



CHANGING THE

GAME

.....

A Playbook for Girls' Sport in Saskatchewan

**Section 4: From the Sidelines
to the Boardroom:
Empowering Women in
Sport Leadership**

 **SASK SPORT**

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We acknowledge the financial support of Sask Lotteries.

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Introduction

This section is your playbook for building a more inclusive and effective leadership team. We start by exploring the current landscape—the statistics, the barriers and the opportunity to make your organization stronger.

Most importantly, we provide a toolkit of practical strategies. From setting goals to redesigning recruitment, you will find tangible steps to attract and empower women in your community. By acting now, we make sport safer, accessible and better for everyone.^{10,16}

A Note on Language

Throughout this guide, we often use the term “women” as a broad term. We want to be clear that this is intended to be an inclusive term that includes girls, transgender women and gender-diverse individuals, such as nonbinary and Two-Spirit people. Our goal is to create a welcoming sport system for everyone.

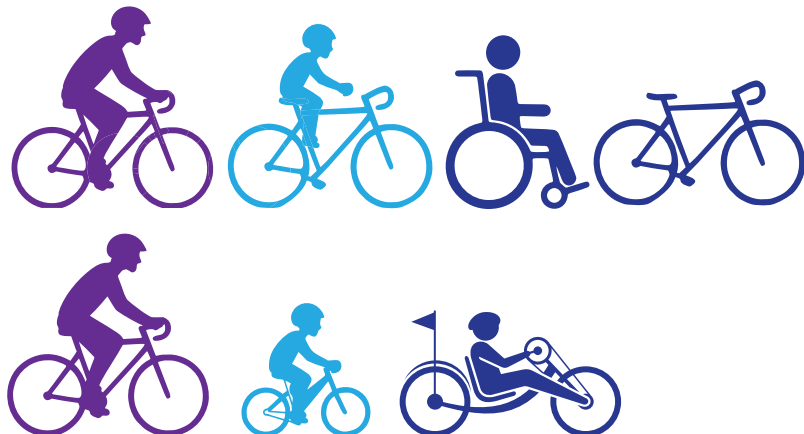
Understanding Equity vs. Equality

You will see the term “gender equity” used a lot. It’s important to know how it differs from “equality.”

- **Equality** means giving everyone the same thing. It treats everyone as if they are starting from the same place.
- **Equity** means giving everyone what they need to be successful. It recognizes that people are not starting from the same place and that we must address imbalances to level the playing field.

We often need to use **equity**-based actions (like creating a specific mentorship program for new women leaders) to achieve **equality** (a state where everyone has a fair shot at a leadership role).

Equality
VS
Equity





Continue the Journey

This guide is just one part of the picture. To explore how to support women in other roles within sport, check out the other guides in this series:

- **Section 1:** *On the Field: Creating Programs Where Girls Thrive*
- **Section 2:** *Beyond the Sidelines: A Playbook for Welcoming Women into Sport*
- **Section 3:** *On the Field of Play: Women as Technical in Sport*
- **Section 5:** *The Organizational Playbook: Strategies for Growth and Sustainability*

Dig Deeper

This guide is your starting line. To help you keep going, we have gathered a collection of helpful tools, reports and websites. Check out the Dig Deeper: Useful Resources section at the end of this guide to find more ways to build your knowledge and take action.

Part 1: The Current Landscape: A View of the Sidelines

The State of Play: Women’s Leadership in Canadian Sport

While progress is being made, there is still a big gap in leadership in Canadian sport. Women are still missing from boards and senior staff positions. This is a challenge that organizations at all levels need to fix.²¹



See Success in Action

Sometimes, seeing is believing. Canadian Women & Sport produces [Women in Leadership Snapshots](#) which highlight and celebrate recent successes in diversity at national and provincial leadership levels. Reviewing these can give you ideas for your own organization.

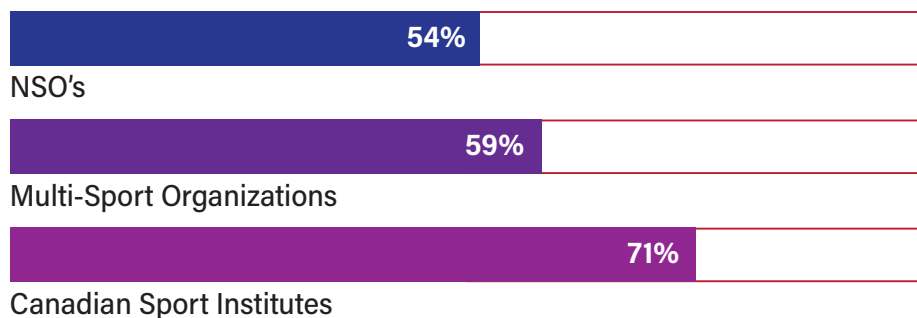
Progress at the National Level

Over the past five years, the Canadian sport system has moved in a positive direction. The percentage of women on the boards of National Sport Organizations (NSOs) has increased from 34% in 2018 to 43% in 2023.¹⁰

This happened partly because the Government of Canada set new rules. They require federally funded sport organizations to have no more than 60% of any gender on their boards by 2025. Because of this, many are on the right track.¹⁰

Progress Toward Board Gender Equity Targets (40-60% Balance)

based on 2023 data¹⁰



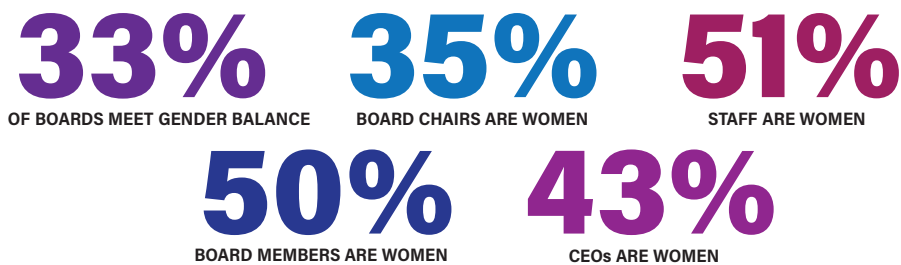
The Picture in Provincial and Territorial Sport

Progress at the national level does not always reach Provincial and Territorial Sport Organizations (P/TSOs).³³ While there are bright spots, the data shows there is still a lot of work to do at the provincial and community level.

