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**SUPPORTING THE ADVANCEMENT OF WOMEN IN AGRICULTURE:
IS YOUR BOARD REPRESENTATIVE? – A BEST-PRACTICE GUIDE TO
ENSURING WOMEN ARE INCLUDED**

Brought to you by:
Canadian Agricultural HR Council



Status of Women
Canada

Condition féminine
Canada



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Is Your Board Representative: A Best Practice Guide to Ensuring Women Are Included

Background

Research shows that having a gender diverse board has a positive impact. It not only ensures that the Board is reflective and representative of society, it also has a positive financial return. In fact, companies with more women as Board of Directors experience higher financial return than those companies that do not have a gender diverse Board.¹

There are key components that are identified by several experts as best practices for increasing the number of women on Board of Directors. Addressing the issue begins right at the recruitment process of new members and goes as far as reviewing terms, election processes and policies.

There are mixed reviews about the effectiveness of setting quotas for the ratio of men to women Board members. Concerns about women being appointed to Boards regardless if they are the most qualified are significant. The best practice to avoid this risk while increasing the number of women in the recruitment process is to ensure that more women are part of the process. Having women represent at least fifty percent of the qualified candidates being considered for Board positions will increase the possibility of a woman being selected through a fair and equitable process.

To achieve the goal of having women represent 50% of qualified candidates work needs to be done to ensure women with the appropriate skills and backgrounds are aware of the Board opportunities. They must also have a feeling of being welcomed to apply for these positions. Recruitment campaigns that target women with the skills and competencies required can assist in getting the word out. Having women in senior leadership within the organization identify and groom women working in the industry can help. Identifying women in senior leaderships networks and encouraging them to apply is another way to ensure qualified female candidates are part of the recruitment process.

This guide provides step-by-step process to implement the best practices in your Board procedures and policies to support diversification of Board members and chairs/presidents.

¹<http://www.catalyst.org/media/companies-more-women-board-directors-experience-higher-financial-performance-according-latest>

Is Your Board Representative? A Best-Practice Guide to Ensuring Women Are Included. CAHRC, 2017.

About the Guide

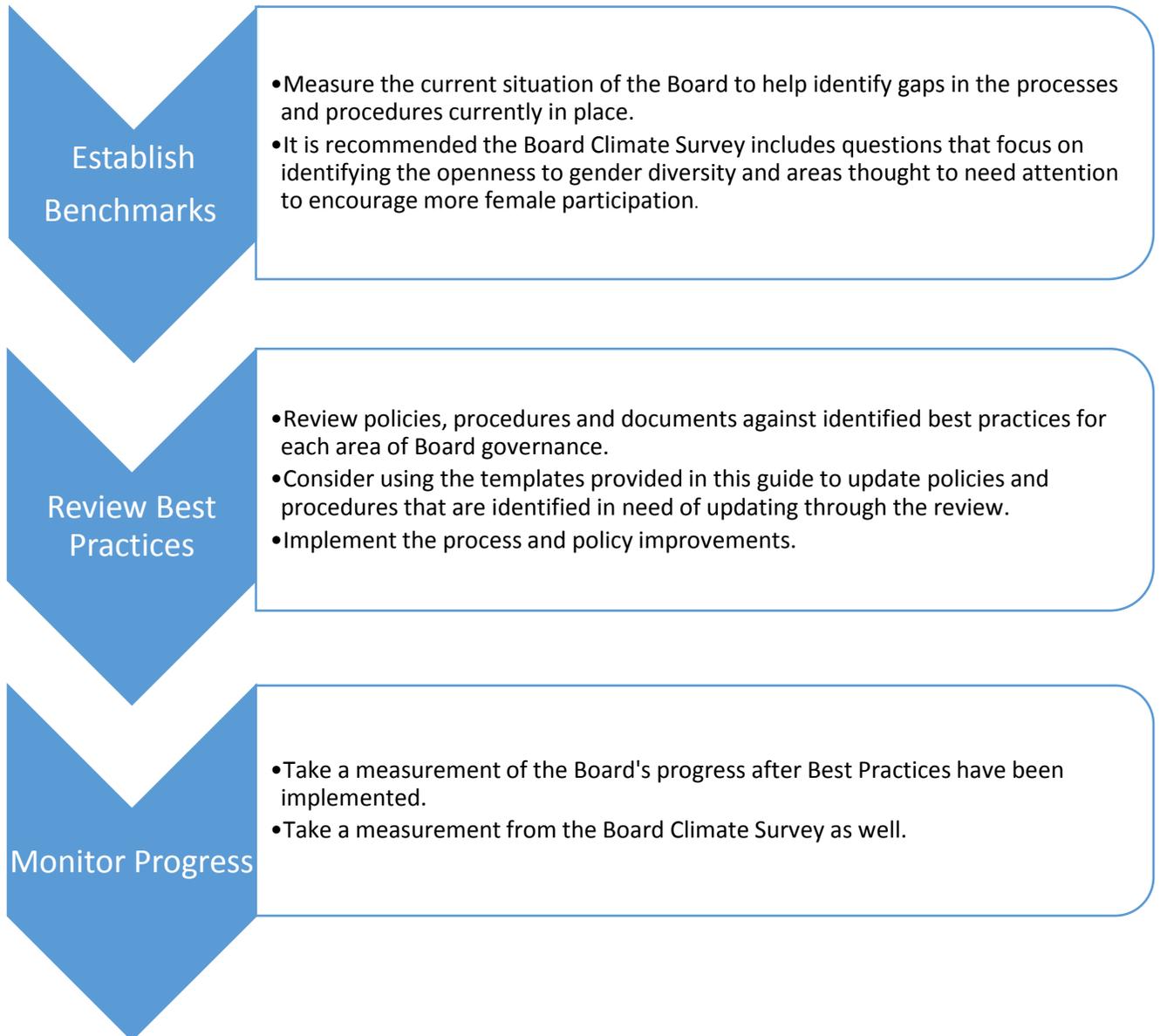
The objective of this guide is to provide support for boards to ensure they are supporting more gender diversification of boards and that opportunities are available and known about for qualified women. The target users for this guide are industry associations' leaders (CEO, President, Executive Director) and the Board Executive. The reports and checklists are meant to be completed by the leadership team. The results can be shared with the Board executive and members. Documentation updates and reviews can be completed by the Board executive and members.

