

A photograph of three women looking at a smartphone together. The woman in the center has dark hair and glasses, wearing a light blue floral-patterned shirt. To her left, a woman in a white hijab and glasses is partially visible. To her right, another woman is partially visible. They are all looking down at a smartphone held by the woman in the center. The background is bright and out of focus.

Pathways to a Women-friendly Surrey: Outcome Report June 2018



Status of Women
Canada

Condition féminine
Canada

WOMEN
TRANSFORMING
CITIES.org

CRIAW
ICREF



DEPARTMENT OF
GENDER, SEXUALITY,
AND WOMEN'S STUDIES

ABOUT THE PROJECT

This forum is part of “Action on Systemic Barriers to Women’s Participation in Local Government,” a multi-year project led by Women Transforming Cities and the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women. The project aims to find ways to improve gender and diversity equity and inclusion within local governments. Status of Women Canada is funding the project.

Co-sponsoring Organizations

The Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAOW) promotes social justice and equality for all women. CRIAOW recognizes women’s diverse experiences and views. It helps to build women’s knowledge. It works to reduce regional isolation. And it helps link researchers and groups that work to promote social justice and equality for all women.

Women Transforming Cities (WTC) is a non-profit society that believes that cities that work for women and girls, work for everyone. WTC wants more women and girls to be decision-makers. It promotes and supports women to become elected officials. And WTC recognizes that women can transform our cities into just and inclusive places as workers, planners, mothers, and informed citizens.

The Department of Gender, Sexuality, and Women’s Studies (GSWS) promotes equality, social justice, and access to power for women, LGBTQ people, Indigenous people, and everyone who faces discrimination. Students and faculty not only study and do research and teaching on these issues, but also assist and support local groups who are working to make their communities more inclusive and welcoming places.

INTRODUCTION

Women run for office in Surrey. Some have won and some not, but all have played important roles in their city. This forum set out to find out why and how women become involved in their city. What helps and supports a woman candidate? What barriers or challenges does she face?

Keynote speaker Barinder Rasode is a former Surrey city councilor and also ran for mayor. She opened the event with an inspiring talk. She described her work to combat domestic violence in the city. She was also the first South Asian woman to be elected to Surrey city council (2008). Barinder stressed the need for women to support and advance women candidates. Women need to know, Barinder said, that they are perfect just the way they are. They do not need to change in order to serve their communities as elected officials.

Next, a panel of women who have run for elected offices spoke about their experiences. Some were elected, and some were not. But all had valuable ideas to share.

The panelists were:

- [Charlene Dobie](#): former Surrey school trustee
- [Nicole Joliet](#): the first openly trans person to run for Surrey elected office (school trustee)
- [Narima Dela Cruz](#): the first Filipino-Canadian woman to run for elected office in Surrey (council)
- [Brenda Locke](#): former Liberal MLA in British Columbia who also ran for council in 2014

- [Penny Priddy](#): the only woman in Canada to be elected to school board, city council, provincial legislature, and the House of Commons

Many panelists talked about how hard it is to balance home-based work, childcare, and/or paid work, while running for office. Sometimes, people told them that women should not take time away from their families to run for office. Men usually do not face the same criticism. Brenda described how badly she felt when her campaign or her work as a MLA took her away from important family moments. Charlene ran for office because she wanted to improve children's quality of education. But she also felt guilty sometimes for not being at home with her family.

Several panelists faced sexism as candidates and in elected office. Barinder described how some people in the South Asian community saw her only as a divorced woman who was not qualified to hold office. People often criticize women running for office for the way they dress and speak, whom they date, and how they act. Brenda said that a man can get away with wearing the same suit and tie to every event. A woman must have a different outfit for every occasion.



Many speakers said that women could feel that they do not know enough to be in a leadership role. This feeling can hold them back. Instead of jumping at the chance to run for office when asked, as a man might do, Charlene said that women question themselves: "Do I know enough? What about my family?" However, Penny knows many women who have been successful in politics. They all grabbed the chance to run as soon as it was offered.