- Only 38% of surveyed P/TSOs currently meet the 40-60% gender balance standard on their boards.¹⁰
- 11% of P/TSOs have either no women or only one woman at the boardroom table.¹⁰
- On average, women hold 41% of board seats and 33% of board chair positions in surveyed P/TSOs.¹⁰

At the staff level, numbers are better. Women make up 46% of CEOs and 48% of senior staff in surveyed P/TSOs.¹⁰ However, at universities and colleges, men still hold most of the top athletic leadership roles. Men hold 72% of athletic director positions.⁹

How Saskatchewan Compares (2023): A Snapshot



A Note on the Corporate World

The sport sector is not alone. In the corporate world, progress has also been slow. While women now hold 30% of board seats on public companies, this progress can be misleading. Recent data shows that the rate of new female appointments is dropping. Also, many new “diversity seats” are created by making boards bigger, rather than replacing outgoing members. This highlights a “governance paradox: adding without including, thereby preserving the existing power structure.”¹

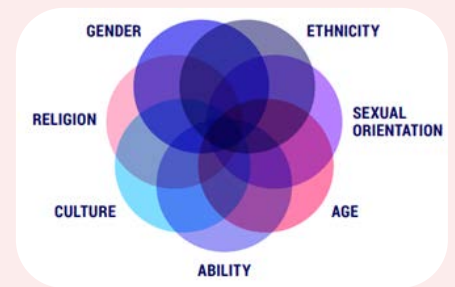
Representation of Diverse Women

For women who have different intersecting identities (like race or disability), the barriers to leadership can be even bigger.

- **Racialized Women:** In surveyed P/TSOs, less than 10% of board members identify as Black, Indigenous or a Person of Colour (BIPOC).¹⁰
- **Women with Disabilities:** Volunteers with disabilities are a large group of talented people who are often underused in sport organizations.^{21,24} However, they are often overlooked when organizations look for leaders.
- **Mothers:** Mothers often put the needs of their family and work ahead of their own.²⁹ Many feel they can’t “fit in” activities like board meetings, which are often held during evenings or weekends.²⁰ When they do take time for themselves, they often feel guilty. This guilt stops many from taking on big volunteer roles.²⁹

Understanding Intersectionality

Intersectionality means understanding that a person's experience is shaped by many different parts of their identity happening at once. For example, a Black woman does not just experience barriers because she is a woman or just because she is Black. She experiences unique barriers because she is both a woman and Black. She might deal with sexism and racism at the same time. To be truly inclusive, we need to consider individuals' intersectional realities to support their development as administrative leaders.



Barriers to Participation

To increase the number of women in leadership, we must first understand the obstacles they face. These barriers are a mix of systemic barriers and personal expectations. Systemic barriers are the “invisible” rules and habits that make things harder for certain groups.

Systemic and Cultural Barriers

While 57% of sport leaders believe leadership opportunities are equal, many also admit that roles are often still filled by men.¹¹ Organizations may provide the same opportunities, but women cannot use them because of these hidden barriers.¹¹

- **The “Glass Ceiling” and Gendered Roles:** A glass ceiling is an invisible barrier that stops women from rising to the top positions.²⁸ When women do get leadership roles, they are often given tasks seen as “female issues” (like managing people). Men often keep control over money and high-performance decisions.^{28,18} This reinforces the idea that men are leaders and women are helpers.³⁰
- **Exclusion from Informal Networks:** A lot of relationship-building happens in social settings outside the office. Because of family duties and having less free time, women are often left out of these important networking moments.¹⁷
- **Hostile or Unwelcoming Cultures:** In male-dominated places, women can face sexist language or discrimination.¹⁴ Also, being one of only a few women on a board can make a person feel very isolated.¹⁴
- **Negative Attitudes and Bias:** Volunteers with disabilities often face unfair attitudes. Others may assume they lack skills or would be “too hard” to manage. They report being given tasks that don’t match their skills. They often have to prove their abilities over and over again.²⁴

Practical and Personal Barriers

Real-life circumstances and personal beliefs also play a major role.

- **Time and Family Responsibilities:** Lack of time because of home and family responsibilities is one of the biggest barriers. Society often expects women to be the primary caregivers of children and aging parents. This means they often prioritize their children’s and partner’s sport activities over their own.³⁰
- **Self-Imposed Barriers and Imposter Syndrome:** Women often hold themselves back. They may feel they aren’t ready for a role until they meet 100% of the qualifications. Men often apply when they meet just 60%.¹⁷ This is a symptom of imposter syndrome. This is a pattern of doubt where a person feels like a “fraud” or that their skills aren’t good enough, even if they are successful.
- **Lack of Confidence:** Sometimes, a lack of confidence stops women from taking on new volunteer roles. For many, confidence comes after volunteering, but the fear of starting can be a big hurdle.³⁰

Specific Barriers for Indigenous, Newcomer and Racialized Women

For women who are Indigenous, newcomers to Canada or women of colour, the barriers to leadership are often layered and complex.

