



CAPACITYCANADA



CREATING AN INTENTIONALLY INCLUSIVE BOARD CULTURE

Funded By:



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Date: August 2023

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MEET THE TEAM



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INTRODUCTION TO THE GUIDE

Introduction

This resource is an accompaniment to Creating Inclusive Board Culture online training modules for boards of organizations who wish to bring social justice into the board room. The inequities in power and privilege that exist because of sexism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, racism and all other forms of exclusion are prevalent in general society and also in the boards of our non-profit organizations. All organizations should have a vested interest in challenging inequality both externally, in social structures and institutions, and internally, within the programs, policies and governance of the organization.

Because inequities are institutionalized, barriers to participation on boards exist for those who are marginalized by the above-mentioned forms of oppression. For example, women comprise 19.5% of the board members for Canada's top 500 companies¹ and within the nonprofit sector, a 2021 Statistics Canada report showed that of those board members who replied to a national survey, 14 percent identified as being immigrants to Canada; 11 percent identified as belonging to a visible minority group; eight percent identified as 2SLGTBQIA+ six percent identified as persons with a disability; and three percent identified as First Nations, Métis or Inuit².

Registered charities often lack diversity on their boards and are not representative of the communities they serve. The following anecdote provides a tangible example:

A non-profit, feminist organization was starting a new outreach program for women engaged in sex work. A volunteer steering committee was established to oversee that work. Its membership included members of the organization's governance board, its executive director and leaders of other women-serving nonprofits. The coordinator of the program at the time argued that the steering committee lacked "lived expertise", as no members had any experience of sex industry involvement, and the inclusion of an individual with that experience would bring a necessary perspective to program development and service provision. The request was denied, as it was argued that a woman engaged in sex work "wouldn't be in a place" to sit on a steering committee.

Fast forward seven years and the committee had disbanded, the program had grown exponentially, and the organization had changed leadership and undergone extensive Trauma Informed Practice training, incorporating that approach into not only its program work but into all aspects of the organization including the board and its governance. The most active member of the board, the person leading its governance review, was a woman with lived expertise in sex work. Her invaluable experience in that area of her life helped inform the board around sex worker advocacy, but beyond that, her extensive skills in other areas including her governance knowledge and organizational skills as board secretary were invaluable.

At the beginning of this anecdote, although the organization always had a mandate around gender equity and was engaged in feminist advocacy, it was not living its values internally, and was not incorporating its trauma-informed approach to service provision in its policies, practices and board governance. Because of this, women who reflected the community it served were excluded from leadership roles (and the organization was missing out on all the contributions they had to offer aside from their lived expertise).

Our Purpose

In this guide and our accompanying online training, we aim to support boards who wish to do the internal work necessary to shift board culture towards a culture of inclusion. We do so through the articulation of a governance framework that centers on feminism, equity and safety. We present this framework through a feminist, trauma-informed lens.

Relevant questions boards may ask themselves before beginning include:

- Why do we need to do this work as a group?
 - Too often we unknowingly retraumatize others with micro-aggressions that come from acting on automatic pilot rather than acting with intentionality of respect and safety as we do our work.
- What is a safe environment?
 - Creating that safety requires each person to consider how they individually exercise and share power.
- What are the desired outcomes for our own board culture?
 - Who do we wish to be as a board? What kind of energy do we wish to create for each board member as we do our work?
 - What values do we want to build our culture around?
 - How would we know when we have violated our board's culture or offended a fellow board member with a subtle act of exclusion?
 - What should be the response when a micro-aggression has been delivered?
 - How would we address that?

How to use the Guide

This guide is intended to be a resource that accompanies the online training videos which dive deeper into the concepts included herein. We recommend that you have this guide available at your fingertips for reference as you view the two online videos.

- Section 1 of this guide aligns with on-line training Module 1 Using Feminist Trauma-Informed Approach to Inclusive Board Culture.
- Section 2 aligns with training Module 2 Board Readiness for Intentional Inclusive Culture.
- The Appendices in Section 3 contain the tools and resources referenced in the videos. Appendix A includes reflection activities for viewers to engage with. Appendix B contains an assessment tool that can be used to establish where your board is in its practices toward creating an inclusive board culture. It also identifies several strategies that boards might consider implementing to improve their inclusive practices.

In considering how to be a feminist, trauma-informed board, we must first establish the principles associated with both concepts, and then reflect on how these principles are put into practice at the board level and how they intersect with traditional concepts associated with board governance. Each section that follows presents a concept and its associated principles. We have also provided questions that boards can ask themselves as they begin to consider the principles presented.



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S E C T I O N

01

USING FEMINIST-TRAUMA INFORMED APPROACH TO INCLUSIVE BOARD CULTURE

Introduction

This section covers terms referenced in video one, introducing the concepts of feminism and trauma informed practice. It begins to consider how we might apply these lenses to an inclusive Board culture.

Feminism

While the need for equitable access to rights and freedoms for women and girls is not generally contested (at least in Canada), the word feminism carries with it a certain baggage by virtue of its sometimes-misunderstood nature and the stigma that it engenders. The values held by some people may align with those of the feminist movement, but due to the negative connotations associated with the word feminist, they may not identify as such. Thus, we identify what feminism means:

It's important to understand that feminism is a movement that has existed throughout history, both locally and globally. It aims to free women and non-binary people from oppression and has specific ideas about how things should be. It identifies the unfair treatment of people due to their gender (along with other factors like race, ability, sexuality, etc.). The movement has various goals, like ending situations where some people have power over others, stopping discrimination based on sex, ensuring that women and non-binary people have control over their own bodies and sexuality, advocating for the human rights of marginalized people and what's best for them, increasing awareness about these issues, changing the way societies and laws work, and promoting democracy. All of this is based on important values such as fairness, rights, personal freedom, self-respect, and justice. Feminism isn't just about talking; it's about taking action to change things and make the world better by examining and challenging current power dynamics and making the world a fairer place for everyone ³.

The world indeed includes the board room; the change that a feminist organization seeks must be reflected in its own internal practices, and especially in its most powerful entity - its Board.