This guide will include the following documents:

- Steps to Review Process
- Establish Benchmarks
- Review Best Practices
- Monitor Progress
- Develop Policies Using Templates

Steps to Review Process

The following provides a map of the process of reviewing the Board processes and procedures, identifying areas for improvement and implementing those changes to move towards having best practices in place for more gender diverse Boards.





Establish Benchmarks

The following questionnaire provides benchmarks to measure change in the Board.

1. How many Board members does your organization currently have?
2. How many of the Board members are women and how many are men?
3. What is the gender of the current Chair/President of the Board?
4. How are your Board members selected? For example, are they elected or appointed?
5. Where does the pool of candidates (elected or appointed) come from? For example, are they members of your association? Do they work in the industry? Are they members of the broader community?
6. How many women candidates did the Board receive in the last Board election/nomination process?
7. How many women were considered and/or interviewed for the Board during the last election/nomination process?
8. What are the current terms of service for Board members?
9. Is there a Board member survey in place? If yes, how often is this survey conducted?
10. Is there a process to educate new and current Board members on topics related to governance processes and procedures?
11. Is there a Board diversity and inclusion policy currently in place?
12. Has the issue of under-representation of women on your Board been brought forward by Board members or association members?



Review Best Practices

Follow this check list to review your current practices and identify areas for improvement to move towards a Board that has best practices in place for gender diversity.

- Review existing Board governance policies and practices** to identify and address any content or activities that may deter women from applying to be a Board member.
 - Are there any things in place that may deter women from putting their name forward for election or applying to be a Board member? For example, if there is a governance rule around Member attendance, does it allow for exceptions for absences such as maternity leave?
 - If the policy currently states that all meetings must be attended in person, is there an opportunity to use technology to meet virtually in some cases to alleviate the time away from home. This could impact Board operations in other ways than gender diversity as well because all Board members may welcome less time away from their operations. It should also have a cost savings impact to the Board as well.
 - If the Board terms are not limited it can reduce the opportunity for new Board members to join. This could slow the shift to more gender diversity. Limited Board terms can have a positive impact on Board operations in other ways as well because it increases the opportunity for new ideas and new voices to come to the table.
 - Update the policies and practices accordingly to ensure the Board environment is welcoming to both men and women. Templates are provided with this guide as examples.

