

The Panel Pledge

# Gender balance in every forum



*Men stepping up beside women on gender equality*

# The visibility and contribution of women leaders in public and professional forums needs to increase

## Where are all the women?\*

Many high-profile conferences, events, taskforces and media outlets lack gender balance, despite there often being no shortage of qualified women to contribute. The '2019 Women for Media Report' snapshot found that only 18% of voices represented in major newspapers' business pages were those of women; and it is estimated that only 30% of event speakers in Australia are women. The impact of imbalances such as these has consequences for women in leadership, gender equality, organisations and our community. There remains an opportunity to improve diverse representation.



## Consequences of (in)visibility

A lack or absence of women leaders in public and professional forums is a consequence of an entrenched system of inequality.

When speakers or contributors are usually men, audiences may be provided a narrow perspective on the issues being canvassed.

This lack of diversity limits the quality and range of a conversation, and the potential outcomes or actions that might arise from it.

When visible role models and spokespeople are predominantly men, the absence of women and a lack of diversity in leadership becomes normalised. Fewer women choose to speak. People also have limited access to knowledgeable women leaders they can learn from.

Without the opportunity for women to be recognised as thought leaders, women miss out on profile-building opportunities - an important contributor to both experience and recognition of their expertise. The community also misses out on the perspectives drawn from the insights and experiences of women in the community. The invisibility of women of colour, women with a disability or older women further compounds these consequences.

“

Debates and discussions provide a platform to share experiences and perspectives. When you limit the range of perspectives, you limit the quality of the conversation.

– Simon Rothery,  
CEO Goldman Sachs Australia

\* We define women to include all cisgender, transgender, non-binary and intersex persons who identify as women.



## We invite leaders to join us in taking the Panel Pledge

As business and community leaders, Chief Executive Women, Women's Leadership Institute Australia and the Champions of Change Coalition, have united to achieve radical improvements in women's representation in public and professional forums. This includes being prepared to call out imbalances when they see them.

### This is our Pledge

# We pledge to increase the visibility and contribution of women leaders in public and professional forums.



We will make our commitment known



We will honour the Panel Pledge when invited to speak



We will encourage others to take-up the Panel Pledge



We will raise the issue of gender balance when the opportunity arises



We will actively encourage women's voices, in all their diversity



We will not accept the excuses

The Panel Pledge is a simple, practical example of actions CEOs can take to influence system-wide change on gender equality and advancing more and diverse women in leadership.

# How to implement the Panel Pledge

---



## Make your commitment known

1. Let key members of your team, such as your EA and Communications team, know about your commitment to the pledge
2. Share your commitment and the Panel Pledge icons with your organisation via internal communications, such as via the intranet, staff messages and forums
3. Ensure external stakeholders are aware of your Panel Pledge via your website and online request forums for speaking engagements
4. Be vigilant, point out gender imbalance when you see it



## Encourage others to take-up the Panel Pledge

1. Cascade the pledge to your executive team and encourage them to do the same with their direct reports
2. Include the Panel Pledge information and icons in conference sponsorship agreements
3. Build an internal culture that encourages the inclusion of diverse voices within your organisation



## Honour the Panel Pledge when invited to speak

1. Ask who the other panellists/speakers are, and how gender balance will be achieved
2. As a condition of acceptance, state that you expect women will be on the panel and be able to participate in a meaningful way
3. Reserve the right to withdraw, even at the last minute, should the finalised list be all male
4. Suggest diverse women from your network or point to resources available to identify women speakers
5. Track the gender balance of panels you participate in and/or the outcomes of communicating your commitment to the pledge



I'm thrilled to see the Panel Pledge is continuing to gain momentum in Australia, and I invite every CEO and senior executive to take part. Gender diversity on panels facilitates robust thought leadership and yields rich and productive results for the whole population.

– Carol Schwartz AO,  
Chair, Women's Leadership Institute Australia

## Practical examples

### ANSTO

ANSTO has extended the Panel Pledge to all staff for external and internal events and conferences, and to all internal meetings.

### Qantas

Speaker Request Forms on the Qantas website includes a message about the CEOs' commitment to the Panel Pledge. The message asks stakeholders to take the Panel Pledge into consideration when submitting a speaking request.

### Telstra

Telstra's long term commitment to the Panel Pledge means that all speaking engagements for the CEO and the senior team are assessed and addressed for diversity and balance.

### Champions of Change Property Group

CBRE, Charter Hall, Colliers International, Cushman & Wakefield, Investa, Lendlease and Stockland have included the Panel Pledge in their conference sponsorship agreements.

All Property Group Members track speaking engagements and review results as a Group annually.