PANSOW⁴ Feminist Premises

1. **To be a feminist** is to assert our equal value as women/[non-binary people] in a society that too often undervalues our worth, contributions and experiences.
2. **To be a feminist** is to challenge the inequities in power and privilege that exist because of sexism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, racism and all other forms of exclusion.
3. **To be a feminist** is to question the institution of family as it is currently structured, and to challenge the roles and responsibilities of women, [non-binary people] and men in family caregiving.
4. **To be a feminist** is to be a strategist in challenging structures and institutions that are built upon male values and experience, and that limit women [and non-binary people]'s equal participation.
5. **To be a feminist** is to view the world through our women's [and non-binary people's] eyes from our women's [and non-binary people's] experiences, and to see this lens as valuable and necessary in the pursuit of equality and inclusion.
6. **To be a feminist** is to recognize, include and value women [and non-binary people]'s different kinds of knowledge, including knowledge informed by personal experience and knowledge acquired through work and education.
7. **To be a feminist** is to acknowledge that the world is not always a safe place for women and non-binary people to speak out about inequality. The strength that exists in the collective voice of women's and gender-diverse organizations makes our challenges safer and more effective.

Intersectional Feminism

The term “intersectionality” was coined by legal scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw⁵ in 1989 to describe how systems of oppression overlap to create distinct experiences for people with multiple identity categories. She noted that when the terms “racism” or “sexism” were framed as an either/or proposition, they could not capture the oppression and experiences of black women.

Intersectional feminism has evolved to recognize the many ways different women and non-binary folks are oppressed by barriers and discrimination that go beyond their gender, recognizing how different forms of marginalization interact and compound to create disadvantage.

Equity (vs. Equality)

Equity is giving everyone what they need to be successful. Equality is treating everyone the same.

Gender equity refers to the belief that individuals of different genders require different levels of support to achieve true equality⁶. There are three main assumptions built into gender equity:

1. That individuals of different genders have different needs and different access to rights, privileges and opportunities.
2. That the needs of each individual depend on their specific circumstances (including forms of marginalization they may be experiencing in addition to those that are gender-related).
3. That the acknowledgement and accommodation of these differences are necessary for true gender equality to be possible.

Equality is the state of all genders having access to the same privileges; equity is the process to get us there.

Systemic Trauma

- Practices and procedures implemented by institutions, organizations or their leaders that directly or indirectly cause psychological, emotional, economic, spiritual, or physical harm to particular individuals or specific groups of people (for example, women, women of colour, etc.).
- Perpetuates inequality, injustice, marginalization, exploitation and oppression of certain individuals or groups through such means as denial of opportunities, exclusionary tactics, preferential advancement of individuals or groups granted majority status, disenfranchisement, and lack of access to resources or other supports⁷.

Structures and institutions are largely built upon male values and experience. Structural barriers to inclusion can silence marginalized voices, prioritize the contributions of members of privileged groups, and devalue certain types of knowledge (e.g., valuing education over lived experience/expertise).

Trauma- Informed

To be trauma-informed as an organization is to “work at the client, staff, agency, and system levels from the core principles of: trauma awareness; safety; trustworthiness, choice and collaboration; and building of strengths and skills.”⁸”

Trauma-informed organizations understand the impacts of all forms of trauma, including systemic trauma, and implement Trauma-Informed Practices (TIP) throughout all aspects of the organization including the provision of services, advocacy, management practices, and board governance.

In addition to this awareness, there are three pillars to TIP:



These pillars are well aligned with feminist practice, and together with individual interactions, service practices, and policies, they create a non-hierarchical and supportive organizational and Board culture.

Safety

Within trauma-informed organizations, there are four forms of safety⁹ that are relevant to the work of Boards.

Emotional Safety

About how we feel. Is respect present? How do we treat each other? How is power distributed? An emotionally safe Board is one where everyone feels respected for their differences.

Social Safety

About group dynamics. Can everyone express themselves without judgment? A socially safe Board is one where the impacts of structural oppression on self-expression are acknowledged and practices are put in place to ensure that everyone has a voice and that all voices are equally valued.

Vocational Safety

About the ability to do a job with integrity. Is there role clarity? Is there effective board governance? Does everyone understand the boundaries of their work/role? Are there barriers to that work being accomplished? A vocationally safe board is one where directors and staff understand their roles and the principles of equity are used to support everyone's ability to fulfill their duties.

Moral Safety

About ongoing ethical dialogue and search for understanding. Does board work happen in line with the principles of organization? What language is used? Is it feminist? A morally safe board, therefore, is one that wrestles constantly with the issue of power and how power can be utilized in ways that promote equity and inclusion. The pursuit of moral safety is what motivates to have a vested interest in challenging inequality both externally, in social structures and institutions, and internally, within the programs, policies and governance of the organization.

Strengths Based

Being strengths-based and skill-building refers to addressing challenges by focusing on the positive attributes of a person or a group, rather than coming from a place of deficit. It means seeing people as resourceful, resilient, and capable of change and growth. This perspective aims to recognize the skills already present and build upon them.

Questions for the board to consider include:

- Have the ED and Board received appropriate training?
- Does everyone feel appreciated for what they bring?
- Are challenges/growth areas addressed from a strengths-based perspective?
- Is there proper evaluation/feedback of performance?
- Is there room for debriefing for EDs and directors?
- How do you orientate new board members?

Collaboration, Choice and Control

Considering collaboration, choice and control from a trauma informed lens is all about sharing power. In the context of the board, individual members should feel empowered in their roles to participate fully and equally in decision making.

Questions for the board to consider include:

- Is collaboration, choice and shared control afforded to your ED and Directors?
- Is there collective decision making?
- Does everyone have a voice?
- Is there role clarity? Can the ED do their job without board interference in non-board related matters?
- Does the board have proper oversight of relevant areas of work?
- Is the board provided appropriate information to make informed choices on areas within their control?



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S E C T I O N

02

BOARD READINESS FOR INTENTIONAL INCLUSIVE CULTURE

Governance with a Feminist Perspective

Governance is operating from a “detached” or “helicopter” view and seeing to it that the organization achieves what it should and avoids unacceptable situations. Governance should happen at every level of an organization where the authority figure/entity at each level is seeing to it that the organization under “my authority” is achieving what it should and avoiding unacceptable situations.

As it relates to feminism, concerns about the status of women, non-binary people appear to fall into the unacceptable situations category. What is unacceptable?

