



CITY OF OTTAWA
CITY FOR ALL WOMEN INITIATIVE, 2006

PLANNING AN EFFECTIVE CONSULTATION

**A Guide for Including
the Full Diversity
of Women**



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WE THANK THE FOLLOWING PERSONS AND ORGANIZATIONS FOR THEIR CONTRIBUTION TO THIS GUIDE:

Caroline Andrew, University of Ottawa

Nubia Cermeño, Latin American Women's Organization, LAZO

Deb Chansonneuve, Consultant on Aboriginal and Gender Issues

Valerie Collicott, WISE, Women's Initiatives for Safer Environments

Claude Crustin, Centre de Ressources Communautaire Orléans-Cumberland

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Jacqueline Nyiramukwende, Rwandese Community Association, Women's Committee

CITY OF OTTAWA –

Lois Emburg - Corporate Services Department

Andree Hill, Tamiza Merali, Colleen Pallet - Community and Protective Services Department

Jocelyne St Jean and Janet Onyango—City Manager's Office

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EDITING: Suzanne Doerge, City for All Women Initiative

TRANSLATION: Genevieve Allard, City for All Women Initiative

LAYOUT AND COVER DESIGN: jwalkerdesign.ca

For more information, visit www.cawi-ivtf.org

Why This Guide?

Are you planning a consultation to develop a new programme, service or policy?

Do you want to ensure the consultation is as comprehensive as possible, while making best use of limited time and resources?

TO PLAN, YOU START BY ASKING:

- What are the expected results?
- Who are the key informants?
- What do you need to know?
- What is the best way to collect the information?
- How will the information be used?

Answering each of these questions, you will want to consider the full diversity of people in our city. Women have valuable insights for planning, but they face barriers and discrimination that may keep them from being heard.

By taking steps to ensure meaningful participation of the full diversity of women at every stage of your consultation, you will be more able to achieve your expected results.

In this guide, we indicate why taking the full diversity of women into account is so crucial and provide tips for ensuring this will happen.

For more information on gender-inclusive planning, see:

Gender Equality Guide: Promoting equality and inclusion of the full diversity of women in the City of Ottawa, 2006



Why Cities are Taking Steps to Include Women in Consultations

A report released by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities in 2004, *Increasing Women's Participation in Municipal Decision Making*, concluded women are an underutilized resource in municipal planning. When the diversity of women's experience is included, more knowledge comes forward leading to better services, more efficient use of resources and more informed decision making by elected officials.

In endorsing the *IULA Declaration on Women and Local Government*, the City of Ottawa joined with other cities globally in committing to include women in decision making and planning.

Roles between women and men are changing. However, women still experience cities differently than men. Women have knowledge and experience to bring to your consultation.

- Women know how well services work as they access them in their traditional role as family caregiver.
- Women see how effectively city services interconnect (ex. bus routes and services) when they are seeking services for their family.
- Women know about time saving measures as they have time constraints in juggling work and family.
- Women are aware of safety issues as they are more susceptible to violence.
- Women know first-hand the value of a social service, as they are most often social service providers.
- Women see the impact at the community level where they work as volunteers.

INCLUDING THE FULL DIVERSITY OF WOMEN

Aboriginal women, recent immigrant and francophone women, visible minority women, women living in poverty, youth and senior women, women with disabilities, lesbians and transgendered all have specific experiences and knowledge to offer.

However, barriers and prejudice may keep many women from being heard. They may:

- Be occupied working in the home.
- Have limited English.
- Have limited time and resources.
- May not trust government.
- Don't recognize their own expertise.
- Have learned that planning is men's business.
- Have experienced discrimination and racism on the part of the city.
- Have been consulted in the past, but saw no results.

The problems and challenges facing humanity are global but occur and have to be dealt with at the local level. Women have the equal right to freedom from poverty, discrimination, environmental degradation and insecurity. To fight these problems and to meet the challenges of sustainable human development, it is crucial that women be empowered and involved as decision-makers, planners and managers.

(IULA Worldwide Declaration on Women in Local Government, 1998)

Eight Tips for Including the Full Diversity of Women

- TIP 1: Use a Gender Equality Lens.**
- TIP 2: Recognize Women as Key Informants.**
- TIP 3: Involve a Diversity of Women in Decision-Making.**
- TIP 4: Connect With Women Where They Are.**
- TIP 5: Use Women-Friendly Logistics.**
- TIP 6: Ask Questions Relevant to Women's Experiences.**
- TIP 7: Use Methods Inclusive of the Diversity of Women.**
- TIP 8: Value the Input Women Give.**

TIP 1

Use a Gender Equality Lens

Inclusion is one of the key principles of Ottawa’s 20/20 Growth Management Plan and the Public Participation Policy. The Equity and Diversity Policy of the City of Ottawa requires it.

