



Gender Balance at Every Forum: The Panel Pledge



Chief Executive Women

Women leaders enabling women leaders



Women's Leadership
Institute Australia

MALE CHAMPIONS
OF CHANGE 

(In)visibility of women at forums matters

Conferences and panels 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

Where are the women?

Many high-profile conferences, events and taskforces lack gender balance, despite there often being no shortage of qualified women. It is estimated less than 15% of panellists in Australia are women. Less than 12% of experts cited in business newspapers are women. Such optics have consequences.

15%

of panellists in Australia are women

Consequences of (in)visibility

The absence of women at public professional forums is a problem. Because speakers are usually male, audiences are given a narrow perspective. The lack of diversity limits the quality of the conversation and potential outcomes.

Moreover, when visible role models are male, the absence of women perpetuates absence of women. Fewer women choose to speak, and fewer are chosen.

Without the opportunity for women to serve on panels as thought leaders, women lack profile-building speaking opportunities, an important contributor to experience and recognition.

In the rare instances women do present at events, entrenched gender biases often surface, leading to negative experiences for the presenter. Women who speak up may encounter derogatory comments or be perceived as arrogant.

Taking a stand on visibility of women at forums

You too may have noted that too many panel appearances and speaking engagements are offered to men. Too few are offered to women. The imbalance continues.

The Male Champions of Change, Chief Executive Women and Women's Leadership Institute Australia are committed to calling out imbalances and

pushing for an improvement. As business leaders, we pledge that whenever we are invited to be involved in or sponsor a panel or conference, we will inquire about organiser efforts to ensure women leaders are represented. This "Panel Pledge" is effective and simple to implement.

It serves as a reminder at an opportune moment of influence.

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

- Elizabeth Broderick, Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Australian Human Rights Commission

What you can do

1. Commit to the panel pledge
2. Keep highlighting gender balance for forums
3. Actively encourage women's voices
4. Persevere

1. Commit to the Panel Pledge

- When you are invited to speak at or participate in a professional forum:
 - Request confirmation of who the other panelists/speakers/participants are, and how gender balance will be achieved;
 - Insist that as a condition of acceptance, you expect women to participate in a meaningful way;
 - Reserve the right to withdraw from the event, even at the last minute, should this not be the case when the speaker list is finalised;
 - Offer names of women from within your organisation or network and, if helpful, point them to resources for support in finding women (see page 4)
- Tell your team so they can support you in delivering your commitment
- Extend the pledge to your own organisation by ensuring all forums you run or sponsor take gender balance into account

Danny Cohen, head of BBC's television output promised viewers the corporation will not make any more all-male comedy panel shows. Cohen said, "We're not going to have any more panel shows with no women on them. It's not acceptable." – **BBC**

Speaker request forms on the Telstra website now state: "Our CEO David Thodey is a member of the Male Champions of Change. As part of this, we are committed to ensuring that events we participate in are gender balanced. Please take this into consideration when submitting your request." – **Telstra**

2. Keep highlighting gender balance for forums

- Don't let the moment pass – point out gender imbalances when you see them
- Encourage conference organisers to take ownership of achieving gender balance, e.g. using the checklist on page 4

Dr Martin Parkinson was invited to speak at a conference billed as bringing together Australian thought leaders to discuss the future direction and economic challenges for the nation. Dialogue with the conference

organisers about his commitment to the Panel Pledge did not impact gender balance on the speaker program, where women were largely absent. Dr Parkinson proceeded with the speech but dedicated the first five minutes of his time to explaining the importance of including women's voices. He received a standing ovation as well as a commitment from conference organisers to focus on gender balance in the future.

– **Australian Government Treasury**

3. Actively encourage women's voices

- Use your networks to link women to speaking opportunities
- Set a goal for gender balance for the face of your organisation, e.g. spokespeople put forward by your corporate affairs team

Upon learning an event lacked women panellists, Elmer Funke Kupper identified a replacement for himself that would improve gender balance. – **ASX**

- Acknowledge and find ways to counter the very real fears women have when they volunteer or speak up, e.g. derogatory comments, negative perceptions

ANZ's "Notable Women" program trains and supports mid-to senior level women to increase their public profile through speaking engagements and media appearances. – **ANZ**

4. Persevere: Don't accept the excuses



Where can I get help finding women?

Women for Media

Women for Media is an online database of more than 170 women leaders in business, finance, government 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 challenge stereotypes and

provide role models for other aspiring women executives and leaders.

Women for Media provides contacts of senior women leaders for interview or comment: 03 9653 5316, info@womenformedia.com.au

For more information on Women for Media, visit www.womenformedia.com.au

About the Male Champions of Change

The Male Champions of Change is a coalition of 25 Australian CEOs, Non-Executive Director and community leaders. The Male Champions of Change believe gender equality is one of the nation's most significant societal and economic issue.

Established in 2010, by Sex Discrimination Commissioner Elizabeth Broderick, our mission is to step up beside women to help achieve a significant and sustainable increase in the representation of women in leadership.

www.malechampionsofchange.com

About Chief Executive Women

Chief Executive Women (CEW) was established in 1985 by eighteen influential Australian women.

CEW now represents over 330 of Australia's most senior women leaders whose shared vision is women leaders enabling women leaders. Through its advocacy, targeted programs and scholarships CEW works to remove the barriers to women's progression and ensure equal opportunity for prosperity.

www.cew.org.au

About Women's Leadership Institute Australia

The Women's Leadership Institute Australia (WLIA) was established by Carol Schwartz AM in 2010. WLIA seeks to catalyse and inspire innovative partnerships, action and system-changing solutions to address the imbalance of women in leadership positions in Australia. It is dedicated to breaking through unconscious biases and structural barriers in business, politics, the media and society more broadly.

www.wlia.org.au

Got a great story about the Panel Pledge?

Email us: panelpledge@malechampionsofchange.com

Printed by E.W. Lee Design and Print, a woman-owned business

Improving gender balance: Checklist for conference organisers

- Strive to achieve 50:50 gender balance.** Force the question – if we don't have gender balance, why not?
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- Distribute topics** so that women's voices are heard on "hard" topics, not just "soft" topics.
.....
- Ensure speaker criteria are not inadvertently biased**, e.g. in Australia limiting panel participation to CEOs or ministers leaves you with very few women.
.....
- Book women speakers early** – in case you need to change your approach to ensure gender balance.
.....
- Ask around.** – Women can be found, e.g. ask other panelists, industry insiders, specialist women's organisations. Google. Look at past conferences, government boards and industry associations.
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The Australia Israel Chamber of Commerce (AICC) and Chief Executive Women have entered into a strategic partnership to improve the engagement of senior women at high-profile AICC business and networking events. Under the partnership CEW members attend

AICC events at member rates. This partnership aims to improve the critical mass of female representation speaking at events and also encourages senior women to take the opportunity to attend and network at AICC events, both of which enhance the experience of attendees.

The Panel Pledge is a practical way to improve gender balance in important debates and public discussion, which is good for women, good for men and good for business.

– Diane Smith-Gander, chairwoman Transfield Services, CEW President



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