1. People feel undervalued for their worth, contributions and experiences.
2. Inequities in power and privilege exist because of sexism, classism, heterosexism, ageism, ableism, racism and all other forms of exclusion.
3. People being cast into a role due to assumption and tradition such as the role of wife or mother in a family or, similarly, female/male roles in a business setting.
4. Operating in a system built upon colonial structures, male values and experience, and that limit or inhibit equal participation of women, non-binary people.
5. A culture where women’s, non-binary people’s perspectives and experiences are seen as less valuable, less valid in the pursuit of solutions and achievement.
6. A culture where knowledge accumulated through lived experience is considered less important than formal education and job experience.
7. A culture where it is unsafe for any people to speak out about inequality and challenge practices that support inequality.
8. A culture absent of emotional safety, social safety, vocational safety, and moral safety.

What should be achieved? A culture where diverse perspectives are safely shared, heard, processed to come to a shared vision and acted upon in a manner that leads to equity, inclusion, and social justice.

While the structure of traditional governance creates a few traps that can undermine feminist governance, the greater issue are the practices of governance that have become enshrined in the concept. Those practices largely fall to human failings.

Traditional governance is often driven with one person in the lead and majority rule. If the individual in the lead role (also known as the Board chair) or CEO, holds a particular disdain for people who are visibly different, that will result in people feeling unsafe. If the individual in the lead role has a low level of emotional intelligence and cannot navigate through tension when someone disagrees with the prevailing opinion, people will feel unsafe to express an opposing view. If the majority membership of any group aligns with each other because they have been similarly inculturated among many possible fronts, they often form a voting block which then discounts an opinion held by a smaller group. In other words, they vote on a particular side of an issue because of who else is voting in that persuasion, rather assessing the issue at hand and voting independently, using their own wisdom and that gained through the discussion before a vote is called.

However, if the individual in the lead role is aware of issues of safety, respect, trust-building and has reasonable facilitation skills, the environment could be deemed as safe on all counts.

The problem of governance is that it is very personality driven, rather than driven by a predictable system. Interpersonal communication skills and organizational practices that contribute to unpredictability in the culture are:

- The unevenness of skillsets for those stepping into a lead role.
- The rotation of leaders (particularly on a board).
- Lack of clarity of purpose and desired outcomes.
- Lack of explicit and enforced rules of engagement designed to create safety in the environment.
- Lack of dialogue skills so that the group thinks together.
- A culture where we lack curiosity about the other.
- Lack of listening skills.
- Lack of orientation to the role and good governance principles.
- The argument culture that is insidious in every aspect of society.
- The power dynamics at work in interpersonal communication.
- The four primary motivators in conflict: to dominate or to avoid domination, to prove that I am right or to prove the other wrong.
- Lack of understanding on how to maintain boundaries and compromise.
- A general lack of communication skill to negotiate to get to a shared perspective, assessing and integrating all of the opinions expressed, into a single shared value.

Organizational culture and practice drive a lack of diversity, equity and inclusion.

Dominant practices on boards that impact feminist perspective include:

Board Composition

Desirable board membership is often based on status where highly respected community luminaries create a high public profile for the organization, social connections for fundraising, and individuals with desirable professional skillsets, such as legal, financial, and public relations.

Board Member Recruitment

The social circle of existing board members is often the source for recruitment, thus leaving out consideration of unknown personalities. There is a belief that board members must be known quantities rather than recruiting based on self-reported experience and skillsets.

Board member vetting is a common practice where references are contacted. If a former employer (who does not hold feminist perspective) gives an unfavorable review of a candidate, that could jettison the opportunity for an unknown person to be recruited. Often the reference is the one that the nominating committee member can relate to.

Roles and Responsibilities

Governing boards rely on strategic thinkers; working boards rely on commitment to engage in projects. Both require commitment to show up, prepare for the meetings, participate and vote. People unacquainted with board culture often do not recognize the expectation for these commitments be fulfilled. Board culture requires commitment and accountability to the others in the group to serve the greater good. Often people who have experienced intersectional injustices have difficulty serving the greater good when their own personal needs have not been met. In the case of trauma-induced stress, people go into survival mode response and literally have an inability to respond, learn or process...all of which are required for effective governance.

A board has a job to impact for the greater good. The board culture is collegial. Board members enjoy fellowship with people they share a commonality with.

Organizations often throw people into a board situation without any on-boarding, orientation, or building community among the board. As a result, first time board members are lost and feel excluded. If in a board member's first experience, there is communication that explicitly or implicitly expects them to be silent and observe at the outset, there is little likelihood that the individual will ever feel comfortable offering an active voice and contribution.

Culture of the Board

Many boards do not develop an intentional culture. They are a group of individuals sitting around the table, each with their own opinions. They think alone, assess issues alone, and vote alone. Boards that develop an intentional culture attempt to bring people along in the process, assuring that all are heard, all contribute, and that the group thinks together with the intention to create a shared vision. Boards with an intentional culture generally do so by creating policy that drives behavior consistently year after year, regardless of who serves in the board chair role. The Executive Director can support this culture by assuring that orientation happens, ritual activities happen consistently and the stories of the organization that illustrate the intended culture are told with regularity.

Role of Bias

The bias of a board is often hidden in the assumptions that board members hold but don't discuss. When boards recruit people from the same social circle, those assumptions are often shared. Boards often make decisions that are not thoroughly vetted and are based on those hidden assumptions. Bias can only be uncovered when the board has explicit conversations about the assumptions held about an issue AND asking, "What if the opposite were true?" Unfortunately, as humans, we only notice that which proves we are right and reject information in the environment that is contrary to our beliefs. Even when presented with hard data, humans have confirmation bias, only noting that which supports their underlying assumptions.

Learning is about bumping up against those assumptions where information received challenges the assumption held AND we notice it AND inquire about the gap between our held assumptions and the facts presented.

Practices

Boards generally do not assume accountability for their practices. Practices get handed on year after year, resulting in, "This is the way we have always done it." Inculturation occurs. Board members who take the opportunity to question practices can call attention to a practice and ask why we do things this way. Frankly, that is the gift that new board members bring to the board; they can see things that others who have been inducted into the system can't see.

When a new board member questions the why, they are often told that this is the way we have always done it and to sit and learn how we do things, rather than the board taking a second look and joining in the inquiry.

Often boards don't recognize they are accountable for their own job design, job development, job performance and job discipline. It is more convenient and takes less energy to do things as we always have. Board members are often busy people who agreed to serve, not because they wanted to make a mission difference, but rather to be part of a social network. What motivation do they have to challenge the status quo of the social network?

