



Women in Governance: Leadership and Mentoring Program at the Town of Cobourg

About the Program

Background

In Canada, women occupy eighteen percent (18%) of Mayors' positions and twenty-eight percent (28%) of Councillors' seats. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM)'s research shows that women face many barriers when running, winning and maintaining positions in municipal politics, which include: a lack of support for families; intimidation and harassment based on gender norms; lack of ability to mobilize financial and political support; and people's perceptions of women's career paths.

According to the United Nations, a threshold of at least thirty percent (30%) of female legislators is required to ensure that public policy reflects the needs of women. At the very heart of this issue is the question of democracy.

In a 2016 study, visible minorities and women were severely underrepresented in leadership positions, especially in the public sectors. ¹ This is true even in areas such as the Greater Toronto Area (GTA) where only 32.5% of senior leadership were women although women accounted for 51.5% of the population. ²

The goal of this program is for the Town of Cobourg to assist with moving the needle towards gender parity and gender equity both in elected office and municipal leadership roles.

Program Information

The Women in Governance: Leadership and Mentoring Program is a twelve (12) week program for women and gender non-conforming individuals to learn more about working in public sector. The program will allow each participant to be matched with a mentor who identifies as a woman or gender non-conforming and is an elected official.

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https://pillarnonprofit.ca/sites/default/files/website_files/visible_minorities_and_women_in_senior_leadership_positions_report.pdf

² Ibid.

This program will be unpaid for the people participating and will incorporate a variety of hours to be involved, including weekdays, weeknights, and weekends, depending on the variance in what is happening at Council. **Participation in this program is not a guarantee for future employment at the Town of Cobourg nor being a member of elected office at the Town of Cobourg.**

Participants will spend an hour with their mentor a week and approximately two (2) to four (4) hours on other programming during the week. During some of the weeks, this will include a group session to learn about or discuss the topic.

Throughout the Women in Governance Program, there will also be additional opportunities to network, hear from speakers at different levels of government, and contribute to the development of the Town of Cobourg's public policy.

At the end of the program, participants will receive a Certificate of Completion.

Program Goals and Objectives

The goals and objectives of the program are:

1. Provide more insights to the public on the integral elements of being a public servant.
2. Provide practical experience with the daily workings of the Town of Cobourg.
3. Provide networking and personal development opportunities for women and gender non-confirming individuals in the Town of Cobourg.
4. Gain resident input on issues of interest to the participants.

Eligibility

The Women in Governance Program is open to all applicants who, at the start of the program:

- Reside or own a business in the Town of Cobourg;
- Are at least in Grade 11 in high school;
- Identify as a woman, trans* woman, nonbinary, agender, or gender non-conforming;
- Are able to commit to approximately two (2) to four (4) hours per week over the twelve (12) week period.

Exceptions to the time commitment will be made on a case by case basis, especially for those that are working in a different career, have additional obligations, and/or are in school.

Program Overview

While the activities may change depending on the circumstances facing the municipality, the following is an outline of the program.

Pre-Program

- Recruitment will occur for seven (7) weeks. Applicants will be required to fill out an application form stating their interest in the program, skills and abilities they will bring to the program, experience, and how they intend to use the experienced gained.

- During this time, the Town of Cobourg will specifically send information through the typical channels of communication for the notice of participation, as well as through other means such as volunteer websites, local organizations, school boards, etc.
- Currently, we are keeping space open for three (3) to five (5) participants; however, if there are a large number of applicants, we will reconsider this number and/or determine the best way to keep everyone engaged in the program moving forward.
- Once participants have been selected, they will be given a week to complete the onboarding aspect of the program, which will include all appropriate training for volunteers of the Town of Cobourg as well as being introduced to the program itself.

Program Outline

The program will be announced on March 31st, 2021 at the end of Women’s History Month. The theme for the 2021 Women’s History Month is “Women in Leadership: Achieving an equal future in a COVID-19 World” – a fitting theme to tie into the program.

After the recruitment, the program will last for twelve (12) weeks of programming and one week of onboarding.

The program will run from May 31st to August 27th, 2021 inclusive.

Week Zero (Pre-Program)

- **Dates:** May 31st to June 4th

During this week, participants will be onboarded to the program including volunteer training and understanding the program itself.

Week One

- **Dates:** June 7th to June 11th

To kick off the program, participants will meet with their mentors to set expectations and outline their interests as well as what they are experienced in to create a reciprocal mentoring relationship.