Women often face more than one barrier when they enter politics. People may see only her skin colour or ethnic identity and then assume she has (or lacks) certain abilities. Some women might live with a

disability. Others might be Indigenous or, they might be LGBTQ. Someone might be all of these things. No one can be defined by just one part of her identity. Some people face many challenges. Others may have it easier because of their skin colour, education, or income. Penny recognizes that she had an easier time because she is from a Euro-Canadian background. Many people in her neighbourhood knew her husband (a professor), as well. Working class women or those from minority ethnic groups often face more barriers that are harder to overcome.

Nicole talked about lacking the time to campaign as much as she needed to. She could not afford to take time off from her job because she had work and family commitments. She also had to deal with ignorance and bias from the public and other candidates because she is openly trans.

Women from minority backgrounds often face gender-based racism. They can also be held to certain standards based on ideas about how immigrants are supposed to act. Narima comes from a strong background of political activism. She said this is common in the Philippines. However, as a Filipina immigrant in Canada, she felt pressure to stay out of politics and remain in the background. This was at odds with who she is and what she wants to do in her life.

Often, too, political parties use minority women as token candidates. Parties can assume that one person can stand in for everyone in a community and that they bring with them a built-in group of voters. Narima decided to reach out to other communities as well as her own. This way, she was able to build a more diverse basis of support. She also feels that helping others with a similar ethnic background to run for office can help create a more diverse field of candidates.

Women still face many barriers to taking part in civic life, but the panelists agreed that things are improving. Women are equally able, informed, and electable as men. The women who have come before them helped make these changes possible. Being a mother can be an asset, too, since raising children can show others that a woman has the patience and dedication for political work. Penny says that the key

is not waiting for barriers to be torn down. Women who have held office need to help others climb over the barriers.

Several panelists spoke about the need to have a network of people around you. These supporters will not only vote for you, but can also help run your campaign and manage your schedule and to-do list. Supporters should have the skills and know-how to reach parts of the community that the candidate might not know well. Penny did not know a lot about the South Asian community when she first ran in Surrey in 1991. But her team, which included Barinder, helped her learn and build contacts.

Both Penny and Brenda stressed how hard it can be to campaign on your own. You have fewer hurdles to getting elected if you run as part of a slate, a cooperative, or a coalition. But a candidate has to be careful in choosing the slate she joins. No candidate will agree with everything a party stands for. But a good rule is to be happy with most of a party's platform and to make sure it reflects your values.

COMMENTS FROM ATTENDEES

We as women and citizens have a duty to stand up and be heard, to participate, to promote and protect our families, our communities, our futures, and ourselves. Not only as candidates at election time but everyday in every way with everyone. Speak up, speak now, speak loud! Advocates, teachers, nurturers, workers, mothers, daughters, humans, we are all political.

