



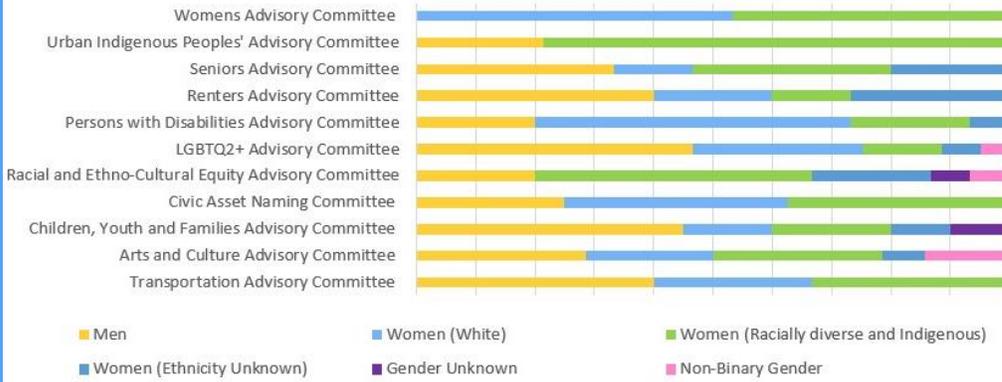
WOMEN ON CITY ADVISORY GROUPS: VANCOUVER AND SURREY

What are advisory groups?

Citizen-led advisory groups help City Council make decisions on issues including transportation, planning, arts and culture, issues important to Indigenous residents, food security, people with disabilities, youth, or seniors. Some cities have a women’s advisory committee which advises council on how to make the city a better and more welcoming place for women and girls. It is important that women’s voices are heard on all city matters.

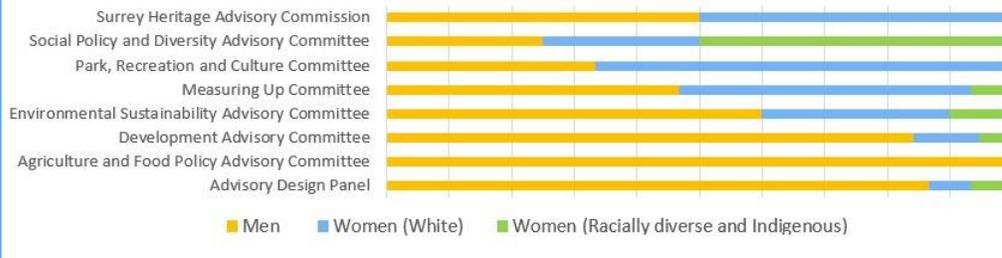
But women are not always well-represented on all city advisory groups.

Vancouver Advisory Committees, Gender and Ethnic Diversity, 2019, Proportions per Committee



- The City of Vancouver has a policy to ensure that 50% of all advisory group members are women.
- Vancouver also has a policy to ensure that 50% are people from visible minority or Indigenous backgrounds. They also want to include LGBTQ people, people with disabilities, young people and seniors, and people from different cultural backgrounds.
- In the City of Surrey, less than 50% of the members of many advisory groups are women.
- Men far outnumber women on advisory groups that deal with land use issues, like development and urban design, environment, and food policy.
- There are more women on groups that deal with social or cultural issues.

Surrey Advisory Committees, Gender and Ethnic Diversity, 2019, Proportions per Committee



Why are we seeing this lack of diversity?



Perceived "women's issues"

In our society, women are still thought of as knowing more about “women’s issues” like children and families, culture, and social justice issues. Some women may not apply to advisory groups that deal with areas thought to be “men’s issues” like development and urban design. If women do apply, they might not be chosen for the same reasons.

Continued:



Lack of gender and diversity policies

Cities must fight sexism and prejudice. In order for their advisory bodies to be gender equal and diverse, cities must have strong policies in place to make sure that happens.



Time and money

Women, in particular women of colour and Indigenous women, often have less time to give to advisory group meetings. They may require childcare and to have their travel costs covered. Meetings are often at times and places that are not suited for women who work and/or conflict with unpaid caregiving.



Lack of clear processes

Some women may find the process to apply difficult or unclear. The city may not explain well who they are looking for, and how they decide who gets on an advisory group. This can make the process seem unfair, and that it favours some people over others.

What can cities do?

- ✓ Create a permanent women's advisory committee. This group could advise council on many different topics, not just on areas seen to be "women's issues." Future councils would not be able to disband the committee.
- ✓ Have a policy to make sure that at least half of the members on **all** advisory bodies are women and people from diverse backgrounds.
- ✓ Develop ways to reach out to women and other groups when recruiting new members to increase diversity. Former or current advisory group members could help plan how best to do that.
- ✓ Consider a more flexible meeting schedule to make it easier for members to take part.
- ✓ Provide support for child/family care and travel for members that need it.
- ✓ Provide staff support for meetings. Provide meals at meetings for members.

What can you do?

1 Learn about your city's advisory groups

Visit your city's website to find out which groups focus on areas that interest you. Find out when an advisory group meets and go to the meeting — most are open to the public. Talk to one of its members to find out how to apply, and ask her what she thinks of how the group operates.

2 Serve on an advisory group

Apply to serve on an advisory group. If you find the process to apply difficult or hard to understand, find out who you should ask for help (this is often the city clerk's office).

3 Make advisory groups more inclusive

If you are on an advisory group now, think about who is not there, and how you could reach out to invite new members.

4 Show your interest in advisory groups

If your city does not have a women's advisory group, contact a councillor and ask why not. If there is one, check the city's website for its minutes to learn more about what it does.

This research was conducted as part of a three-year Status of Women Canada funded project with Women Transforming Cities and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. The fact sheets were authored by R. Bateman. Layout and design by A. Yee, M. Leong and M. Alig.



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