Often people who serve on boards are chosen because they are viewed as leaders. They may be leaders in their own organizations; however, they are not likely comfortable in group process. Often people who are viewed as good board leaders have a behavioral style that focuses on getting through the agenda rather than taking the time to process an issue. If there is a process, it is often short circuited due to time and agendas that are too full. Additionally, many boards that meet regularly have time parameters of meetings that are no more than 90-120 minutes. It is difficult to process everything on a packed agenda in that time frame.

Alignment of Values

Boards are not highly skilled to navigate and negotiate pathways. Board members generally operate by bringing opinions to be debated with the majority vote to decide the final option.

Holding a values discussion is a very different animal. When people can connect their deeply held values to each other, it is easier to find a shared vision for a situation. The practice then should be, "You can state your opinion, but please identify what values inform that opinion." Getting underneath opinions to values is a critical level of dialogue.

When dealing with opinions, Boards get stuck in defending opinions that lead to a decision being made by individuals who are dominating the discussion. Whereas, if board members could suspend their judgment about an expressed opinion, and instead listen and inquire, this process leads to a path of generative discussion.

A healthy practice to achieve this is for all board members to express their perspective first so that we get all the diverse perspectives on the table, THEN discuss the merits of the situation and the range of values shared to define the relevant values for the organization to live.

How to Foster an Inclusive Board Culture

We have outlined what is holding Boards back from creating a feminist, trauma-informed inclusive culture. We have also offered some specific solutions. The key, however, to fostering inclusion needs to be considered from a "helicopter" view—the broader perspective. These governance principles, cultural principles and board practices identified below will foster an inclusive culture.

Proposed Governance Principles: These seven principles could be incorporated into a board's rules for engagement OR more permanently in board policy.

1	The Board is accountable to create an intentional culture that honors the authentic and lived experience of its membership.
2	The Board shall assure that each member of the board treats colleagues and is treated with respect, equity, and afforded deep listening.
3	The Board shall act as a collective, expressing its decisions and policies with one voice that results from a group process grounded in emotional safety, trust, trustworthiness, and transparency.
4	The Board shall act with humility, inquiry and response to cultural, historical and gender issues.
5	The Board will assure its processes are person-centered, engaging each person in the process. Topics for discussion will primarily be outward focused and meaningful to the community as a whole, rather than preoccupied with operational detail.
6	The Board shall be responsive to widespread conditions of inequity, injustice, toward any segment of society.
7	The Board shall define clear impacts for its work before engaging in any initiative.

Proposed Cultural Principles: Once again, these twelve principles could lay the groundwork for Board policy on creating an intentional culture of inclusivity. They could be adopted as cultural values for a board that seriously wishes to create an inviting and inclusive environment for diversity to be a sustainable condition on the board.

1	Board culture shall recognize the inherent worth and dignity of every person. Each person brings a differentiated value-add to the process.
2	Board culture shall be based in mutual respect, well-being of all, do no harm, and just treatment of all, resulting in freedom of psychological danger, fear and anxiety, social rejection and re-traumatization.
3	Board culture focuses on listening to each other in the expression of one's authentic self.
4	Board culture assures the full participation of each individual serving on the board, with that input being fully received and considered in the dialogue.
5	Board culture intentionally frequently engages in trust building work and evaluates its trustworthiness at each meeting.
6	Board culture is focused on co-creation of learning, dialogue, decisions and solutions
7	Board culture allows people to be authentically themselves in perspective, culture, language, and dress.
8	Board culture offers culturally informed hospitality connected to the people serving on the board or served by the organization.
9	Board culture lifts up the trauma experienced by each person, particularly persons who have been considered outside of the mainstream and have been marginalized in some manner, and practices with a trauma-informed framework.
10	Board culture keeps itself accountable for upholding human connections and group holism, assuring that each individual serving leaves each meeting whole and uplifted.
11	Board culture is keenly aware of and takes action when interpersonal communication, as well as policies and procedures, have a discriminatory effect on any person.
12	Board culture allows each individual the opportunity to express a concern when these principles are undermined or violated. The culture leads with a board response to properly process the concern.

Recommended Board Practices: It is one thing to put words in writing in a policy manual, it is entirely another thing to actually practice those words in day-to-day living. The following are specific practices that could improve a board's practice toward inclusivity.

1	The board chair is accountable for the integrity of the governing process, and each individual has an obligation to call out a moment where the board was out of integrity with its promises to each other.
2	Board check-in and clearing at the end of each meeting. The check in is intended to build a caring for each other as we encounter life activities that may create joy, pain, sorrow, etc. The clearing at the end of the meeting is to acknowledge people who contributed to you through their authentic sharing, perspective, insight. It is also an opportunity to process if one has been offended by another.
3	Board will conduct self-assessment with a focus on moral safety, including what hurts and what helps in relationships, attitudes & beliefs, policies and procedures.
4	The Board will create policy that integrates a concern for moral safety in equity, inclusion and justice throughout all of its work, including identifying what should be achieved and what is unacceptable in relevant relationships, attitudes and beliefs, and policies and procedures.
5	The Board shall adopt policies to systematically realize, recognize and respond to people who have experienced trauma and examine its responses to resist retraumatizing individuals or segments of the community.
6	The Board will cultivate group responsibility to address any barrier that emerges in its process by acknowledging, addressing, and resolving issues in a timely manner.
7	At the introduction of any topic, the board chair will offer the opportunity for each person to contribute their unique perspective BEFORE the group engages in discussion. The discussion then encompasses the whole of the group's perspectives.
8	<p>The job of each member is to recognize and appreciate the magnificence of each of the others and the gifts they each bring.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The concept of respect requires each person to hold the door open so that our colleagues can authentically share their perspectives. • <i>Showing respect</i> recognizes that each person's perspective is informed by a valid life experience. As soon as we judge another, we close the door of respect and reject the other person's life experience as invalid or irrelevant. • When an opinion is expressed, the response ideally would be, "What is this person trying to teach me here and now?"

THANK YOU!

Thank you to WAGE Canada for providing the funding for this project and to the St. John's Status of Women Council for their support in developing the proposal and receiving funding.