- Conduct Board Climate Survey** to gather an understanding of the current Board climate as well as the willingness and openness to becoming a more gender neutral Board.
 - Gathering feedback from the current Members can be very valuable in identifying what work needs to be done to address the issue. It may also identify the need diversity and inclusiveness training for Board members to ensure they are prepared to make this initiative successful.

- Build awareness of conscious and unconscious biases of current Board members and leadership.** Everyone has conscious and unconscious biases. Providing support and training to Board members and leadership to build awareness of this as well as tools to manage these biases will help ensure they do not have a negative impact on processes and procedures of the Board. See the “Bias Awareness Tool” provided in this document for more information on how to achieve this best practice.

- Review the competencies and skills required** for Board members. It may be that the Board requires various areas of skills and expertise to be represented on the Board.
 - Conducting this analysis and comparing it to the existing Board’s skills and expertise will help with identify and attract the right type of applicants in the Board recruitment process.



- This is also important when looking to introduce diversity to Board membership. The goal of diversity is not to fill a quota; it is to attract qualified, skilled and competent applicants to the Board.
- **Review the Board recruitment process.** Consider how most Board member candidates have come to be aware of the Board opportunities. Processes that are mandated to include qualified candidates from a gender diverse field can impact the number of female candidates that are successful in the process.
 - Is there a formal recruitment process in place? If candidates all come from referrals of other Board members or a very close network of contacts it may be that the net has not been cast broad enough to encourage diversity on the Board, including not wide enough to encourage qualified female candidates to apply.
- **Identify opportunities to increase the number of women** in the Board member application process.
 - Sometimes it requires a champion (male or female) to be assigned to identifying potential qualified female candidates, contacting them to share information about the Board opportunity and inviting them to apply.
 - This can be done as a formal process of identifying a champion or in a more informal way by sharing with Board members the goal of bringing more women into the fold.
 - The Ontario Securities Commission, which has implemented policies based on their own best practices review, suggests the following wording could be
- **Implement a requirement that women must represent fifty percent of all qualified candidates** considered in the recruitment of Board members. Ensuring female applicants are in the recruitment process ultimately increases the chance that a woman will be selected for the Board position.
 - If there is a mandate to have fifty (50) percent of qualified candidates be women it increases the possibility of women being successful in the process. It is not a quota for the number of seats on the Board women must hold. It is an increase in the number of qualified women brought into the recruitment process for consideration.
- **Review the Board member selection process.** Identify any aspects that could present a bias (conscious or unconscious) to female candidates being considered as Board members.
 - This may be as simple as using gender neutral language and using gender neutral examples when talking about experience and opportunities.
 - Consider the images used in collateral for the organization and the Board. Are there images of women working in the area of the organization's focus? Are communications geared towards men specifically?



- If possible, ensure there is at least one woman represented on the selection/election committee. Ideally as more women become involved in the organization the goal would be to have 50/50 male/female representation on the selection/election committee.

- **Ensure that the environment in which the Board operates is gender neutral.** This can be done by:
 - encouraging equal participation in meetings amongst Board members;
 - ensuring professional language and behaviour always be adhered to in activities related to Board business. This includes the selection of locations, times and activities included in attending Board meetings and social activities;
 - survey current Board members through a Board climate survey to measure how they feel about the inclusiveness of the environment. There may be other issues identified in this survey as well that could help address more than ensuring the environment is inviting to women.



Monitor Progress

This questionnaire is met to gather the same data that was gathered prior to the Board review. Comparing the results from this questionnaire to the benchmark data will show what progress has been made. This questionnaire can also be conducted on a regular basis within the Board cycle as an on-going measurement of progress.

1. How many Board members does your organization currently have?
2. How many of the Board members are women and how many are men?
3. What is the gender of the current Chair/President of the Board?
4. How are your Board members selected? For example, are they elected or appointed?
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10. Is there a process to educate new and current Board members on topics related to governance processes and procedures?
11. Is there a Board diversity and inclusion policy currently in place?
12. Has the issue of under-representation of women on your Board been brought forward by Board members or association members?

Develop Policies Using Templates

The Board policies need to reflect the objective to support more gender diversity in its membership. The Ontario Securities Commission has done a great deal of work in this area and has provided recommendations to Boards for policy statements that achieve this goal.