### University of Sydney

The University of Sydney invited staff to sign a Panel Pledge, available on the staff intranet. Over 230 professional and academic staff have since committed to the Panel Pledge.

### Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT)

DFAT has extended on the Panel Pledge concept, creating practical actions to increase gender equality and inclusion, that leaders at all levels of the organisations can take in the workplace each day.

This extension of the Panel Pledge concept gives leaders opportunities to take action/s that are meaningful in their work area, and with their teams. Sample 'pledges' are grouped under three themes: Diversity, Culture and Respect, and Collaboration and Communication. Suggested pledges include commitments to; share meeting chairing duties equally between genders, attend training on workplace diversity matters, create opportunities for early intervention to prevent inappropriate behaviour, remain in contact with colleagues on long-term-leave, support flexible work initiatives and role model respectful behaviour at all times.

Pledges were drafted in consultation with staff representative groups and provided to all staff for inclusion in their annual performance agreements – particularly for SES - ensuring a shared pathway to enhancing inclusive and commitment to gender equality across DFAT's network.



A diversity of women's voices at all levels across Australia is essential for inclusive and effective leadership. By taking the Panel Pledge to increase the visibility and contribution of women leaders particularly in executive leadership teams you make a purposeful commitment to change.

– Sam Mostyn AO,  
President Chief Executive Women.





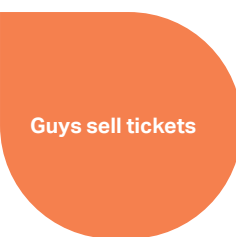










 **Raise the issue of gender balance when the opportunity arises**

1. Point out gender imbalances when you see them
2. Encourage conference organisers to take ownership of achieving gender balance in speakers and attendees
3. Consult available databases for relevant women thought leaders and speakers such as the Women for Media Database run by the Women's Leadership Institute Australia

 **Actively encourage women's voices**

1. Use your network to recommend diverse women for speaking opportunities
2. Encourage and enable women in your organisation and network to accept speaking opportunities
3. Set a goal for the spokespeople put forward by your corporate affairs team, to make the public face of your organisation more gender balanced
4. Call out and address any instances of gender based derogatory comments
5. Offer professional development, support and training in public speaking to encourage participation, on public and professional panels and forums

 **Don't accept the excuses**

 <p>There aren't enough qualified female speakers</p>	 <p>It's a male dominated field</p>	 <p>Women are shy</p>	 <p>Women just aren't interested in this field</p>	 <p>Guys sell tickets</p>
 <p>The organisers just wanted to get the best speakers they could find</p>	 <p>The women we called were booked</p>	 <p>We're only responding to demand</p>	 <p>Fine. YOU tell me who they should have invited</p>	 <p>The women we booked bailed at the last minute</p>
 <p>You can't kick out a male speaker just to fit a woman in there</p>	 <p>Female speakers are always burnt out from speaking so much</p>	 <p>We need 'big name' speakers and few of those are women</p>	 <p>Trying to get more female speakers is sexist</p>	 <p>Attendees want to hear from people like themselves</p>



One of the things I've learnt is that if you don't intentionally include women, you unintentionally exclude women.

– Elizabeth Broderick AO,  
Founder of the Champions of Change Coalition

---

## Practical examples

### **BASF**

CEO David Hawkins was asked to speak at a CEDA lunch discussing Innovation Hubs, he declined and suggested Samantha Read, CEO Chemistry Australia be given the opportunity instead.

---

### **Frasers Property Australia**

CEO Rod Fehring actively nominates senior female leaders to take his place in speaking engagements.

---

### **Wesfarmers**

Wesfarmers provide their speakers with the option of working with a specialist communications coach before key speaking events. This is an effective way to counter the fears some people have of speaking and helps to make the experience more positive. By equipping them with the necessary skills, they then have the confidence and the capability to have the impact on the audience that they want to have.

### **Victorian Court of Appeal (Supreme Court)**

When the Victorian Court of Appeal began recording appearances by the gender of counsel, it became apparent that women barristers rarely have speaking roles in appeals. This was particularly the case in civil appeals. The statistics showed that while a number of female counsel appeared in appeals, they often were in the role of junior counsel, and did not present any of the oral argument.

The Court responded by adopting a practice note which encourages senior counsel to allocate part of the oral presentation to junior counsel.

The practice note has had an immediate effect, with a number of junior counsel having speaking roles in both civil and criminal matters.