Big thanks to the members of the Provincial Action Network on the Status of Women, Newfoundland and Labrador (PANSOW), for their collective wisdom. We appreciate your time and energy in piloting and reviewing the materials for this project.



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APPENDICES: ACTIVITIES, WORKSHEETS AND TOOLS

Appendix A

Worksheets to Accompany Module 1: Using Feminist-Trauma Informed Approach to Inclusive Board Culture

This first appendix contains two resources that are designed to be used by individuals on boards as an accompaniment to the online training and information in this guide. While meant to be completed individually, the board may wish to collectively debrief their individual experiences of engaging with the material. Debrief questions are suggested below.

Activity # 1: Biases Questionnaire

This resource is intended to help individuals consider bias as a concept, to think about their own bias, how it impacts them and others and how they might work to address bias when it shows up for them. In a group debrief, it is not suggested to have individuals share what their biases are or may be, but rather to debrief using the questions that are found below.

Suggested Group Debrief Questions Related to Activity #1:

1. Have you ever thought about bias before? Have you done any reading or work on bias?
2. What came up for you in thinking about bias? How did it feel to consider the concept of bias overall?
3. How do we know when bias is present in our minds? What are our cues that we may have bias "showing up" for us?
4. What can we do when bias "shows up"? What are some strategies to challenge bias that have worked for you or that you've heard about?



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Biases Questionnaire

Rate your comfort level with the following...

(1 = deeply uncomfortable; 5 = very comfortable)

Biases exist

1 2 3 4 5

Having biases is part of being human.

1 2 3 4 5

I am human, so I have biases.

1 2 3 4 5

Some of my biases include...

I keep a look-out for my biases. I know that they "show up" when...





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I respond by...

Managing biases and assumptions begins by acknowledging that we have them. Not judging ourselves or others is so important. We must be cognizant of our own biases and explore them. We can explore our biases by educating ourselves, both through diversity training as well as reading up on issues that show up in your bias areas. It's also a good idea to research studies or projects about implicit bias and engage with them.

[Project Implicit](https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html) is a great place to start.

(<https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/takeatest.html>)

We can respond to bias by practicing mindfulness and being present. We can talk to others about bias and ask for support. We must be courageous and vulnerable; exposing ourselves to things that make us uncomfortable will help. Go easy and check in with yourself often!

Activity # 2: "My Philosophy" Activity

This resource is intended to help individuals consider who they want to be and how they want to show up in the board room. It uses a strengths-based perspective, as discussed in a trauma-informed framework, to encourage individuals to highlight the best parts of themselves and think about what they need to bring their best to the board. This activity is individual in nature, but also suggests that we all contribute to board culture. Group debrief questions are included below.

Suggested Group Debrief Questions related to Activity #2:

1. We don't often get asked about our strengths, how did it feel to think about how someone close to you would describe you?
2. What did you learn about your own safety in a group when doing this activity? What kinds of things do you need to feel safe?
3. What are some ideas for how we can support each other to build an inclusive board culture?
4. What are some ideas for how we might respond when we're challenged?



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My Philosophy ¹⁰

This is a document which guides me and my work. It captures my unique strengths, the things I need to feel safe, my personal goals in my work and some reminders to keep me on track. I will carry it with me and return to it when needed.

Strengths-Based

My most beloved person would describe me as...

Things I do well and the talents I bring to our board...

Experiences I am most proud of...



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Safety and Trust

I feel safe and respected in conversations when...

I will build trust with board peers by...

I feel collaboration is present and power is shared when...

*Adapted with gratitude from St. John's Status of Women Council/Women's Centre's "Empowering Ourselves" Facilitator Training materials. With acknowledgement to Dana Warren and Stacey Hoffe.



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My Intentions

Values that are important to me and by which I guide my work...

This is the type of board member I hope to be...

I hope to support my board peers by...

***Adapted with gratitude from St. John's Status of Women Council/Women's Centre's "Empowering Ourselves" Facilitator Training materials. With acknowledgement to Dana Warren and Stacey Hoffe.**



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Staying the Course

Ways I have addressed or challenged power in the past include...

Here is what I need to remember when things get tough...

This is my mission statement (my main purpose and goal in board involvement)...

*Adapted with gratitude from St. John's Status of Women Council/Women's Centre's "Empowering Ourselves" Facilitator Training materials. With acknowledgement to Dana Warren and Stacey Hoffe.



Journal Reflection

What do you find unacceptable regarding the treatment of people?

Appendix B

Board Readiness Assessment to Live an Inclusive Culture

If a board wishes to intentionally diversify its membership and sustain that diversification, it must assess whether the culture of the board is not only ready to accept the diversification, but also assure that every member of the board experiences inclusion throughout the governing process. Without inclusion, well-intentioned diversification efforts result in tokenism or disenfranchised board members.

This assessment tool is intended to assist your board in evaluating whether your board culture has adopted intentional practices that offer inclusion to all who choose, or are invited, to serve on your board. Diversification of a board is not always easy because the culture of the board outrightly rejects or cannot accept or integrate diverse perspectives into its processes of thinking together.

If a board wishes to be inclusive, it must embrace the process of learning together and evolve to be ultimately successful at inclusion of diverse perspectives. In essence, the board must be open to challenging its assumptions about board process as well as accepting change in the way the board operates and thinks together. Inclusion allows people to bring their uniqueness to the table. Authentic expression informed by lived expertise is historically not ingrained into the culture of most boards.



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Board Readiness Assessment to Live an Inclusive Culture