To be inclusive means a consultation will be more complete and the results will be effective.

Planning is never gender neutral. We cannot assume that what is good for men is good for women.

Women have both common and unique perspectives to bring due to their diverse backgrounds and socio-economic status. To be comprehensive requires seeing the interconnection between equity issues, such as: gender, race, ethnicity, language, ability, age, income level and sexual orientation. And then taking these differences into account at each step of the process.

...establish a framework that requires all departments within the City to embrace the spirit of equity and diversity in the development of their policies and programs that impact the delivery of City services, the use of City facilities, grants to external agencies and other outwardly focused activities.

**Equity and Diversity Policy,
City of Ottawa, 2002**

GENDER EQUALITY LENS:

- Are women and men affected differently by the need or social problem, policy or service?
- Are there steps we can take to address any differences and reduce inequalities?
- Are some groups of women more acutely affected or at-risk of exclusion: according to their:
 - **aboriginal ancestry;**
 - **income;**
 - **race or ethnicity;**
 - **language;**
 - **physical and mental ability;**
 - **marital status;**
 - **family status and dependents;**
 - **age;**
 - **geographic location;**
 - **length of time in Canada;**
 - **sexual orientation**
- Are there steps we can take to address the differences and reduce inequalities these women experience?
- How do we reflect this in our work?

TIP 2

Recognize Women as Key Informants

CONSULT WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Women's organizations and organizations serving women have knowledge about the population with whom they work and expertise in addressing community concerns. Those organizations who have demonstrated a commitment to working with women's communities will be your best resource for reaching specific groups of women.

ASK WHICH WOMEN ARE BEING HEARD

In some cases, you may have a majority of women at a consultation, but it is also important to consider:

- Are you reaching women of different races, ethnicities, abilities, languages, sexual orientations and levels of income?
- Who do the women present represent?
- Who actually speaks?
- Will their perspective be included in your final report?



CONSIDER WHICH WOMEN ARE KEY TO YOUR RESEARCH

- **Mothers** bring daily-lived experience in linking the needs of family and community.
- **Women living-in-poverty** will know what is needed to give the marginalized a step up to participate more equally in our city.
- **Recent immigrant women** bring a wealth of skills and commitment to cross-cultural understanding.
- **Women with disabilities** have an acute understanding of issues of safety.
- **Aboriginal women** bring the strength of their unique cultural identity and knowledge that the health of individuals, families and communities is inseparable.
- **Rural women** know what it means to raise a family far from the city centre.

TIP 3

Involve a Diversity of Women in Decision Making

From designing the consultation to implementation of your recommendations, consider to what extent the full diversity of women are included as decision makers in the process.

- Designing the consultation (Identify barriers to access and plans to minimize them; develop questions that will frame the consultation).
- Analyzing and interpreting the data.
- Developing recommendations.
- Deciding on the recommendations.
- Implementing the recommendations.

If specific groups of women are not included who would be important to the issue, what adjustment can you make to include them?

COLLABORATE WITH WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Work in partnerships with local women's organizations and organizations working with women to design your consultation so as to ensure it is presented in a way that is meaningful and relevant to women's lives.

BE TRANSPARENT:

Provide women participating in the consultation with clear information about your consultation and how information will be used.

BE ACCOUNTABLE:

- Ensure the information is used and reflected in recommendations.
- Give credit to the women for their valuable role in developing the recommendations.

TIP 4

Connect With Women Where They Are

Women's organizations and the women with whom they work have many demands on their time. You will need to practice some pro-active strategies to ensure their involvement.

REACH OUT TO SPECIFIC WOMEN

- Engage women's networks and expertise so as to ensure you are respectful and effective in reaching women.
- Make personal contact when possible, especially for engaging marginalized women.
 - Contact women's organizations and networks with expertise.
 - Contact mixed-gender organizations who have demonstrated effective work with women.
 - Contact ethno-cultural specific women's organizations or women's committees within community groups.

MAKE IT WORTHWHILE FOR WOMEN TO PARTICIPATE

- Show how it connects in practical ways with their daily lives.
- Inform them of your role, and how information will be used.
- Let them know you value their opinion and are prepared to show it in your final report.

USE A VARIETY OF MEDIUMS TO COMMUNICATE

- Use a variety of mediums for getting information out and inviting feedback (website, newspaper, flyers, broadcast media, information to women's networks)
- Computer communication can be effective as it enables women to become informed from their home, but not all women have knowledge, ability or access.
- Adapt the mediums of communication to reach diverse populations of women (e.g. rural, francophone).
- Provide accommodation measures to ensure women with disabilities can participate equitably. For example:
 - To reach women who are deaf or deafened, use sign language interpretation or intervener services.
 - To reach visually impaired women, use large font size and include computer formats other than PDF files as voice recognition devices cannot read them.
 - Ensure room size can accommodate women using wheelchairs and/or guide dogs.