The HR Council also provides templates based on the work they have completed in this area.²

These recommendations are now widely used by corporate and non-profit Boards across Canada. The following templates are based on the recommendations made by the OSC³ and the HR Council.

²<http://www.hrcouncil.ca/resource-centre/home.cfm>

³http://www.osc.gov.on.ca/documents/en/Securities-Category5/csa_20150928_58-307_staff-review-women-boards.pdf

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Diversity and Inclusion Policy

Policy Statement:

Having a board in place that represents the diverse backgrounds of our stakeholders is important. (Company/Association) is committed to having a Board comprised of these diverse backgrounds, skills and experiences including the representation of women.

In identifying suitable candidates for nomination to the Board, the Corporate Governance and Nominating Committee will consider candidates on merit using objective criteria and with due regard for the benefits of diversity on the Board. In an effort to promote the specific objective of increasing the representation of women on the Board, the Diversity Policy suggests that the selection process for suitable candidates must involve the following steps:

- *a list of potential candidates for the nomination must be compiled and must include at least one female candidate; and*
- *if a female candidate is not selected by the end of the selection process, the Board must be satisfied that there are objective reasons to support its determination.⁴*

Procedures:

To ensure the principles of diversity are integrated into Board recruitment and retention, the following activities will take place:

- An audit of the adherence to governance policies and procedures will be conducted bi-annually.
- An annual review of the skills, competencies and requirements of the Board will be conducted. This will be cross-referenced with a skills matrix for the Board. Gaps, if identified, will be addressed within the annual term.
- Recruitment and election of Members will follow a set guideline based on the requirements outlined in the skills matrix.
- The application process suggests that fifty percent of qualified applicants to be women.
- The interview process suggests that a minimum of one qualified woman is included in the interview process.

Accountability:

The Board Chair will take responsibility for implementing the policy requirements.

Board Members (OR Nomination and Membership Committees) are responsible for following the steps outlined in the policy and ensuring the objectives of the policy are incorporated in recruitment and retention activities.

The Nomination and Membership Committee *should report the results of its review and assessment of the Diversity Policy to the board on an annual basis.*

⁴⁴http://www.osc.gov.on.ca/documents/en/Securities-Category5/csa_20150928_58-307_staff-review-women-boards.pdf

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Board Code of Conduct⁵

The <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> has a mission <INSERT ASSOCIATION MISSION>. The following Code of Conduct (“the Code”) is designed to allow the Association to preserve its long tradition of integrity and credibility with the public and within the Association. This Code applies to <INSERT ALL APPLICABLE POSITIONS INCLUDING BOARD MEMBERS, DISTRICT REPRESENTATIVES, EMPLOYEES, LEADERSHIP TEAM, ASSOCIATION VOLUNTEERS, and THIRD PARTY SERVICE PROVIDERS IN FACE-TO-FACE CONTACT WITH ASSOCIATION MEMBERS>.

The Code is organized into categories, as follows:

Service

1. Always act with fairness, honesty, integrity and openness; respect the opinions of others and treat all with equality and dignity without regard to gender, race, colour, creed, ancestry, place of origin, political beliefs, religion, marital status, disability, age, or sexual orientation.
2. Promote the mission and objectives of the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> in all dealings with the public on behalf of the Association and within the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME>.
3. Provide a positive and valued experience for those receiving service within and outside the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME>.

Accountability

1. Act with honesty and integrity and in accordance with any professional standards and / or governing laws and legislation that have application to the responsibilities you perform for or on behalf of the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME>. <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> is a <NATIONAL/PROVINCIAL/REGIONAL> organization with <PROVINCIAL/REGIONAL/BRANCH> operations. <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> Human Resource policies apply to all volunteers and employees. Policies are reviewed every 3 years or sooner if an issue arises with its interpretation and use.
2. Comply with both the letter and the spirit of any training or orientation provided to you by the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> in connection with those responsibilities.
3. Adhere to the policies and procedures of the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> and support the decisions and directions of the Board and its delegated authority.
4. Take responsibility for your actions and decisions. Follow reporting lines to facilitate the effective resolution of problems. Ensure that you do not exceed the authority of your position.

⁵http://www.hrcouncil.ca/docs/POL_Code_of_Conduct.pdf



Conflict of Interest

Conflict of interest arises when a person participates in a decision about a matter (including any contract or arrangement of employment, leasing, sale or provision of goods and services) which may benefit or be seen to benefit that person because of his/her direct or indirect monetary or financial interests affected by or involved in that matter.