- For **newcomers to Canada**, two major barriers are often present. First, the idea of volunteering for a board might not exist in their culture. They may not understand what a board does or how to join. Organizations often fail to explain this.³²
- Second, newcomers also face the **“Canadian experience” barrier**. Similar to paid jobs, they may feel unqualified because they lack volunteer experience in Canada. This is a barrier organizations should remove.²⁶ A 2017 report noted that newcomers are often less likely to volunteer not because they don’t want to, but because they “did not know how to get involved” or simply “no one asked.”⁵
- For **Indigenous women**, the main barriers are often systemic racism and a lack of cultural safety. Sport organizations built on colonial models (western ways of doing things) may feel unwelcoming or hostile. Indigenous women can feel discouraged from leading.
- For many **newcomers and racialized women**, English may be a second language. This can make it hard to understand fast-paced meetings or complex rules.
- **Racialized women** (both newcomer and Canadian-born) also face unconscious bias. This means their skills and leadership styles might not be valued the same way as their white counterparts.

The Case for Change: The Benefits of Diverse Leadership

Recruiting more women into leadership is not just a “nice to do”. It is a smart move. Diverse organizations are more effective, creative and better at serving their communities.

A More Inclusive and Growing Sport

Leadership that that looks like the community is better positioned to grow.

- **Increased Female Participation:** Research shows a direct link between women on boards and female members in that sport. Having a group of women on the board works better to increase membership than just having one “token” woman leader.²¹
- **Powerful Role Models:** Half of all girls feel inspired by coaches and role models who look like them.¹² Seeing women in leadership shows girls they belong in sport for life.
- **Improved Organizational Function:** Cultural diversity drives success. Research shows that organizations with more cultural and ethnic diversity are likely to be more profitable and creative.²³ Diverse teams bring more skills and solve problems better.²³
- **Better Community Connection:** Including volunteers with disabilities improves the culture. It gives unique insights into what all members need. Seeing leaders with disabilities challenges stereotypes.²⁴

Shifting the Conversation

For too long, the conversation around gender equity has been about fairness. It is time to also talk about performance. The evidence is clear: diverse leadership is a competitive advantage. It leads to better decisions, stronger finances and a more vibrant sport community.²¹

Part 2: Building the Bench: A Playbook for Recruitment and Culture

Attracting women to leadership takes more than an invite. It takes a plan. You need to change your organization's culture, policies and actions. This section shows you how.

Setting the Stage for Success

You must make sure your culture is welcoming to women before you recruit them. If new leaders join and have a negative experience, they will leave. And they likely won't come back.

This work starts with a commitment from everyone. You need clear goals and policies that make inclusion a top priority.

It's Everyone's Job

Gender equity is a team effort. It is not a "women's issue" for women to solve alone. Meaningful progress needs everyone.

- **Men as Allies and Accomplices:** Men have an important role to play. They can move from being passive allies to active accomplices. They can use their influence to nominate women for boards, mentor new female leaders and educate their peers.¹⁷
- **Boards as Champions:** Board members shape the strategy. They have the power to put gender equity on the agenda and make sure the organization makes progress.⁸
- **Identify a Champion:** Appoint a "gender equity champion" in your organization. Give them the power and budget to drive the work forward.⁹

CALL-OUT BOX: What Men Can Do

- **Invite:** Actively invite women to join committees. Go out of your way to meet potential female candidates.
- **Nominate:** Use your position to nominate women for board and leadership positions.
- **Mentor & Sponsor:** Offer to mentor a new female leader. Even better, become her sponsor—someone who speaks up for her and opens doors.¹⁷
- **Speak Up:** Intervene if you hear boys or men using sexist, homophobic or offensive language. Do this whether or not women are in the room. A simple, "Hey, that's not cool, we don't say that here," helps create a better environment for all.
- **Show Up:** Watch and support your organization's women's and girls' games. Your visible support matters.

Setting Clear Goals and Targets

You are taking the first step by recognizing that more can be done. You recognize that we can do more. Now that you see the need, what comes next?

- **Make a Public Commitment:** Set a clear vision. State publicly (like on your website) that you are committed to a gender-balanced board and team.¹⁵
- **Set Measurable Targets:** Organizations with targets do better. Commit to a gender-balanced board (40-60% range). Set targets for recruiting women as coaches and officials.^{9,19}
- **Aim for a "Critical Mass":** Research shows you need a "critical mass" (a certain number of people) to make real change. If there are only one or two women on a board of ten, they might be ignored. When there are three or more, they participate more. Aiming for at least 30-33% is the tipping point for real change.^{17,21}

A clear goal is specific. For example:

- **Volunteers:** "Achieve a 50/50 gender balance in our volunteer coaching roles for all U9 programs by next season."
- **Board:** "Increase women on our board from 25% (two of eight) to 40% (four of ten) within two elections by using our skills matrix."
- **Staff:** "Ensure that for all future senior hiring, the shortlist of candidates includes at least 50% qualified women."

Updating Your Policy Playbook

Your policies send a message about your values. Review them to remove hidden barriers.

