

Women's Symposium

Building Leadership and Community

September 15, 2012

FINAL REPORT

EVENT SUMMARY:

On Saturday, September 15, 2012, over 225 women from various community and cultural backgrounds gathered at the Fantasyland Hotel and Conference Centre for a dynamic day of learning, sharing and networking. Throughout the day, women shared leadership experiences and explored ways to promote women's participation in community and government in an effort to better the professional, educational, and social outcomes for women in Edmonton. The Honourable Rona Ambrose, Minister of Public Works and Government Service and Minister for Status of Women delivered the keynote speech for the event. The majority of women who responded to the evaluation rated the Symposium overall as very good or excellent and considered the event as a valuable opportunity to share information and to network.

Four key objectives guided the planning and delivery of the Women's Symposium – Building Leadership and Community. These were to:

1. Engage a diverse audience of women to continue the conversation of building leadership and community;
2. Facilitate networking and learning opportunities for women;
3. Explore possibilities for mentorship programs to empower women to take on leadership roles in social, economic, and political sectors of civic life;
4. Receive input from women regarding the need and criteria for developing a Women's Advisory Committee to Council.

A variety of learning sessions offered throughout the day explored topics such mentorship, leadership in a multicultural world, parenting in a community of diversity, balancing work, education and family, leadership after retirement, Women in Media, and stories for community change. Speaker biographies as well as a detailed summary of each session topic can be found in the accompanying program.

Women who attended the Symposium were provided with three opportunities to contribute input and provide suggestions for a Women’s Advisory Committee (or Entity) to City Council. Three facilitated discussion sessions were scheduled at various times during the day to maximize opportunities for women attending the Symposium to attend at least one of the sessions.

Two main questions guided the discussion. Women were asked:

1. What they viewed as being the main topics or areas of focus for this committee/entity, and
2. What criteria would determine membership and/or participation?

A range of responses were received throughout the day and have been summarized into category headings below: A complete listing of feedback gathered can be found in the attached appendix.

Suggested topics/areas of focus

1. Violence against women
2. Human Rights, Equal Rights
3. Career and Leadership Development
4. Health and Family
5. An information Portal or Hub, an avenue to promote Community Linkages, resources
6. Education and Advocacy
7. Research and Policy Review

Suggested criteria to determine membership and/or participation

- A) Diversity – women from various community, cultural, business and political backgrounds
- B) Women with expertise and knowledge relating to the issues or subject matter
- C) Committed Individuals with a common vision and the ability to influence change
- D) A committee or entity with a clearly defined structure, purpose and the required supports in place to ensure viability and sustainability
- E) A clearly defined recruitment process

Common themes presented included an action oriented entity to promote advocacy regarding issues that affect **ALL** women, their children and families, such as health, education, housing, equal rights violence against women, leadership and career development. Women viewed the “entity” as a way to bring together diverse groups to a level of equality in work, education, recreation and other opportunities; an entity that would advise on policy, procedures, programs and services, an entity that would work to break down common barriers to participation, such as child care; and an entity that would promote mentorship opportunities for women from diverse ages and backgrounds.

Women also viewed the entity as a centralized hub of (referral) services (e.g. research, resources, and programs) as a way to garner awareness and improve access to those services.

Women viewed membership/participation as being a group of knowledgeable community ambassadors representing diverse ages, skills and experiences with a common vision and ability to educate and influence change. Both mainstream and minority opinions and populations must be represented on this committee; ensuring voices of all classes of women are heard. Women in these roles need to be supported to be successful.

The Way We Live – Edmonton’s People Plan

The Women’s Symposium demonstrates ways in which the Community Services department is following The Way We Live Edmonton’s People Plan.

EDMONTON IS A VIBRANT, CONNECTED, ENGAGED AND WELCOMING COMMUNITY

- The City of Edmonton provides opportunities in neighbourhood, community and public spaces to connect people and build vibrant communities
- The City of Edmonton connects individuals, families, groups, cultures and communities to the services they need to thrive and realize their potential
- Provides opportunities for new residents to connect and feel welcome and be engaged in their new city.
- Provides and promotes innovative methods to reduce barriers to participation and engage citizens in local government.