---

# How to host a gender balanced conference

## Checklist for Conference Organisers

- ✓ **Strive to achieve 40:40:20 gender balance**, that is: 40% men, 40% women and 20% any gender as speakers, panellists and attendees. Force the question – if there isn't gender balance, ask "why not?"
- ✓ **Consider all aspects of diversity for panellists and speakers.** When looking to achieve gender balance, seek opportunities to engage a diverse range of people from a variety of backgrounds, age groups, cultures and abilities.
- ✓ **Distribute topics** so that women's voices are heard on a range of issues across all aspects of the agenda. Actively break the mould by asking men to talk on topics such as soft skills and gender equality which are typically offered to women.
- ✓ **Ensure speaker criteria is not biased.** For example by setting "CEO-level" as a threshold for speakers in sectors which are male dominated, women leaders may be automatically excluded.
- ✓ **Identify and confirm all speakers early** in case you need to change your approach to ensure gender balance.
- ✓ **Don't allow a pay gap.** Often women are invited to speak 'for the opportunity' or 'the exposure', rather than as a paid speaker. Review how men and women are compensated for their time as a panellist/ speaker and pay them equally.
- ✓ **Ask around.** Women can be found, ask other panellists, industry insiders, specialist women's organisations. Look at past conferences, government boards and industry associations.

## Need help finding women leaders?

Women for Media is an online database of more than 200 women leaders in business, finance, government, academic and the not-for-profit sector.

It aims to increase the visibility of women leaders in the media speaking about their professional areas of expertise to ensure diversity of thought.

Women for Media provides contacts of senior women leaders for interview or comment: [info@wlia.org.au](mailto:info@wlia.org.au)

---

### Get in touch

For more information on Women for Media, visit [womenformedia.com.au](http://womenformedia.com.au)





Elevating the visibility of female scientists is critical to boosting the profile, funding and advancement of their research. Conferences and symposia that do not include all of our best minds have the potential to hold back women's careers AND delay vital medical advances. That is just unacceptable.

– Doug Hilton AO,  
Director, WEHI

---

## Practical examples

### Property Council of Australia

The Property Council of Australia organises more than 350 industry-wide events nationally each year. Ensuring diverse perspectives are presented is now a strategic priority in the historically male-dominated sector.

A live dashboard tracks in real time the gender-balance of speakers and attendees at all events. Progress is reported at every Board and Executive Committee meeting where members have related targets as part of their performance agreements.

Gender balanced panels are now the norm in the property industry, supporting the Property Member's Panel Pledge. The campaign has also extended to promote equality in audiences at Property Council major forums.

---

### The Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC)

The Australasian Fire Authorities Council (AFAC) has integrated the Panel Pledge into its annual conference - a major event for the Fire & Emergency sector which runs for 4 days, attended by 2,500 emergency service managers, volunteers, researchers and industry representatives. AFAC is encouraging suppliers, who feature at the exhibition which runs in parallel with the conference, to also take the Panel Pledge.

---

#### Feedback

Do you have feedback suggestions on the Panel Pledge?  
Email: [contact@championsofchangecoalition.org](mailto:contact@championsofchangecoalition.org)



### **About the Champions of Change Coalition**

The Champions of Change Coalition includes CEOs, secretaries of government departments, non-executive directors and community leaders who believe gender equality is a major business, economic, societal and human rights issue. Established in 2010, by Elizabeth Broderick AO, our mission is to step up beside women to help achieve gender equality and a significant and sustainable increase in the representation of women in leadership.

[championsofchangecoalition.org](http://championsofchangecoalition.org)

---



### **Chief Executive Women**

#### **About Chief Executive Women**

Chief Executive Women's (CEW) shared mission is 'women leaders enabling women leaders'. CEW's 640 members hold leading roles in Australia's largest private and public organisations. In 2021 they oversee more than 1.3 million employees and \$749 billion in revenue. Member's organisations have a combined market capitalisation greater than \$1.144 trillion and contribute in excess of \$249 billion to Australia's GDP.

Since 1985 CEW has influenced and engaged all levels of Australian business and government to achieve gender balance. Through advocacy, research, targeted programs and scholarships, CEW helps to remove the barriers to women's progression and ensure equal opportunity for prosperity. CEW's members work actively to realise our vision of a community where women and men have equal economic and social choices and responsibilities..

[cew.org.au](http://cew.org.au)

---



#### **About Women's Leadership Institute Australia**

The Women's Leadership Institute Australia (WLIA) is a not-for-profit organisation, founded by Carol Schwartz AO. WLIA is the research and advocacy arm of the Trawalla Foundation, focused on finding the best levers for change to achieve equal voice, equal representation, and equal recognition for women in Australia. WLIA fundamentally believes in the value of more female leaders and optimising outcomes for Australia by ensuring that men and women together share power, leadership and decision making. Equal representation will shape culture, decision making, collaboration, and ultimately reflect community issues in a more fulsome way.

[wlia.org.au](http://wlia.org.au)