1. **Conduct a Gender Audit:** Check your rules and procedures. Make sure they aren't accidentally excluding women. Ask women in your organization about their experiences.¹⁵
2. **Use Inclusive Language:** Check your documents. Use gender-neutral language (Ex. use "Chair" instead of "Chairman," "they/them" instead of "he/she").¹⁵
3. **Set Term Limits:** Set time limits for board members. This ensures new people and ideas come in regularly.¹⁵
4. **Create a Gender Equity Policy:** Write a formal policy. Outline your plan and timeline for increasing women's representation.^{15,18}
5. **Examine Staff & Hiring Policies:** If you have paid staff, check your policies. Look at family leave and flexible work options. Research shows women often earn less after taking maternity leave.² Supportive policies can help close this gap.

Using Tech to Help: Need help writing these? Artificial Intelligence (AI) tools like ChatGPT or Gemini can be great assistants. You can ask them to "scan this text for gender-biased language" or "draft a simple gender equity policy for a small non-profit sport club." Always review the output to make sure it fits your needs, but it can save you a lot of time.



Don't Start from Scratch

Writing policy can be hard. Canadian Women & Sport offers a [Gender Equity Policy Template](#). It provides a guide and text you can use to write a policy that fits your needs.

What's in a Gender Equity Policy?

A strong policy is a clear commitment to action. It should include:

- A **Purpose Statement** (why this is important to your organization).
- Clear **Goals and Targets** (Ex. committing to a 40-60% gender balance on the board).
- **Scope** (who it applies to: board, staff, volunteers, committees).
- **Actionable Commitments** in key areas (Ex. recruitment, training, meeting processes, succession planning).
- **Accountability** (who is responsible for the policy).

Cultivating an Inclusive and Respectful Culture

Success depends on a culture where everyone feels valued.

- **Lead with Intention:** The Board Chair sets the tone. They must create an environment where different opinions are encouraged and expected.¹⁷
- **Address Resistance Head-On:** If you face old attitudes, use facts. Point to the research on diversity benefits. Remind people that funders support diverse organizations.¹⁵
- **Have Challenging Conversations:** You need to have honest talks about gender equity. These can be uncomfortable, but they are great learning opportunities.¹⁷ Create a culture of “calling in” (helping people learn from mistakes) rather than “calling out” (punishing them).¹⁶
- **Make the Hard Decisions:** Sometimes, inclusion means letting go of things that no longer fit. If someone constantly blocks your commitment to respect, leaders must be prepared to remove them from their role.



Building Cultural Safety

When working to include Indigenous participants and leaders, look to the [Indigenous Long-Term Participant Development Pathway](#). This framework from the Aboriginal Sport Circle and Sport for Life helps organizations understand how to be culturally responsive.

Creating a Culturally and Religiously Inclusive Space

A welcoming environment respects everyone’s practices.

- **For Muslim Women:** Be mindful of contact. Don’t initiate physical contact. Understand daily prayer schedules. Islam requires prayer five times a day. Providing a quiet, private space for a 10-15 minute prayer is a powerful way to accommodate this.³¹
- **For Indigenous Women:** Be open to practices like smudging. A smudge is a ceremony for clearing the mind. Organizations should accommodate this.²⁷ Provide a ventilated space and communicate with employees.³ Remember, smudging is always voluntary.²⁵
- **General Flexibility:** Be ready to adapt. Avoid key religious holidays for meetings. Provide different food options (Ex. Halal, vegetarian). Ask members what they need.

Rethinking Recruitment

Traditional recruitment usually relies on asking people you already know. An inclusive approach means being proactive and creative to find new talent.

Defining Roles and Mitigating Bias

Unconscious bias refers to quick judgments our brains make based on the past. These biases make us favour people who are like us.¹⁷ Training your board to spot bias is a key first step.

Common Types of Gender Bias

- **Performance Bias:** Hiring women based on past results, but men based on “potential.”
- **Attribution Bias:** Thinking a woman’s success is due to luck, but a man’s success is due to skill.
- **Likeability Bias:** Expecting women to be nice. If they are assertive, they are seen as “aggressive.” A man acting the same way is seen as a “strong leader.”
- **Maternal Bias:** Assuming mothers are less committed to their careers.¹⁷

To fight these biases, be objective. Use clear role descriptions and a skills matrix.

- **Write Inclusive Role Descriptions:** Many clubs operate informally. This uncertainty can be hard for people who need to plan their time. A good description defines the tasks and the time commitment clearly, so people know exactly what is expected of them.
- **Check Your Own Work:** Ask yourself: "If I were a working mom, would this description give me the answers I need? Does it sound welcoming?"



Fair Hiring

Use the [Inclusive Hiring Process Checklist](#) from the Coaching Association of Canada. It gives you a step-by-step guide to removing bias from your hiring.

What is a Skills Matrix?

A Skills Matrix is a tool that maps out the skills, experiences, and perspectives your board has versus what it needs.

How to Use It:

1. List Your Needs: Brainstorm the ideal skills for your board. Include:
 - o Professional Skills: (Ex. finance, law, marketing, HR).
 - o Competencies: (Ex. strategic planning, community connections, governance).
 - o Diversity Metrics: (Ex. gender, age, cultural background, geography, connection to the sport).
2. Audit Your Current Board: Anonymously or as a group, map your current directors against these needs.
3. Identify the Gaps: The matrix will clearly show you "We have three accountants, but no one with marketing experience," or "Our board is 70% men over 50."
4. Recruit to Fill Gaps: Now you know who to look for. You can ask, "Who do we know with marketing skills who is also a woman under 40?"

Merit vs. Diversity is a False Choice

The idea that picking diverse candidates means sacrificing "quality" is a myth. When you use objective criteria (like real experience and skills), research shows many female candidates are just as qualified as men.¹ Diverse recruitment simply removes the hidden barriers that stop the best people from getting the job.