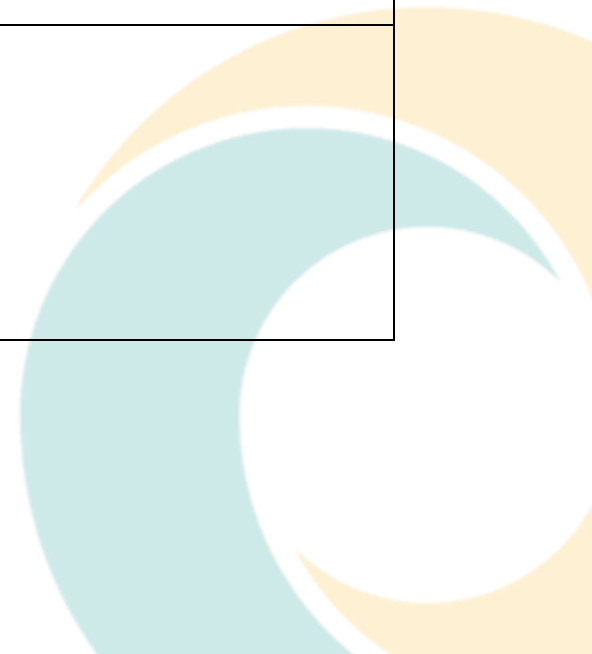
Step #1: Instructions

Each board member should complete this assessment tool, rating each of the 15 items on the scale from 4-1, providing any evidence they notice to support their rating. The completed assessments should be compiled. The averaged score may be instructive, however, more useful is the range of scores offered. For example, if four board members rate the items at its highest rating of 4 and one member identifies that same item as a one or zero, that offers a perspective that there is not a level playing field at the board table. The range is more important than the averaged scores. Once the assessment result has been compiled, the board will want to discuss the results and what those results mean in terms of the board's readiness to truly be inclusive. Once that meaning has been established, the board should create a clear and prioritized plan to move itself forward toward living an inclusive culture.

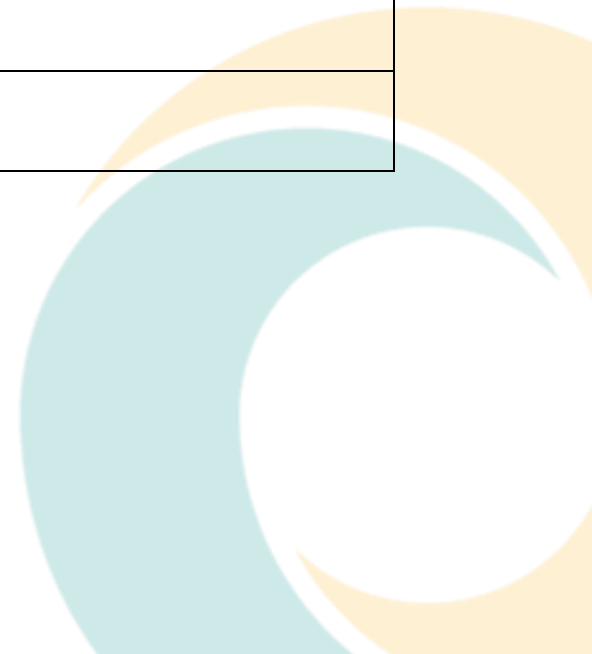
Step #1: Board Readiness Assessment to Live an Inclusive Culture

		Rating System: 4=To a great extent; 3=To a moderate degree; 2=A Small Amount; 1= Not At All; 0=Not Applicable					
		4	3	2	1	0	What evidence demonstrates your response?
<u>1</u>	We recruit board candidates based on an established criteria that offers equity of opportunity.						
<u>2</u>	Our board has an adaptable hierarchy in alignment with its expressed aims/goals, rather than a traditional hierarchy based in power.						
<u>3</u>	Our board regularly engages in trust building work and assesses its own trustworthiness.						
<u>4</u>	Our board demonstrates an intentional culture of accountability around respect and inclusion within its own processes as well as assuring accountability to these values throughout the organization.						

5	Our board hears all the relevant perspectives around the table before forming opinions and diving into discussion or dialogue about the issues on the agenda.						
6	Our board intentionally creates a safe space for people to authentically share their perspectives and opinions.						
7	Our board intentionally works toward deep listening to each other, encouraging and accepting the authentic self of those around the table.						
8	Our board regularly discusses the assumptions that we hold in addressing our issues.						
9	Each member of our board practices inquiry before advocacy. Each member demonstrates a value for curiosity about opinions or perspectives shared in a non-threatening manner.						



<u>10</u>	When conflict is present, our board navigates and resolves conflict in a healthy manner.						
<u>11</u>	Our board engages in ethical dialogue centered around a human rights approach.						
<u>12</u>	All board members feel empowered in their interactions with each other.						
<u>13</u>	All board members have a deep appreciation and intentionally consider the unique perspectives shared in dialogue. There is forgiveness and learning when subtle acts of exclusion are made.						
<u>14</u>	Every board member's strengths and talents are known, recognized and celebrated.						
<u>15</u>	There is clarity in board member roles and responsibilities.						



Step #2: Board Readiness with Strategies to Improve

Instructions:

Once the Board Readiness Assessment result has been compiled, the board will want to discuss the results and what those results mean in terms of the board’s readiness to truly be inclusive. Once that meaning has been established, the Board should create a clear and prioritized plan to move itself forward toward living an inclusive culture. The strategies in the second part provided here are intended to give some direction as to potential methods to employ that could improve the Board’s Readiness for Inclusive Governance.

	Readiness Criteria	Strategies to Improve Readiness
1	We recruit board candidates based on an established criteria that offers equity of opportunity.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create a strategic criteria for candidate recruitment that will further the board’s strategic vision. • Assess the spectrum of diversity represented in terms of social circles, skill sets. • Create a succession plan for board seats to assure equity of opportunity to serve from new segments of the community. • Assure a fair and objective review of a candidate’s strengths and opportunities to contribute value to our board only against our stated criteria.
2	Our board has an adaptable hierarchy in alignment with its expressed aims/goals, rather than a traditional hierarchy based in power.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The board conducts its own assessment of “colonial” practices that need to be adapted to assure there is no power imbalance. Consider: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Does the Chair act as though the position holds more power than the full board holds? (The chair does not have higher authority but has a differentiated job to do in assuring the integrity of governance in the organization.) ○ Do the bylaws state that the officers have more power than the full board does? (If so, change the bylaws to

		<p>assure that all board members are equals. Officers simply have a differentiated role to play to assure integrity in their assigned roles such as finance and documents.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Is there board policy established that states that the Executive Director is accountable to the full board? Is there policy that clearly states that the Chair is NOT the supervisor of the Executive Director, but rather a partner empowered to do the operational work.
3	Our board regularly engages in trust building work and assesses its own trustworthiness.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assure the board has properly educated itself and inculcated practices around concerns of trauma, intersectionality and emotional, social, vocational and moral safety. ● Assure a board culture of learning so that all board members are operating from a level playing field of understanding of the issue.
4	Our board demonstrates an intentional culture of accountability around respect and inclusion within its own processes as well as assuring accountability to these values throughout the organization.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assure an intentionality around respect and inclusion including evaluation of formal and informal processes at every meeting. ● Assure all governing documents are reviewed for inclusive language. ● Assure all processes have been reviewed for equity and inclusion. ● Conduct regular assessments of inclusion and respectfulness with our board and committees. ● Respond and initiate change processes when barriers for equity and inclusion are identified.
5	Our board hears all the relevant perspectives around the table before forming opinions and diving into discussion or dialogue about the issues on the agenda.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Assure the questions for discussion are posted on the agenda so that people can come prepared to share their initial perspective. ● Board members need to practice suspending their judgment on issues until the conclusion of dialogue, thus allowing themselves to be informed by people with lived expertise.