Key Learning and Feedback Received:

1. Expand mentorship marketplace to include more diverse opportunities
2. Increased representation and involvement from the Aboriginal Community; perhaps consider an aboriginal stream in future Symposiums
3. Engage more young women in this dialogue/work/struggle
4. Work with moderators to recognize and become aware of audience tension and conflict. Provide training and orientation around techniques to de-escalate and facilitate difficult conversations.
5. Continue to offer this Symposium; perhaps expand to 2 days to delve more deeply into topics.
6. Additional topics might include: business start-up, entrepreneurial leadership, making a mark in the corporate world, corporate/organizational leadership, women and poverty, violence against women, diversity & inclusiveness policy.
7. Expand promotional efforts for future symposiums
8. It was good to see an overview of grassroots organizations, municipal initiatives, programs and National political perspective....well done

9. Wish I could have attended other workshops – the two I attended took up all of my time.
10. Please consider a local producer of gift bags

RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. Further explore opportunities to support women’s issues/areas of focus within the City’s Administrative structure e.g.: Communities of Interest, Next Gen Municipal Engagement Strategy.
2. Share the key themes arising from the symposium and apply this as the context for a survey with a broader representation of women in the community, such as an on-line survey, Facebook, newspapers and other means.
3. Continue to explore the topic of mentorship; including the possible expansion of the existing Women’s Mentorship program and linkages to other mentorship programs in Edmonton.
4. Conduct a scan of what exists in other municipalities and prepare a report on the various models & initiatives to share as context for a future conversation and/or survey.
5. a) Create an internal working committee to continue to engage this work - possibly part of a formal Council Initiative; AND:

b) Create a Task Force (council committee) that would review the input from the facilitated session and information from the activities under Recommendations #2 & #4, in order to recommend to City Council a mandate and structure for an ongoing entity.
6. Plan another Women’s Symposium to take place in the Spring of 2013.

APPENDIX:

Women's Symposium – Building Leadership and Community

Facilitated Discussion – Women's Advisory Committee/Entity
Flip Chart Notes

Discussion Topic 1: Suggested Areas of Focus

Violence against Women

Missing or murdered Aboriginal women (+/- 600 nationally)

Violence against women

Awareness of how cultural traditions hurt women, children & families

Human trafficking

Advise on violence against women

Human Rights, Equal Rights

Human rights

Equal rights of both genders/transgender

Women – wage gap

Pay equity/advocacy voice

Focus on a few key areas eg. 4 major themes eg. Economic issue, pay equity

Equal rights for **aging women of colour**

Find ways to bring all diverse groups to a level of equality in work, education, recreation & other opportunities.

Career & Leadership Development

Employment for **persons with disabilities** (pwd) – meaningful and appropriate (paid)

Linking careers, employment, and transferrable skills of **immigrant** women

How to help **professional immigrant women** identifying transferrable skills

Helping **immigrant** women to work in the areas they are qualified for (education, skills have direct transfer)

Employment & progression i.e.: promotions and mentorship in organizations

Computer skills – job finding

Business development – all women

Investing in women's success in business – how to move up the success ladder; empowerment in business.

Women's entrepreneurship.

Leadership development for women (x2)

Mentorship (x2) (recruitment & empowerment of women by key leaders in communities)

Inclusiveness very important; mentoring, sharing knowledge

Mentorship programs for **Newcomers**; career
Helping women to learn how to help themselves – personal coaching adjustment & skills
More done for **senior** women
Investment – Financial advising after retirement

Support for women to be more assertive e.g. business, life balance; bring out inner strengths
Building skills and knowledge for **new immigrants**
For women to be supportive of each other in general

Recognition of women's contributions
Acknowledge work success and celebrate recognition of women local and international
"Women in the City"
Have awards for women as a part to promote leadership

Political capital for women of colour (how to get involved, supports to get there)

Move from (advisory) issues to advocacy & mentorship

Health & Family

Supports for **new mothers** – education of services
Teach life skills (housekeeping, childcare to young women (**new mothers**) i.e. Communication skills in schools
Child welfare issues
Identifying and break-down of barriers eg: Childcare
Navigating systems; family nutrition, keeping our children healthy
Safety, supports (educ) for **youth/teenagers**
Nutrition and education
Food security
Health and wellness
Women's health (x2)
Wellness of women
Well being of women and specifically the needs of **vulnerable Aboriginal women** (provide resources - funding is only federal)
Spiritual emotional, physical holistic lens
Education on inner development translating into who I am
Social determinants of health
Bring up issue of cultural sensitivity re: women + issues re health
Family Issues perhaps a physical place women can go for wrap around services that is child friendly, etc.

A Center women can access to celebrate womanhood the strengths that already exist – sharing, teaching

A Q's Centre – involve research, a place to meet.