Casting a Wider Net

It was common to call for nominations on social media and then wait for applications. But if we want to find different candidates, we have to do different things.

- **Advertise Inclusively:** Say clearly that you are seeking women, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, Indigenous, BIPOC candidates and persons with disabilities.¹⁵
- **Look Beyond Your Sport:** Your best candidates might come from outside your sport. Recruit women with skills from other sectors. This brings fresh perspectives.¹⁵
- **Ask Directly and Repeatedly:** Women often won't apply unless personally invited. Don't be afraid to ask more than once. A "no" today might be a "yes" next year.^{17,28}
- **Diversify Your Hiring Committee:** Make sure the group selecting new leaders includes women and diverse voices.²⁸

- **Seek a Width of Age:** Recruit young women (teens/20s) for a youth perspective. Recruit older or retired women for their time and experience.
- **Provide Education:** For newcomers, explain what a board is and why volunteering is valuable. Don't assume everyone knows how it works.³²

Diversifying Role Opportunities

Women, particularly mothers, often face significant time constraints. Smart organizations get creative with roles.

- **Offer “Toe-in-the-Water” Approaches:** Let women try a small role first, like a short-term committee. This helps them test the waters without a big commitment.¹⁵
- **Embrace Microvolunteering:** Break big tasks into small ones, like helping with one event, making a few phone calls, or providing expert advice on a specific issue.
- **Promote Role Sharing:** Let two people share one position. This makes big jobs easier for people with busy lives.
- **Tailor the Role:** Fit the role to the person. If a woman has five hours a month and graphic design skills, create a specifically sized role just for her.
- **Create Shadowing Opportunities:** Let interested people follow an experienced volunteer to learn. This is an excellent way to build skills, transfer knowledge and support your succession plan.
- **Create Clear Progression Pathways:** Don't keep women in entry-level roles. Talk to them about their goals. Give them training to move into senior leadership.¹⁸

The Perfect Match Starts with a Conversation

Don't guess why someone wants to help—ask them. Have a real conversation with the women you want to recruit to understand their motivations.

- Ask about their goals: Do they want to build new job skills? Meet new people? Give back to the community?
- Ask about their strengths: What are they good at? What do they enjoy doing?
- Ask about their concerns: What might stop them from saying “yes”? Is it the time commitment? Do they worry they aren't ready? Discuss these concerns openly and work together to find solutions that reduce those barriers.

When you open up this dialogue, you can find a role that aligns with their interests. This creates a “win-win” situation where the organization gets the help it needs and the volunteer feels valued and fulfilled.

Part 3: Fostering Champions: A Guide to Support, Retention, and Growth

Recruiting is just step one. To ensure long-term success and impact, organizations must create ways to provide support.

Building Confidence and Growth

Give women the tools and training they need. This builds the competence that leads to confidence.

Training for All

Education is powerful, but it doesn't have to be complicated. Grassroots organizations can start small.

- **Start Small:** You don't need a big budget. Look for free webinars or resources from your Provincial Sport Organization (PSO).
- **Partner Up:** Partner with other local clubs to host a workshop together. This shares the cost and the effort.
- **Use What Exists:** Don't create new training from scratch. Use existing programs like "Gender Equity LENS" or "Keeping Girls in Sport" from Canadian Women & Sport.⁹
- **Train Everyone:** Try to get all board members to do one basic training session a year. This keeps everyone on the same page.⁴

Supporting Leaders with Disabilities

Sometimes, barriers are about how we communicate. For leaders with vision or hearing loss, standard meetings can be difficult. Small changes can make a big difference.

- **Documents:** Use high-contrast colours (like black text on white backgrounds). Avoid light text on light backgrounds. Use a font size of at least 12 point or higher so it is easy to read.
- **Technology:** Send documents digitally ahead of time. This allows people to use screen reader software (tools that read text out loud). In virtual meetings, use platforms that offer live captioning.
- **Ask, Don't Assume:** The best way to know what someone needs is to ask. Be flexible. Be ready to adapt your technology or meeting style to help them succeed.



Start with Good Governance

If your board needs a refresher on the basics, Sport for Life offers an [Effective Board Governance](#) eLearning course for volunteers.

Where to Find Training

- **Ask Your PSO:** Request that your Provincial Sport Organization (PSO) host training online or in-person.
- **Check the Resources:** See the end of this guide for a list of resources.

The Power of Mentorship and Sponsorship

Types of Mentorship

Mentorship doesn't always mean a senior leader teaching someone younger.

- **Vertical Mentorship:** The traditional model, where an experienced leader guides a less experienced person.²²
- **Peer-to-Peer Mentorship:** People at a similar level share challenges and support each other. It's a powerful tool for building community and reducing feelings of isolation.²²

A lack of visible role models and mentors is a significant barrier for women.¹⁷ Mentorship programs can help.

- **Establish a Mentorship Program:** Give new board members a mentor for their first year.¹⁵
- **Look for Existing Programs:** Many PSOs and NSOs have mentorship programs.
- **Foster Sponsorship:** Encourage leaders to be **sponsors**. A sponsor actively advocates for a woman and opens doors for her.¹⁷

Mastering the Onboarding Process

A good onboarding process helps new leaders feel valued from day one.

- **Structure Your Orientation:** Provide a full orientation package. Let members share why they want to serve—their motivation for serving on the board. This helps forge stronger relationships based on shared values.¹⁵
- **Embed Equity from the Start:** Make inclusion training part of the onboarding.¹⁶
- **Schedule Check-ins:** Have a mentor or Chair check in regularly with new members.

What Should be in an Orientation Package?