Provided for reference only. Always consult current legislation in your jurisdiction to create policies and procedures for your organization.

It is the duty of any person taking part in the operations of the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> to adhere to the Conflict of Interest Policy at all times. In the event that such a matter arises, the person shall formally disclose the interest, refrain from attempting to persuade or influence other persons participating in the decision, and shall not cast any vote on the matter.

Confidentiality

1. Respect and maintain the confidentiality of information gained as a *volunteer or employee*, including, but not limited to, all computer software and files, the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> business documents and printouts, and all volunteer, employee membership, donor and supporter records.
2. Respect and maintain the confidentiality of individual personal information about persons involved with <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> gained through your role in the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME>, for example, meetings or events.

Personal or Sexual Harassment

Sexual harassment is any conduct, comment, gesture or contact of a sexual nature that one would find to be unwanted or unwelcome by any individual, or that might, on reasonable grounds, be perceived by that individual as placing a condition of sexual nature on an employment or career development.

Personal harassment means any conduct whether verbal or physical that is discriminating in nature, based upon another person's race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political beliefs, religion, marital status, physical or mental disability, sex, age or sexual orientation. It is discriminatory behaviour, directed at an individual, that is unwanted or unwelcome and causes substantial distress in that person and serves no legitimate work-related purpose.

The <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> has a zero tolerance policy with respect to Personal /Sexual Harassment. Personal/Sexual Harassment in any form is strictly prohibited and may be grounds for termination as a volunteer, or, in the case of an employee, immediate dismissal for just cause without notice or pay in lieu of notice.



Implementation

Strict observance of the Code is fundamental to the activity and reputation of the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME>. It is essential that all <INSERT WHAT IS APPROPRIATE FOR YOUR ORGANIZATION e.g. BOARD MEMBERS, MEMBERS, CLIENTS, VOLUNTEERS>, all employees (permanent full-time, hourly, fixed term contract, permanent part-time), and any other third party service provider in face-to-face contact with our <MEMBERS/CLIENTS/GENERAL PUBLIC REPRESENTING OUR ASSOCIATION> adhere to this Code.

They will certify this by signing a Declaration that they have read and will abide by this Code.

The Human Resources Manual gives further details of this and other policies and procedures of the Association. The senior leadership team has the responsibility of ensuring compliance with all Codes and Policies of <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME>.

Code of Conduct Declaration

I, (Employee/Volunteer – please print), have read, understand and agree to abide by the Code of Conduct of the <INSERT ASSOCIATION NAME> and I understand that such adherence is a condition of my employment or volunteer work. I understand that a violation of the Code of Conduct may be grounds for termination as a volunteer or in the case of an employee immediate dismissal for just cause without notice or pay in lieu of notice.

Signed this _____ day of _____, 20_____.

_____ (Volunteer/Employee - Signature)

_____ Position with Association



Bias Awareness Checklist

| Gender Bias Awareness Checklist ⁶ | Yes / No* |
|---|---|
| I have tried to educate myself about discrimination by discussing the topic with others or reading about it. | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have thought about how my own attitudes and behaviors may contribute towards gender discrimination at work and in social situations. | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I try not to use words or phrases that may be perceived by others as degrading or hurtful, even when I'm making a joke in casual conversation. | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I try not to rely on gender stereotypes to explain or predict the behaviours of people I interact with. | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have openly disagreed with a comment, action, or joke that insulted someone's gender. | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am comfortable giving constructive feedback to someone of a different gender. | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I am open to hearing input from anyone on the board and in the workplace, even if their experience or opinions are different than mine. | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I try to ensure that events, meetings, or training program are planned and/or conducted in a gender neutral way. | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| When a board member or worker is quiet or keeps to her - or himself, I make an effort to talk to them and make them feel as though they're part of the group. | <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> |
| *For questions where you answer "no," consider making an effort to incorporate the activity into your workplace behaviour. | |

⁶ Checklist based on diversity checklists from these sources: <http://www.adl.org/assets/pdf/education-outreach/Personal-Self-Assessment-of-Anti-Bias-Behavior.pdf>, <https://extension.usu.edu/diversity/files/uploads/checklist704.pdf>

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