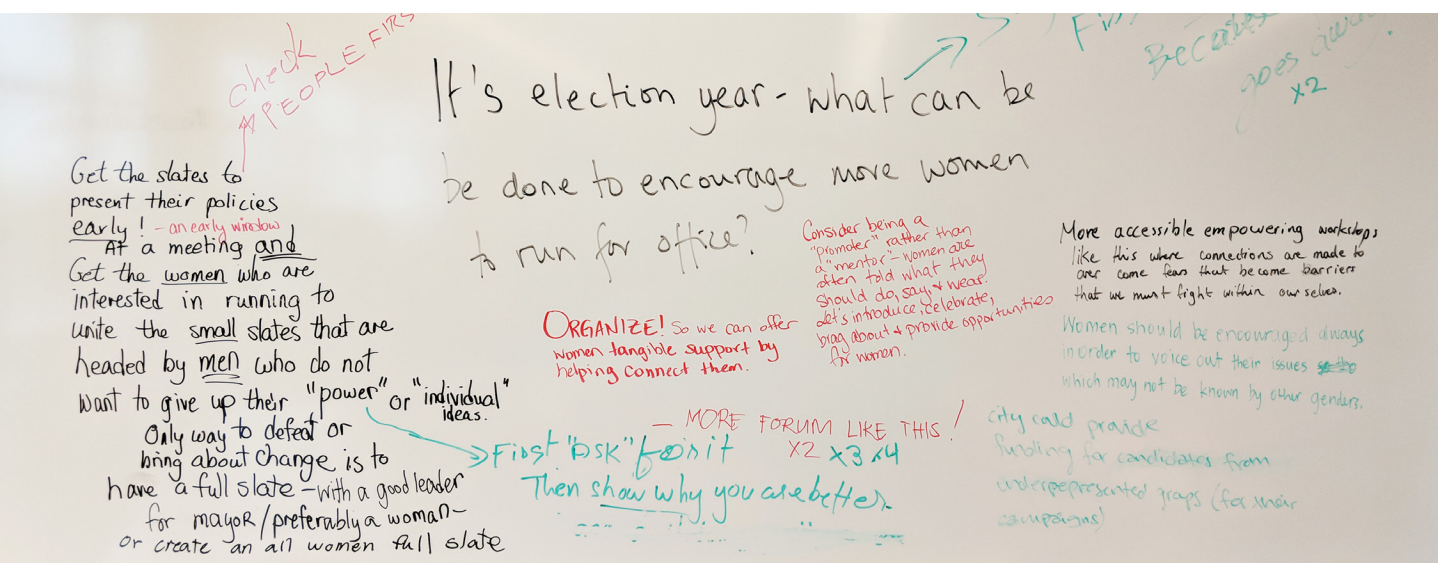
People who came to the forum asked the panelists and the keynote speaker questions. They could also write comments on the whiteboards under four headings:

- What from the panelists' comments today stuck with you most?
- What changes could the City of Surrey make to welcome more women into civic life (like childcare at events, travel costs, etc.)?
- What's the biggest barrier for women? What's the biggest opportunity?
- It's election year – what can be done to encourage more women to run for office?

The comments included these main themes:

1. The importance of storytelling

Many people liked hearing diverse and new points of view, like those of working class women and women of different ethnic backgrounds. Events like this forum provide space for women to tell their stories. This can help make the political process clearer and provides a chance for women to work together. Workshops and forums like "Pathways" can help women connect and begin to build support networks.



We need to move away from only seeking candidates for elections. We need to teach women that "politics" isn't just elections. EVERYTHING in our lives is Political - from the food we eat, roads we drive, schools we attend + send our children to... our healthcare, our wages, our environment
EVERYTHING IS Political!

We as women + citizens have a duty to stand up + be heard, to participate to promote + protect our families our communities our futures + our selves! Not only as candidates at election time but Everyday in every way with Everyone. **SPEAK** up, speak now Speak Loud.

Advocates, teachers, nurturers, workers, mothers, daughters - humans

WE ARE ALL POLITICIANS

The word "politics" doesn't need to be dirty.

If you have previous political experience - seek out ♀ of colour + First Nations ♀, and not only encourage them to run BUT ALSO go "the extra mile" - ie. set-up meetings, use a public voice to support, ask your networks to support, help fundraise !!

to tie into - we need to change the stigma of what a politician is. We need to remove the "corrupt"-ness + create policies w/o loopholes that are pro-active in removing the stigma.

2. Providing input on slates early

Commenters said that women interested in running should form slates to present their ideas early on in an election year. They can also work to unite smaller slates. This can happen at a party meeting or all year long. Several people commented that women should voice issues specific to their gender loudly and often. Politics is never limited to the campaign season!

3. Promotion is as important as mentorship

Attendees thought that women who have held office must reach out and support women of colour, Indigenous women, and other diverse women candidates. This should include promoting their campaigns. Those who want to support women candidates should introduce, celebrate, blog about, and fundraise for them as well. Be a promoter as well as a mentor!