A good package has everything a new leader needs:

- Mission, Vision, and Values
- The Strategic Plan
- Descriptions of programs and participants (vital for those unfamiliar with your sport).
- Key documents (bylaws, code of conduct, gender equity policy)
- Contact information for board and staff
- The new member's specific role description
- Calendar of meetings and events
- Expectations for other events
- Information on appropriate attire
- Information for expense reimbursement
- Recent meeting minutes
- Current budget and most recent financial statements



A Plan for Success

To help new volunteers and board members settle into their roles, check out the [Onboarding Guide for a Sport Organization](#) from the Coaching Association of Canada. It offers a structured plan to ensure nothing falls through the cracks.

Recognition and Appreciation

Thanking your leaders is a powerful motivator.

- **Make it Meaningful:** Recognition can take many forms: Send a card, invite them to speak at an event, or nominate them for an award.¹³
- **Provide Equitable Pay:** If you have paid staff, fair pay is a non-negotiable way to demonstrate that you value their talent and contributions.⁹
- **Create a Feature:** Feature photos and bios of your women leaders on your website or newsletter. This shows other women, “You can be it, because you can see it.”

Nominate Your Volunteers!

A formal nomination is a powerful form of recognition.

- **Provincial Sport Awards:** Many PSOs have awards for volunteers.
- **Saskatchewan Sport Awards:** Sask Sport hosts an annual awards program. Nominating one of your dedicated volunteers is a fantastic way to show your appreciation.

Designing Inclusive Processes

How your organization runs meetings can either foster inclusion or reinforce exclusion. By being intentional about your processes, you can ensure all voices are heard.

Rethinking Meeting Logistics

- **Be Mindful of Time and Location:** Evening or weekend meetings can be hard for caregivers to children or aging parents.¹⁵ Ask participants what times work best. Try virtual meetings to save travel time.
- **Make Meetings Family-Friendly:** Offer money for childcare or bring in athletes to babysit during meetings.¹⁵ Adopt policies that support a healthy work-life balance for both staff and volunteers.⁹
- **Ensure Accessibility:** When working with volunteers or staff with disabilities, the physical space is key. Does the venue have accessible parking or access to public transit? Are paths to the building clear and easy to navigate? Are materials provided in large font, and do presentations use high-contrast colours? Taking these extra steps sends a clear message that you have thought about everyone’s needs and that all are welcome.

Making Space for All Voices

The Board Chair has a responsibility to ensure everyone is heard.

- **Facilitate, Don’t Dominate:** The Chair should ensure all board members are given an opportunity to contribute. This may mean actively calling on quieter members or asking dominant speakers to hold back to allow others to share their perspectives first.^{17,4}
- **Establish a Code of Conduct:** Create a code of conduct that outlines expectations for respectful communication and healthy debate.¹⁶
- **Set Expectations Early:** Include information in your board onboarding package about how this board works to include many voices.
- **Provide Tools:** Your onboarding package can also include resources on “how to have difficult conversations” or “practices for hearing from everyone.” This gives new members the tools they need to participate fully from the start.

Don't Start from Scratch

Sask Sport offers a [Safe Sport Policy Manual for PSOs Template](#) that includes a code of conduct. You can adapt this for your organization to save time.

Rethinking Social Time

Networking often happens outside meetings. Be mindful that this can exclude those who have family obligations, work commitments, financial constraints, or transportation challenges.

- **Integrate Social Time:** Build informal connection time into your formal meetings, such as starting with a brief social check-in.
- **Keep Optional Events Optional:** If you have separate social events, make sure no business is discussed. This way, people who can't come don't miss out.¹⁷

Planning for the Future

When you have the basics established, you can start looking further ahead. Implementing practices for the long term ensures that your progress lasts. For a deeper dive on building capacity within your organization, look for Section 5 The Organizational Playbook: Strategies for Growth and Sustainability.

Talent and Succession Planning

- **Create a Leadership Pipeline:** Identify talented women within your organization and broader communities. Work with them to help them advance to senior roles.⁹
- **Transition Youth to Adult Roles:** Create pathways for girls leaving the sport to return as volunteers, coaches, or committee members. This provides them with valuable experience and builds your future leadership pool.
- **Ensure Knowledge Transfer:** When experienced board members leave make sure they pass on their knowledge. Use exit interviews (to learn from their experience) and transition meetings (to pass off files and contacts).

Evaluation and Feedback

- **Track Your Progress:** Check your progress against your targets every year. Share the results transparently.⁹
- **Create Safe Feedback Channels:** Ask women for feedback regularly. Create a safe space where they can share their experiences—even critical ones—without fear of penalty or repercussion.

Conclusion: A Commitment to Lasting Change

Empowering women in leadership is an ongoing commitment. We must constantly check our policies and challenge our biases. We must intentionally create a supportive environment for all.¹⁷

This guide gave you a playbook of strategies. You can set targets, change recruitment, foster mentorship, and run inclusive meetings. It starts with one step—a conversation, a policy review, or an invitation to a talented woman. By tracking progress and celebrating success, you can build a leadership team that reflects your community. This team will be more effective and resilient.¹⁷

Does getting started feel overwhelming? You don't have to do it all at once. And you don't have to do it alone. Ask neighbouring clubs for help. Consult with your Provincial Sport Organization or Sask Sport. Canadian Women & Sport is a national leader that can help. Human resource specialists or consultants can also support you. The power to change the game from the sidelines to the boardroom is in your hands.