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Chair might regularly ask, “Does anybody see this issue differently?” OR “Does anyone hold information that could better inform us on this issue?”
6	Our board intentionally creates a safe space for people to authentically share their perspectives and opinions.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure the board honors the need for process to assure an inclusive dialogue, i.e. adjust the agenda to allow time for focused dialogue. • The Presider of the meeting needs to use quality facilitation skills to allow for quality process. • Assess at the end of each meeting whether there were moments that may have been unsafe for members.
7	Our board intentionally works toward deep listening to each other, encouraging and accepting the authentic self of those around the table.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure the board has time to process and dialogue in the creation of the meeting agenda. • Board members take ownership of the process to assure quality dialogue, assuring no individual or committee hinders its ability to hold deep and meaningful dialogue. • Board members engage in inquiry vs advocacy in the course of dialogue.
8	Our board regularly discusses the assumptions that we hold in addressing our issues.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presider regularly asks about what assumptions are driving opinions shared by Board members. • The presider facilitates dialogue when assumptions expressed vary significantly.
9	Each member of our board practices inquiry before advocacy. Each member demonstrates a value for curiosity about opinions or perspectives shared in a non-threatening manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The culture of the board is shared leadership rather than dependent on the presider to drive opinion sharing. • The board engages in self-assessment to create continuous process improvement. • The board seeks education and learning on how to improve engagement in group process and dialogue skills.
10	When conflict is present, our board navigates and resolves conflict in a healthy manner.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Individually and in group process, practice resolving conflict in three steps: acknowledge there is conflict, address (or name) the conflict, then resolve the conflict by finding areas of

		agreement first, then exploring ways to bridge the areas of expressed disagreement.
11	Our board engages in ethical dialogue centered around a human rights approach.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In each topic of the agenda, the Presider asks what are the ethical issues surrounding this topic. • The board gains clarity and a shared value around the ethical issue, then places that value in the context of the issue.
12	All board members feel empowered in their interactions with each other.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assess if there is bullying behavior on the board. Address it. • Assess the facilitation of the group’s process. Does everyone have the opportunity to express their opinions openly? • When an issue is to be discussed, assure everyone has an opportunity to share their initial perspective on that issue BEFORE dialogue begins. Do not allow discussion until all relevant perspectives have been expressed. • Add an agenda item “Comments for the Good of the Order” where board members acknowledge each other for thoughtful and impactful contributions to their understanding of issues.
13	All board members have a deep appreciation and intentionally consider the unique perspectives shared in dialogue. There is forgiveness and learning when subtle acts of exclusion are made.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure that everyone leaves a meeting whole. • Assure that the Board as a group is healthy and whole before adjourning a meeting. • When a mistake is made, the Presider should assure that the people involved have an opportunity to address it and forgive, likely in a private setting. • Alternatively, for the board to learn as a collective body, follow this process: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Pause the action. 2. Assume good intent. 3. Explain why the action was paused; what was the subtle act of exclusion that occurred. 4. Then acknowledge the feedback with gratitude. 5. Replace defensiveness with curiosity and empathy.

		<p>6. Follow through and follow up to assure forgiveness and learning have taken place.</p> <p><i>This process is described in Subtle Acts of Exclusion by Tiffany Jana and Michael Baran © 2020, published by Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., California.</i></p>
14	Every board member's strengths and talents are known, recognized and celebrated.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intentionally create a culture of gratitude and acknowledgement among the board. • Institute Comments for the Good of the Order as a regular feature on the meeting agenda. The comments offered should acknowledge people who contributed to one's learning AND/OR create an uplifting comment so that all people leave the meeting energized.
15	There is clarity in board member roles and responsibilities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assure there is clear role delineation between the board's governing role and that of the operational organization. • Conduct an effective orientation and on-boarding process for new board members that includes the whole board. • Assure that the on-boarding process includes inclusive dialogue practices as well as general governance philosophy and procedures. Assure that all board members understand their role, rights and responsibilities in the process as well as in delivering governing results. <i>This is vocational safety.</i>

Bonus Section

The preceding sections of this Guide track with the videos available online. Those sections offer concepts, worksheets and tools for any board to use to improve their culture of inclusion, using a feminist and trauma-informed framework. For organizations that wish to go a step forward toward shifting the power dynamic of governing structures, we offer this section on structural considerations.

When determining anything about structure, the first place to start is to define the function that needs to be achieved. THEN, determine the most efficient form to achieve that function. This is one tenet of systems thinking: form follows function. When creating forms that effectively enable a function, each construct brings a defined and differentiated value-add to the organization.

Recognizing that a board of directors is a power structure, there may be a reason to rethink the function to level the power and politics of the entity.

Suggested Structure: Mission Circle

Organizations may choose to retitle the “Board” terminology to “Mission Circle” responsible to assure that the organization stays focused on the mission.

Purpose of the Mission Circle

- Advance the Mission/Cause
- Govern by seeing to it the organization achieves what it should and avoids unacceptable situations.
- Governing jobs:
 - Bringing the concerns and values of the external environment into the organization.
 - Determining and documenting shared values that create the rules of engagement and the “playing field” of the operational organization, including the desired impacts of the organization.
 - Assure performance of both the mission circle and the operational organization.

Technical Characteristics of an Effective Mission Circle

- Roles and responsibilities are clear
- Structures and processes are in place to facilitate the work.
- The right skills and expertise are on the Mission Circle to meet the organization’s goals.
- Mission Circle members are responsive to staff and engaged in the work.
- The Mission Circle sets high expectations for the work and provides the support needed for the staff to meet those expectations.
- Mission Circle work is data-driven.