4. Actions specific to the City of Surrey

Forum attendees provided many ideas on how the City of Surrey could work to welcome more women into civic life. The City could form a committee of women to advise Council and provide space for events where women can share their success stories. Several people felt that the City should push for even lower campaign spending caps and personal donation limits. People donating to civic election campaigns could get tax receipts, and that could help women candidates attract more financial support. Comments also included putting in place a ward system and providing funding to candidates from diverse backgrounds. One commenter suggested that school trustee candidates should also attend all-candidates meetings since the role of councilors, the mayor, and school trustees is to work together.

BY THE NUMBERS

In total, about 35 people attended Pathways to a Women-friendly Surrey. WTC and CRIAW asked attendees to complete a short survey and answer some basic questions about themselves. The survey answers will help WTC and CRIAW know more about those who attended. Twenty-three people filled out the survey.

Most people identified themselves as women (78%) and less than half (44%) indicated they care for dependents. English was by far the most popular language spoken at home (70%), followed by multiple languages (English, Malay, French, Spanish and Tagalog).



78%

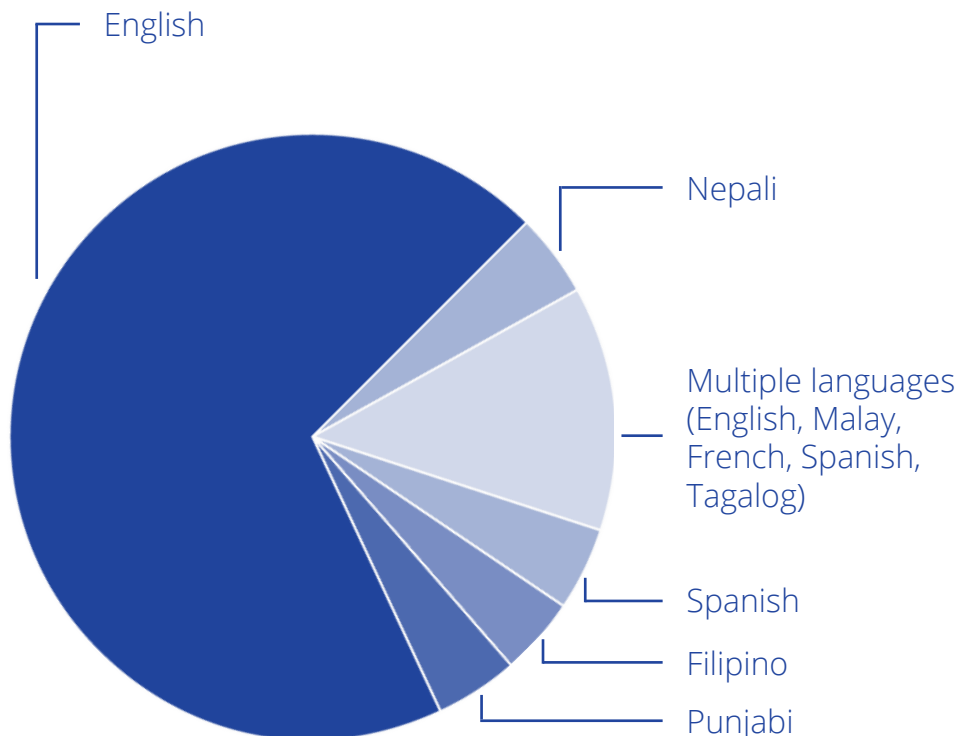
of attendees
identified as
women



43%

of attendees care
for dependents

Chart 1 Languages spoken at home



Many attendees (57%) were of European origins, such as English, Greek, and Scandinavian. About one-third (30%) were of Asian origins. Around 35% of attendees did not live or work in Surrey, but 39% had lived or worked in Surrey for 24 years or more. Most attendees (65%) had never run for office in Surrey.

Those between ages 25-39 made up nearly half (48%) of those who attended. This is a younger group than usually comes to events like this (this could be because the forum was held at a university).

Regarding income, several attendees (22%) had total household income below \$40,000, and 17% made between \$100,000 and \$150,000.



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35%

of attendees did not live or work in Surrey