Information Portal/Hub, Community Linkages

Integrated database of services & support – personalized services

Coordination of resources welcoming aspect, reception

Central repository of information on other groups for women (Bridge of info)

Creating a database of what is already available; collaboration brings together women's services that already exist.

Bring together one stop shopping

One stop shop on info/services (safe house concept)

Strategy to get information to everyone

Have a directory of women in business. E.g.: accounting, counseling, education, etc.) Set criteria of who can be listed.

Seniors greater awareness of services

Integration of **newcomers** to society

Supporting **immigrant** women to know where support services are

Keepers of community contact of services/programs (existing, needs for other services)

Need for clarifying resource information

Financing (literacy, understanding of services)

Equal access (informed referral of services)

Disseminating of information and referral of support/services that exist

Housing (affordable/subsidized)

Structure for transfer of knowledge, skills, history for continuity

Security, safety, quality of life, financial & economic status.

Non-denominational centre

Coordinated strategy for assisting **women on the streets** – awareness of programs

Bridge women's with men's organization

Is it promotion of rights, availability of programs & services as the mandate? (So much potential and options)

Looking to action – we know the issues. Hub (is a) good idea. Not just advisory but concrete action with deliverables

Ways for Advisory group to reach out and engage to existing organizations

Capacity to hear from community and bring to advisory committee

Making connection with: women leaders, other cities, agencies, organizations, services, education, awareness of opportunities, diversity in schools (curriculum)

Building partnerships across communities

Channel all information for all diverse groups to bring back to those who will listen

Sponsorship of more interagency meetings. More awareness of what exists (provide meeting of different cultural groups to share)

Where can municipality have a role (can they broker relationships, offer services, etc)?

Liaison/bridge between local issues and other gov't levels Can we create advisory committees through existing foreign embassies – link together?

General

Should replace former committee and have fresh outlook (1994)

Similar setup to UN meeting – quarterly governance structure

Advisory role only – not replacing what exists (programs, services)
Advising council to ensure that women's programs are not duplicated
Women advising on eg: Recreation centers, all activities in the city.
Move from (advisory) issues to advocacy & mentorship (as above)
Looking to action – we know the issues. Not just advisory but concrete action with deliverables (as above)
Ensure the committee stays focused and connected – prevent isolation from others/community
Would prefer to have word "council" used as opposed to "committee"
Stepping stone for change
Political, social, cultural and capital focus
Assurance of what committee advises on IS HEARD – accountability – voice
Women's programs should be complimentary
Work to realize full potential of women
Recognize demographics of Edmonton in order to bring all issues forward; leave no one behind.
Everybody's needs should be on the table. Variety of needs within group e.g. New to Canada
Get away from laying blame on cultural groups – it's everyone's problem as Canadians
Celebration of cultural diversity – pay attention to traditional structures of groups (integration of some elements)
Celebrate and encourage citizenship of Canada.
Tender funding for outcomes (ie sports council model), program support for example)

Education and Advocacy

To advise council what we want to see happening in our neighbourhoods
Strategy to inform school system that educates children – voice to advocate for **immigrant** involvement in school boards
Educate society to include all diversity (race, religion, ability, age...)
Educate men and women to cooperate with each other at work & home in family. We are all humans. Segregation is not very helpful as much as integration. Educate families; educate men and women to make business together.
Policy to influence change when they move to Canada, based on credentials. (Advocacy work)
Access to education
Gender based oppressive practices and discrimination
Acknowledging historical impact of Aboriginal women and struggles – draw from existing Aboriginal resources
Greater political involvement for women in general
Voice for women's issues & taking action
Targeting and strengthening voice of Aboriginal women
Advocate for working together with existing programs e.g.: women with addictions
Educating men about women's issues and involvement/partnership with men

Strategies for assisting women living on the streets
What can be done about the # of Aboriginal children in care, Aboriginal people incarcerated?
Aboriginal women's issues administration – coordination from City

Research & Policy Review

To ensure policies of Council are inclusive to all women from diverse backgrounds (disabled, immigrant, aboriginal, etc)

Cross sectoral women's voice to City and City Council's initiatives and policies

Need to research what other provinces have been doing. We need to catch up and find what will benefit women (include current functioning organizations for women)

Study on existing women's shelters in Edmonton

Looking at policies & institutions

Advocating for policy changes

Revisit and review and to begin to implement policy and procedures already existing.

Process needs to be in place for determining all issues & researching all diverse communities then prioritize.

Discussion Topic 2: What criteria would determine membership and/or participation?