TIP 5

Use Women-Friendly Logistics

When women are comfortable and know their input is valued they are more motivated to participate fully in consultations.

USE LANGUAGE THAT IS EASILY UNDERSTOOD

- Consult in the language that women are most comfortable.
- Provide a cultural interpreter as needed.
- Use plain language and avoid jargon.

CHOOSE WOMEN-FRIENDLY LOCATIONS

City Hall seems so far away and formal.

- When possible, hold consultations in settings where women gather.
- Reach women who are less mobile where they live (i.e. low-cost housing or residences for the elderly, rural) by creating travelling consultation units.
- Arrange a focus group during a group's regular meeting time.
- Hold consultation meetings at work places or community centres.
- Ensure the building is accessible to people with disabilities.
- Select a site that feels safe with well-lit parking and nearby bus stops (note bus routes in your publicity).

SCHEDULE A TIME THAT IS DO-ABLE FOR WOMEN

- No time is an ideal time.
- Avoid meal times and the time children are leaving school.
- If you are scheduling speakers, give participants an estimated time when they will present so as to enable women and men with family responsibilities to plan their time.
- Vary meeting times; offer choices.
- Take into account diminishing energy levels as the day winds down for women with disabilities as well as Paratranspo scheduling needs.
- Publicize a few weeks in advance.

PROVIDE SUPPORTS

- Provide childcare on site or reimburse expenses.
- Reimburse transportation costs or provide bus tickets).
- Let participants know in advance supports will be available.

TIP 6

Ask Questions Relevant to Women's Experiences

We think when we get more diversity around the table, it will be reflected in the decision-making, but the thinking is still mainstream, we have to be prepared to change the way we think.

Precisely because diverse women and men experience the city differently, your list of questions will need to draw out their differing experiences of the issue. To more effectively hear their answers, you will need to be ready to see the issue in new ways.

WHAT IS ASKED:

Aspects of diverse women's experience are often not considered in planning. Factors, like the following, may be key to the issue you are researching but will remain invisible, unless you draw them out.

- Differences according to gender, ability, race, ethnicity, culture, language, income, age and sexual orientation.
- Experience of discrimination.
- Impact on the household, as well as the community.
- Impact on unpaid work in caring for immediate and extended family.
- Time constraints of juggling work and family responsibilities.
- Fear of violence.

HOW IT'S ASKED:

- Be clear as to who you are, why you are consulting and what you will do with the information.
- Provide the participants with clear information.
- Recognize their right to only share what they choose to share.



TIP 7

Use Methods Inclusive of the Diversity of Women

USE A VARIETY OF TOOLS

- Use tools that draw upon different means for getting opinions — qualitative research (opinions and experiences), focus groups, surveys and walking safety audits.
- When using visual displays, avoid using only words and charts. Use photos, images and examples that show the full diversity of women and men who relate to the issue, service or programme.
- Remember that many cultures rely more on oral than written communication.
- Best to avoid filling out forms for women working in a second language or with limited literacy

MAKE THE MOST OF GROUP SETTINGS

Women should feel like they belong here.

- Invite women's organizations with expertise in working with a particular group of women to assist with the facilitation or design of the information gathering process.
- Women-only sessions will often help women speak more freely.
- Focus groups and workshops where women are provided with information and have an opportunity to give feedback are effective.
- Kitchen table meetings, talking circle style meetings, and meetings where food or refreshments are shared will engage women who are less likely to attend a more formal setting.



DOCUMENT WHO IS CONSULTED

- Collect data on who is consulted, so as to know how many men and women of diverse groups are included in the consultation.
- Observe and note the race, age and gender of who speaks and what they say.

TIP 8

Value the Input Women Give

When women participate in a consultation and feel they have been listened to with respect, they are more likely to speak again.

USE A GENDER EQUALITY LENS TO ANALYZE FINDINGS:

- Consider the demographics of who spoke and what was said. Note any gaps.
 - What specific skills or insights do they bring to the issue?
 - Do they have equal access to resources and decision making on this issue?
 - What is blocking that access?
 - Are there inequities or discrimination that need to be addressed?
- Compare this with your initial assumptions.
- Be sure to include these findings in your conclusion.

WOMEN	
MEN	

ABORIGINAL WOMEN	
RECENT IMMIGRANT WOMEN	
VISIBLE MINORITY WOMEN	
FRANCOPHONE WOMEN	
WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES	
WOMEN LIVING IN POVERTY	
LESBIAN, BI-SEXUAL, TRANS-GENDERED	
RURAL WOMEN	

SHOW WOMEN THEIR CONTRIBUTION IS VALUED

- Take care to use the information that is provided.
- Inform them of the progress of your study.
- Inform them of decisions that are made.