Weeks Two to Eleven

- **Dates:** June 14th to August 20th

Based upon the participants’ interests, and their program stream, each participant may have different learning opportunities during this week. There will be ten (10) topics covered during the program to provide an overview of leadership and governance.

Participants will be given a different set of learning objectives during the week and opportunities for learning through training, self-directed research, and multi-media options. They will meet with their mentors or with the program coordinator on a weekly basis, alternating every week, to discuss these topics and ideas, as well as any other topics that have come up during the week.

During this program, we will host a Speaker of the program on a biweekly basis. Speakers will be asked to participate in a short presentation about how they became interested in their chosen path, what they believe is necessary to move forward, and leave time for Q&A.

Speakers will be determined at a future date, but will include a mix of elected officials from all levels of government in Canada as well as municipal, county, provincial, and federal staff.

Topics covered during these weeks will include:

1. **Arts, Culture, and Tourism:** Arts, Culture, and Tourism focuses on the growth and development of the heritage and thriving artistic culture in the Town of Cobourg.
2. **Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion:** Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion focuses on the EDI Strategy at the Town of Cobourg and how we will be moving forward with this at the Town of Cobourg.
3. **Finance:** The Finance Department discharges the responsibilities and duties assigned to the Treasurer by the statutes and Council, including the collection of property taxes and other revenues, co-ordination of the current and capital budget estimates, preparation of financial statements, maintenance of accounting records, payments to suppliers, provision of payroll and auditing services.
4. **General Governance:** General Governance focuses on how the Town functions including understanding a typical Council meeting, Council reports, Advisory Committees of Council, and the inner workings of the Legislative Services.
5. **Intergovernmental Relations:** Intergovernmental relations involves interacting national, provincial, and local levels of government, including Indigenous Councils, created and refined to enable the various parts of government to cohere in a manner more or less appropriate to the institutional arrangements.
6. **Parks and Recreation Services:** The Community Services Division is responsible for the maintenance and development of Town of Cobourg owned and operated parks and recreation facilities as well as recreational, leisure and cultural services for residents and visitors. They work closely with community groups, volunteers and individuals as a facilitator to ensure that community and visitor needs are addressed.
7. **Planning and Development Services:** Planning and Development Services manages the growth and physical form of the Town through the land use planning process and by establishing goals and objectives for future growth and development.
8. **Protective Services:** Protective service focuses on providing communities and individuals with adequate safety and security. This includes the Fire Department and Police Department at the Town of Cobourg to protect the public.
9. **Public Works Services:** The Public Works division is responsible for a variety of services that are provided to the public including: (1) Road construction projects, (2) Roads and sidewalks, (3) Sewer maintenance, (4) Water pollution control, (5) Transit, (6) Parks Operations, and (7) Engineering and G.I.S.

10. Sustainability and Climate Change: Sustainability and Climate Change at the Town of Cobourg promotes the protection, maintenance and awareness of the environment within the community.

Week Twelve

- **Dates:** August 23rd to August 27th

The Women in Governance Program will end this week. There will be a wrap-up of information, understanding of what everyone has learned, and a networking opportunity to meet with all the mentors and mentees.

Optional Learning Experience

- **Dates:** November/December 2021

This optional element of the program will allow participants of either cohort to learn more about the municipal budgeting process from either the Staff or Council perspective.

2021 Departmental Budget Dates are TBD and typically take place in November or December annually.

Reporting and Feedback

A report to Council will be provided upon completion of the program including information about the next steps and satisfaction of participants in the program.

Pre-Program Surveys

Before the program begins, we will ask participants to fill in a survey about:

1. Career Goals;
2. Knowledge of Municipal Government, and;
3. Knowledge of Career Opportunities in Public Service.

Program Check-Ins

Throughout the Women in Governance Program, the participants will sit in with the overseers of the program to discuss what has been working, what could be improved, and what they hope to get out of the next weeks of the program.

As well, anonymous surveys about the interest in each speaker will be given to determine the types of speakers that should be present in future weeks and cohorts.

Post-Program Survey

After completion of the program, participants will be asked the same questions as in the Pre-Program Surveys as well as additional questions about their experience in the program as well as feedback for future iterations of the program.

Continuation

The Women in Governance Program will be evaluated after the first cohort to determine successes, opportunities, and next steps to continuing this program at the Town of Cobourg.