Who? Diversity

Voice is important from all areas (high level & grassroots)

Aboriginal representation to their issues

Aboriginal community embedded in all identified issues

Aboriginal representatives necessary

Important for Aboriginal people to share their stories & educate others on the reasons for the importance of their role on committee. (Educate others on the relevance & significance of our necessity on committees)

Women with disabilities

Include gay/lesbian community

Representation: educational, public and private

Involve women from immigrant communities in all aspects

Cross generational

Open to everyone – diversity

Inclusive to all diverse groups

Should be reflective of all area of diversity e.g. City of Edmonton. Diversity & inclusion framework (layers of diversity)

Key leaders from different communities – accurate representation (i.e. Aboriginal, francophone)

Marginalized voices need to be represented not just the privileged

Should be a model of all diversity not just gender.

Seniors & youth representation important (PWD, GLBT)

Cultural/age diversity, occupational (___ (up road sectors?))

Women from finance, medicine, education, etc. as well as grassroots community Include many partners – multi-sectoral

Women who are self employed entrepreneurs

Bring in women working in grassroots level

Fair genders and generations represented

Ensure representation from every level

Newer voice to come on board is good. New ideas/fresh eyes
All ages; youth and seniors representation (college level)
Guard against just having human services rep/multi-sectoral
Consider adding men to the committee; Educated men; they can relay back “men listen to men” to the community

Recruitment & criteria – Expertise/Knowledge

Process of recruitment and selection should reflect what the committee sees as relevant to process and mandate

Determine the purpose. Is it diversity or women’s group? Describe the scope that will be addressed

Define for potential members:

How many hours are needed, job description, process for nomination

Define objective; purpose and how will our voice be heard?

Develop criteria for membership/representation (x2); for example...

Anybody who is passionate, has the time, multicultural

Committed Individuals

Interested & committed (x2)

Women who work in their communities but with knowledge of policies and how to inform & influence policy change

Expertise in their area

Global view of other groups – no self interest, or “agenda” driven

Willingness to be open-minded

Committee members should be ambassadors that can educate and influence change – strong voice.

Organization leaders with knowledge of women’s issues

Passion for women’s issues; combination of self selection and nomination(s)

Knowledge of your own community and issues

Ability to influence change

Awareness of what council can do

A democratic process – diversified funding

Awareness of current research on women’s issues

Mentors with expertise but with global views

Trusted community members to bring issues to be voiced & supported by community to be that voice.

Who can best provide representation of identified issues?

Not appointment but selected by community

Advertise within communities

Who are the local experts in the community/very isolated?

Women with community experience

The representative needs previous experience with having sat on a committee

Don’t just ask community leaders to pick people – non traditional methods for recruitment

Multidimensional community outreach to different communities.

Need to define what the Community is
Don't assume only leaders are best representation; need to connect with who will be bring those issues forward. (Consider grass roots)

What does success look like? Structure/Purpose/Support

Vision

Mandate, outcome & expectations need to be known - resources based on these

Need to establish a good base of guiding principles and criteria

Evaluation and measures of success.

Intent would be to identify common ground

Research! (Current best practices)

Sharing & disseminating available services, resources and expertise

Structure allows for sub-committees that can gather information

To have all voices represented some are too shy to speak out (i.e. Aboriginal & immigrant),

keep it to 10 – 12 women per group send someone from community as representative

We have to look at what level women are involved (E.g.: Women part of each 10 -12 do a community consultation that would inform the community they represent & reveal #'s.)

Multiple ways of consultation

Skilled facilitation

Use of social media for networking and building social capital

Following from today community for networks to begin connecting to database for areas of focus.

Have a forum once year to ensure representative of all sectors

Put focus area into themes; e.g. Policy

Areas of interest related to issues

Issue "be a woman"

Not all issues need to be at table (represented) but do need recognition of those issues existing (mechanism for transferring of information)

Gender relations (focus area)

Other Important Questions & Considerations

What will be the impact of our voice, regarding decisions that City Administration & Council are working on, women's voices need to be represented.

Council for women vs. advisory committee established in City structure + office in City Hall.

Prefer a COUNCIL vs. an Advisory Committee

Be clear that you are focused on the City of Edmonton

Commitment to role - City needs to commit as action based

Many committees have come & gone...we need to ensure it is viable, sustainable.

Human resources to coordinate with administration of Committee and its outcomes

Mechanism for providing reports back to the community = accountability to women as citizens

Needs to focus externally, locally (government) and department so that everything is connected.

Follow-up from city: with email/contact info. Start network by requesting information on your area of expertise.