

# Establishing a women's caucus – Guidelines for Women Councillors

## What is a Caucus

Women's caucuses or parliamentary groups are structures that have been created within political assemblies in many countries to strengthen cooperation between women in political life across party and ideological lines and which strengthens their capacity to effect change. They can help build the capacity of women councillors; especially newly elected councillors, through formal and informal mentoring and promote women's equality in Local Government. A women's caucus in your local authority should develop according to the specific histories, experiences, needs and resources in relation to women's participation and representation. Local authorities can assist with the establishment of such caucuses.

**There are different models and types of caucus formal or informal, local regional or national.**

## Step 1 – Assess the environment

- Have women councillors expressed an interest?
- What resources financial and human will be needed?
- Consider the local context; the numbers of women councillors in your local authority and in neighbouring local authorities, if there is a small number of women.

## Step 2 – Gaining support – Identifying any potential supporters or allies

- Are there active women's groups and networks in the area that can support your caucus or provide a secretariat role, as in the model adopted in Limerick? Consider what resources would be required.
- Are there women's civil society groups and groups representing marginalised communities that you can work in partnership with and strengthen links and cooperation with your caucus?
- Determine the relationship with the Local Authority. Inform them of your plans. Establish how they can support you with meetings times and spaces, IT and administrative support.
- Speak with caucuses that are up and running in Limerick City and County and Dublin City Council.
- Contact the Association of Irish Local Government (AILG) who have formed a women's network.

## Step 3 – Lay the foundations

- Establish a cross party and Independents preparatory group and clearly identify and delineate responsibilities.
- Invite and support all women councillors to take part in its formation.

- Consider engaging an independent facilitator initially to work with the members to define and agree the name, structure, format, vision and objectives.
- Explore themes that will unite women and where you can find common ground.
- Agree membership.
- Agree how meetings will work and how decisions will be made.

## Step 4 – Getting up and running

- Consider launching the caucus with a joint press release or submitting a motion.
- Agree the leadership structure including chairperson and secretariat role (independent or provided by officials?) If an independent secretarial role is chosen, advocate for resources to support this.
- Decide who is eligible for membership and what the criteria are? Consider trans and non-binary inclusive language. What are the rights, responsibilities and obligations of being a member?
- How will the caucus be renewed following an election and how can you ensure institutional memory and embedding the political experience of women?
- Agree, formalise and publicise your rules or constitution. This should include, rationale, name, objectives, definition of membership, structures, process of decision making and conflict resolution, leadership, meetings, functions and resources.
- Discuss the development of a media and communication strategy as well as a Caucus email (linked to the council or independent) and social media platform.
- Make links with National Women's Parliamentary Caucus.

## Step – 5 In action

- Develop work plan for 6 – 12 months – what do you want to achieve?
- Decisions on activities should be based on the collective objectives of the caucus and could include: Identify specific policy issues that require deeper examination for example, violence against women and a safer public environment. Where possible, collect data and conduct investigations to strengthen the advocacy impact of the caucus – and also to encourage buy-in from other decision makers.
  - Outreach - Organise discussions among citizens and politicians on issues of importance and build networks– invite submissions, hold meetings, use existing structures such as the PPN.
  - Raise the visibility of specific issues and the caucus by organising press conferences and media interviews.
  - Promote your local authority signing up to the [European Charter for Equality between Women and Men in Local Life](#).
- Review funding to ensure successful functioning.
- Document and celebrate the achievements.
- Ensure that the local caucus is maintained in the run-up to future general and local elections, where members may be running against each other and/or will be supporting their own party's candidates.

## Further resources

Inter-Parliamentary Union –  
Guidelines for Womens Caucus

Irish Womens Parliamentary Caucus

NWC & NCCWN - Establishing Local  
Caucus for women councillors

Womens Democracy Network Uganda  
Chapter – Guide for creating and  
sustaining successful women local  
councilor's caucuses at district and  
sub-county levels in Uganda

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