by 2026. As we work towards greater representation of women across our diversity in formal structures of decision-making, it becomes even more important for the City to inform women about how to participate and make sure our voices are heard.

Recommendation #3: Inform Public on How to Participate

- Educate residents about how the system works – including the significance of key documents and decision points (Strategic Plan, Governance Reviews, Fiscal Framework and Annual Budget Process) and how public can inform decision-making.
- Get information out more broadly about public consultations (e.g., print in free daily papers, circulate posters to community centres) and use simple, multi-lingual, multi-media formats.
- Be more proactive about outreach (e.g., hold meetings in the community) with due consideration for cultural differences (e.g., some people are not comfortable coming out at night, speaking at microphones, may have apprehensions of police involvement given experiences with authority figures in countries of origin).

Strengthen Effectiveness of Advisory Committees



For decision making to be inclusive, there must be structured processes that are ongoing, transparent and well identified. Advisory Committees offer residents a forum, which is often less intimidating than some formal public consultation processes, to raise concerns and share perspectives. We believe that these committees should strive to be more representative in their membership to reflect the diversity of our City and can be strengthened.

Recommendation #4: Improve selection process

- Develop an application form that asks for specific information that is needed to help in the selection, such as skills, interest, knowledge, links to community and invite self-identification.
- Develop guidance documents for selection panels that encourage members to consider people from diverse backgrounds to create committees that are reflective of City's demographic composition.

Recommendation #5: Train all members

- Provide training to all Advisory Committees so all members understand how city government works, clarify roles and responsibilities (e.g., linkage to implementation of Strategic Plan), and how they can influence decisions being made.
- Encourage Advisory Committees to view themselves as conduits for sharing information with public and attaining public input to support municipal decision making.
- Guide chairs of Advisory Committees to facilitate in a way that encourages everyone to participate and try to achieve consensus decision making.
- Create opportunities for Chairs to meet frequently to share information amongst themselves (share practices and pressing issues) and to learn from each other.

Recommendation #6: Strengthen lines of communication between Standing Committees and Advisory Committees

- Communicate any priorities Standing Committees have set for the year to the Advisory Committee at the beginning of the term and for consideration while developing annual work plans. Be clear about expectations of Advisory Committees.
- Keep lines of communication open so that the Advisory Committees are informed about how their input is being addressed by staff and Standing Committees.
- However, while it is valuable that Advisory Committees support the priorities of Standing Committees, it is also important that when they see an issue emerging in the community, there is a way to bring it forward.

Triple-bottom line approach to fiscal management – financial, social and environmental



Increasing economic challenges facing our city puts services in jeopardy of being cut which has a particular impact on women. We take on more work as family caregivers and community volunteers. We see erosion in our standard of living, as it is largely women who work in these “caring” professions. We find it more difficult to access services to meet the needs of our families. The budget is not just about dollars and cents. It’s about our quality of life and our communities. Our ideas and experiences need to be heard.

Recommendation #7: Establish a process that starts from the bottom-up and addresses community needs

- Create opportunities for public to inform draft budget at the outset and when the Draft Budget is prepared.
- Hold public consultation at Standing Committees rather than at Council as a Whole to enable better dialogue between officials and public.