Feature 1:

Leading by Example: Voices from the Sask Sport Board of Directors

With a shared vision for a more inclusive future, the women on the Sask Sport Board of Directors are actively shaping the landscape of sport in Saskatchewan. For Chair Amy Prokop and board members Jessie Buydens, Kendra Farmer and Brittany Brunn, the path to governance was paved by a mix of personal passion, mentorship and a desire to ensure every girl and woman sees themselves represented at the top.

For many women, the journey to the boardroom begins with an invitation. Jessie Buydens, a lawyer and long-time rugby and football leader, notes that she was "shoulder tapped" by a mentor who recognized her potential before she considered it herself. Similarly, Kendra Farmer, a Métis track and field athlete, was encouraged by a boss to apply, proving that young leaders belong in governance spaces just as much as experienced veterans. Their experiences highlight a critical strategy for organizations: to get more women on boards, current leaders must actively extend invitations and champion new voices.

Once at the table, these leaders are driven by the opportunity to break cycles and build inclusive systems. Brittany Brunn, a softball and basketball athlete working in Indigenous education, joined the board to ask tough questions about data and representation. For her, administrative leadership is about being a visual role model so Indigenous girls know they can "take up space" and excel. Amy Prokop, the board's Chair and a university soccer assistant coach, emphasizes that true inclusion moves beyond simply tolerating diversity to celebrating it. She advocates for board environments where women and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ community feel their perspectives are not just heard, but valued and acted upon.

Their collective advice for aspiring female leaders is simple: be brave. Amy notes that women often talk themselves out of applying, but urged them not to let doubt silence their valuable perspectives. Whether it is Jessie's dedication to the impact of KidSport, Kendra's bridge-building between athletes and administration or Brittany's focus on trauma-informed support, these women demonstrate that diverse administrative leadership is essential for a thriving, safe and welcoming sport community.



Amy Prokop



Jessie Buydens



Kendra Farmer



Brittany Brunn

Digging Deeper: Resources

The following resources can help you continue learning.

Governance, Policy, and Organizational Foundations

[Women in Sport Leadership Workshop](#) – Canadian Women & Sport – A live workshop helping leaders understand improvements in women’s leadership and how to create lasting change.

[Women on Boards Workshop](#) – Canadian Women & Sport – A workshop to help organizations make their boards more inclusive and welcoming.

[Women in Leadership Snapshots](#) – Canadian Women & Sport - Highlights and celebrates recent successes in diversity at national and provincial leadership levels.

[Effective Board Governance](#) – Sport for Life - An eLearning course for volunteers on how to follow effective governance practices.

[Governance Toolkit and Best Practices](#) – viaSport British Columbia - Tools and templates to help organizations understand governance better.

[Gender Equity Policy Template](#) – Canadian Women & Sport - A guide and template to help you write a custom gender equity policy for your organization.

[Gender Equity Committee Terms of Reference](#) – Canadian Women & Sport – A template to guide the creation of a Gender Equity Committee.

[How to Apply a Gender Lens to Decision Making](#) – Canadian Women & Sport – Highlights four steps to make more fair and inclusive decisions.

[Developing Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion \(EDI\) Policies](#) – Coaching Association of Canada – A guide on steps to take when creating EDI policies.

[Glenn Tuck Memorial Scholarship](#) – Sask Sport – Support for post-secondary students in Saskatchewan studying at specific institutions.

Inclusive Hiring, Onboarding, and Workplace Culture

[Emerging BIPOC Leaders Program](#) – Inclusion in Sports Network – A program for people aged 18 to 26 to connect with professionals and gain leadership skills.

[Mentorship Programs to Foster Diverse Leadership](#) – Jumpstart – A visual guide for creating mentorship programs that support diverse leaders.

[Inclusive Hiring Process Checklist](#) – Coaching Association of Canada – A checklist to ensure your hiring process is fair and inclusive.

[Inclusive Interview Checklist](#) – Coaching Association of Canada – A checklist to ensure interviews are conducted fairly.

[Onboarding Guide for a Sport Organization](#) – Coaching Association of Canada – A plan to help new employees, volunteers, and board members settle into their roles.

[Respect and Inclusion in the Workplace](#) – Sport for Life - eLearning about acceptable workplace

behaviors and how to support a respectful environment.

[Effective Communication](#) – Sport for Life - eLearning that looks at how we communicate and the role of digital communication in volunteer sectors.

[Diversity and Inclusion Training for Volunteers eLearning](#) – Sport for Life – Educates volunteers on respectful behavior and how to support a productive environment.

Partnerships and Volunteer Management

[Building Meaningful Partnerships](#) – Jumpstart – A visual guide to building partnerships in sport organizations.

[Recruitment and Retention of Volunteers](#) – Sport for Life - Key information on how to find, train, and keep volunteers.

Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Anti-Racism

[A Quick Guide for Accessibility, Inclusion, and Quality Participation](#) – Canadian Disability Participation Project – Describes accessibility, inclusion, and quality participation.

[What is Intersectionality?](#) – Canadian Women & Sport – Describes intersectionality and how to apply it to gender equity.

[Organization Reflection: Intersectionality](#) – Canadian Women & Sport – Exercise to check if diverse experiences are represented in decision-making.

[What is Unconscious Bias?](#) – Canadian Women & Sport – Describes unconscious bias and how to counteract it.

[Intercultural Skills in Sport Toolbox](#) – Coaching Association of Canada - Resources for engaging with participants from varying cultural backgrounds.

[Inclusive Language Guide](#) – Jumpstart – A guide to creating belonging using inclusive language.

[Anti-Racism in Coaching](#) – Coaching Association of Canada - eLearning to help coaches support racialized participants.

[Play Fair. An Anti-Racism in Sports Toolkit](#) – Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network - Designed to address and combat racism in sports.