Mission Circle Process

- The group needs to agree on its "aims", that is, defining, "What is it that we are doing here? What is our work here in this group?"
 - To determine the group's aims, answer the questions: "Who are we accountable to? What are we accountable for?"
 - Cultivation of group responsibility. Focus on the "we"
 - When the aim is defined, it becomes an invitation to others, "This is what we are doing. If you like what we are doing, please join us."
- The hierarchy is based on the specificity of the aims and work to be achieved, not about power.

Mission Circle and Operational Leadership are aligned through a defined Strategic Plan.



Mission Circle Goals are intended to advance strategic exploration and continuously improve governance capacity.

- Mission Circle committees are appointed by the Mission Circle, accountable to the Mission Circle and are created to help the Mission Circle do ITS work.

Executive Director (ED) Goals are intended to advance the operational organization through financial management, sustainable delivery of programs and services, talent acquisition.

- The Leadership Team and Operational Committees are appointed by the ED accountable to the ED and created to help the ED do operational work.
- When Mission Circle members serve on operational committees, they are in the role of unpaid staff and accountable to the ED for the work to be done.

Overall Process: Collective Decision-Making is based in thinking together and being mutually influenceable.

Must be based in reflective and generative thinking, not defensiveness.

- Identify your perspective or the experience that informs your opinion. State your viewpoint.
- Suspend your viewpoint and listen to other perspectives, considering each in the context of the dilemma and deliberation.
- Inquire when another's view is different than yours to understand where you may be missing key information. Do not advocate your opinion; keep it suspended.
- Identify where there is agreement and where there is disagreement.
- Consider alternatives that would bridge the disagreement.
- Consider a third alternative that would bridge the gaps in agreement.

When an issue comes forward on an agenda, these questions should be answered BEFORE discussion begins:

1. What is the true nature of this issue?
2. Do we agree this is a shared issue and worth our time to discuss?
3. Whose issue is this? The Mission Circle or the ED? Why?
4. Have we ever discussed this issue previously? If yes, what did we say then?
5. Do we need to say more on this issue?
6. Before we discuss this issue further, what perspectives do we hold around this table (giving each person an opportunity to express their perspective.)
 - It would be ideal that when a person offers an opinion they should identify what experience they had that primarily is informing their opinion, e.g.. As person who has been physically beaten many times, I see ... or As an active sex worker, I see it this way...
 - The facilitator of the conversation should try to get underneath opinion and pull out what values are held about the issue.
7. What values were expressed in those perspectives?
8. Now that we've heard all the relevant perspectives and have a better sense of the values of each person in this group, what will be our shared perspective on the issue?
9. Before voting, each person should ask themselves, "Is this a decision I can live with and support?"
 - Consider the question, "What if the opposite were true?"
 - Any member can bring forward an "owning up" process before the whole group and be open to consequent feedback. This process lets everyone know that the "confronter" is concerned that the organization may be making a decision that is contrary to the desires of any of its members.
 - The "confronter" owns up to his/her own concerns and then asks where the rest of the group stands.
 - "Although I have previously said things to the contrary, I don't like this. I am concerned that because of previous statements I may end up misleading you and that we may end up misleading one another....That's why I need to know where the rest of you stand. Do you really think this is the right decision for us?"
10. In each decision, the circle needs to decide if the resolution is a one-time decision OR does it have implications for other similar types of situations. If it has long-term implications, the circle should develop a policy that documents the shared values of the group and becomes part of a policy manual that becomes foundational for other decisions.

Introduction

Overall, if the Mission Circle concept is appealing to your organization, we offer these twelve goals to move the organization closer to the feminist perspective and values.

Goals of Governance for a Feminist Board

Inspired by Board Source © 2005, Twelve Principles of Governance that Power Exceptional Boards

1. **Mission Circles** govern in constructive partnership with the Executive Director, recognizing that the effectiveness of the Mission Circle and the ED are interdependent.
2. **Mission Circles** shape and uphold the mission, articulate a compelling vision and ensure the congruence between decisions and core values.
3. **Mission Circles** allocate time to what matters most and continuously engage in strategic thinking to hone the organization's direction.
4. **Mission Circles** institutionalize a culture of inquiry, mutual respect and generative dialogue that leads to sound and shared decision-making.
5. **Mission Circles** are independent minded. When making decisions, Mission Circle members put the interests of the organization above all else.
6. **Mission Circles** promote an ethos of transparency by ensuring that donors, stakeholders, and interested members of the public have access to appropriate and accurate information regarding finances, operations and results.
7. **Mission Circles** promote strong ethical values and disciplined compliance by establishing appropriate mechanisms for active oversight.
8. **Mission Circles** are results-oriented AND process-oriented. They measure the organization's impact and evaluate the process in terms of well-being of the participants and recipients.
9. **Mission Circles** intentionally structure themselves to fulfill essential governance duties and to support organizational priorities.
10. **Mission Circles** embrace the qualities of a continuous learning organization, evaluating their own performance and assessing the value they add to the organization.
11. **Mission Circles** energize and revitalize themselves through planned turnover, thoughtful recruitment and inclusiveness.

Resources

1. Annual Report Card, 2015. Canadian Board Diversity Council
2. Diversity of charity and non-profit boards of directors: Overview of the Canadian nonprofit sector, 2021. Statistics Canada
3. Dietz, M. G. (2003). Current controversies in feminist theory. *Annual Review of Political Science*, 6, p. 399.
4. Provincial Action Network on the Status of Women, Newfoundland and Labrador, 2016. PANSOW applies a provincial lens to issues of equality and ensures a public voice for women from a non-partisan, grassroots, and feminist perspective. PANSOW consists of the Executive Directors of all nine Status of Women councils in Newfoundland and Labrador. PANSOW's mandate is two-fold: To educate and build awareness on broad issues related to gender equity and justice in the province; and to advocate for change in government policy and legislation that facilitates gender equity and justice.
5. Crenshaw, K. (1989). Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics, *University of Chicago Legal Forum*: 1989(8).
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9. Adapted by Ally Jamieson (2016) from The Sanctuary Model at www.sanctuaryweb.com By Dr. Sandra L. Bloom, Joseph F. Foderaro, LCSW, BCD, and Ruth Ann Ryan, APRN, BC.
10. Adapted with gratitude from St. John's Status of Women Council/Women's Centre's "Empowering Ourselves" Facilitator Training materials.