

Introduction:

Why Boards Need More Women

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Joining a board can be the first step on a journey of rewarding experiences, both for you personally and for the organization you choose to join. A position on a board can offer a wealth of opportunities to broaden your horizons, gain new skills, and experience the satisfaction of serving the community at large.

A 2005 study by Catalyst Canada Inc. found that women account for one in nine corporate directorships in Canada.¹

Information on the proportion of women on the boards of Canadian not-for-profit organizations is not readily available; however, it is generally recognized that women are often underrepresented in leadership positions.

Some Canadian data suggest that men account for more of the total hours of volunteer involvement with not-for-profit sport and recreation organizations than women. Furthermore, men also account for more hours spent on boards and committees of not-for-profit sport and recreation organizations.²

¹ Catalyst Canada, 2005 *Catalyst Census of Women Board Directors of the FP 500* (Catalyst Canada, 2006)

² 2004 Canada Survey of Giving, Volunteering, and Participating



Different experiences and perspectives

An effective board provides a forum where strategies and directions are decided upon after rigorous debate and the input of people with different views and ideas. Increasing the number of women on boards can bring new voices, varying opinions, and different approaches and solutions to the decision-making process.

Different knowledge and connections

Women bring a new dimension to the boardroom culture. Along with their different experiences and perspectives, women bring new knowledge and contacts to a board. The connections of its members can be among a board's greatest assets: good contacts can benefit an organization and provide a more visible public profile.

Diversity = representation

Boards are put in place to oversee an organization and to provide leadership. They govern for the benefit of and are therefore accountable to their organization's stakeholders and often the community at large. Women represent a significant proportion of many boards' stakeholders – and it is difficult to represent this important group's views and needs without having women on the board.

Having women on the board makes a statement about the organization's willingness to seek out and take into account the views of all of its stakeholders.

It's good for business

Many for-profit companies are discovering that it makes good business sense to have women on their boards. Indeed, studies suggest a connection between organizational performance – both financial and non-financial – and greater numbers of women in positions of power. Between 1996 and 2000, Catalyst Inc. found a strong correlation between the number of women in top executive positions and financial performance among Fortune 500 companies.⁴

Having more women on boards means a greater diversity of skills, experiences, opinions and strategies – and that means better governance. And better governance inevitably means better results.

⁴ Catalyst, *The Bottom Line: Connecting Corporate Performance and Gender Diversity* (Catalyst, 2004)