[Anti-Racism Training – Recreation](#) – Sport Nova Scotia – eLearning on racism within the recreation sector.

[Anti-Racism in Sport for Youth](#) – Sport Nova Scotia – An anti-racism eLearning for youth.

[Anti-Racism in Sports for Parents](#) – Sport Nova Scotia – Outlines the role of racism in sports and how to be an ally.

[Black Leaders in Sports Day](#) – Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network – Dedicated to the development of equitable leadership pathways.

[Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network](#) – A not-for-profit supporting racial equity in Canadian sports.

[Cultural Calendar & Observations](#) - Jumpstart – A guide for important cultural days for planning the season.

Inclusion for Disability and 2SLGBTQIA+

[Sport Modifications Guide](#) – Saskatchewan Blind Sports Association – A guide for modifying sports for people who are blind or partially sighted.

[Axis to Access](#) – Saskatchewan Arts Alliance – A living document on accessibility in the province of Saskatchewan.

[Transathlete.com](#) - Information about trans inclusion in athletics.

[Leading the Way: Working with LGBTQ Athletes and Coaches](#) – Canadian Women & Sport - Resource for making sport welcoming for LGBTQ individuals.

[2SLGBTQI Sports Inclusion: Playbook to Breaking Down Barriers](#) – Egale Canada - Tips on fostering a more inclusive sport environment.

[Policy Guidance: 2SLGBTQI+ Inclusion](#) – viaSport British Columbia - Supports organizations in developing inclusive policies.

[NCCP Coaching Athletes with a Disability](#) – Coaching Association of Canada – eLearning for coaches new to coaching athletes with a disability.

[Coaching Kids of All Abilities](#) – Jumpstart - Helps leaders create inclusive environments for kids of all abilities.

[No Accidental Champions: Long-Term Development for All 3.1](#) – Sport for Life – Opportunities and challenges for persons with disabilities in sport.

[Special Olympics Quality Sport Checklist](#) – Special Olympics Canada – Defines elements of quality sport experiences.

[Long-Term Athlete Development: Supporting Quality Sport Experiences 2.0](#) – Special Olympics Canada – Model for athletes with intellectual disabilities.

[Inclusive Physical Literacy](#) – Sport for Life - eLearning on physical literacy for participants with disabilities.

[Coaching Athletes Who Are Deaf or Hard of Hearing](#) – Sport Manitoba - Information for coaching D/HH athletes.

[Evidence-Informed Recommendations: Tips and Tricks for Developing and Disseminating Physical Activity Information for Families of Children with Disabilities](#) – Sport Canada, Active Living Alliance & Canadian Disability Participation Project - Tips for sharing info with families of children with disabilities.

[Inclusive Playgrounds Playbook](#) – Jumpstart – Blueprint for developing inclusive play spaces.

[Physical Accessibility Evaluation](#) – Jumpstart – Evaluates accessibility of facilities.

[Building Welcoming Sport Environments](#) - viaSport British Columbia - Recommendations on 2SLGBTQ+ issues.

[2SLGBTQ+ Inclusion Policy Resources](#) – Sport and Rec - Sport Manitoba - Guidance for safe, equitable spaces.

[Training Athletes with a Physical Disability](#) - Canadian Sport for Life - Supports athletes with a disability through Long-Term Development.

Inclusion for Indigenous and Newcomer Communities

[Aboriginal Sport Circle](#) - Canada's national voice for Aboriginal sport.

[Indigenous Sport for Life: Long-Term Participant Development Pathway 1.2](#) – Aboriginal Sport Circle & Sport for Life - Framework responding to Indigenous peoples' needs.

[Indigenous Long-Term Participant Development Pathway](#) – Sport Organization Guide – Sport for Life - Sport for Life - Guide for collaboration with the Indigenous sport system.

[Indigenous Long-term Participant Development Pathway Workshop](#) – Aboriginal Sport Centre - Workshop on supporting Indigenous participants.

[Aboriginal Coaching Modules](#) – Aboriginal Sport Circle - Training tool for coaches of Indigenous athletes.

[Stepping Stones to Indigenous Sport and Physical Activity Participation](#) – Aboriginal Sport Circle – eLearning for culturally grounded programming.

[Aboriginal Apprentice Coaching Program](#) – Aboriginal Sport Centre – Professional development for Aboriginal apprentice coaches.

[First Nation Elder Protocol](#) – Coaching Association of Canada – Understanding processes of inviting and thanking Elders.

[How to Take Part in a First Nations Round Dance](#) – Coaching Association of Canada – How-to for a traditional celebration.

[Indigenous Communities: Active for Life](#) – Sport for Life & Aboriginal Sport Circle - Equips local champions to create sustainable sport programs.

[Indigenous Communities: Active for Life Workshop](#) – Aboriginal Sport Centre - Support for developing sustainable quality sport programs.

[Welcome to Canada: Engaging New to Canada Participants in Sport and Physical Activity](#) – Sport for Life - Workshop on barriers and solutions for newcomers.

[Cultural Awareness in Youth Sport](#) – Sport for Life - eLearning on modeling cultural awareness.

[Hijabi Ballers Toolkit](#) – viaSport British Columbia - Tools for inclusive practices for female Muslim participants.

[Faith on Ice: How Canadian Coaches Can Support Muslim Athletes During Ramadan](#) – Winnipeg Newcomer Sport Academy - Guidance for supporting Muslim athletes.

[Sport for Life for Every New-to-Canada Participant 2.2](#) - Sport for Life - Outlines barriers and solutions for newcomers.

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