# Gender Equity in Governance

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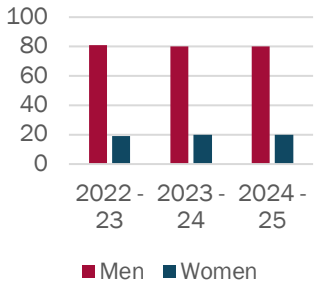
## Gender Representation in Governance Positions

While there has been progress made in improving gender equity in governance, there are differences across sectors. Recent improvements were observed in Australian Government, with women holding 54.3% of all government board positions, which was achieved by implementing a gender balance target of 50%, therefore questioning whether incorporating a gender balance target could assist achieving gender equality amongst other sectors. Although there has been a significant increase in gender equity over the years, research suggests that continued developments are needed within organisations; discussing that approximately 70-80% of women are employed within the not-for-profit (NFP) workforce, however, women hold approximately 50% of the board positions within community organisations, reflecting a gap in gender equity in governance *(Australian Council of Social Service, 2012; Australian Government, 2025; Australian Institute of Company Directors, 2026; Chief Executive Women, 2026; NFP People, 2024)*.

Gender Composition of Chairs in Governance *(Workplace Gender Equality Agency, 2024)*




## Feedback Collated on Gender Equity in Governance

Qualitative feedback was received from governance leaders, which highlighted consistent themes around the importance of gender equity in governance, and barriers that may be in place to support gender equity. From a review of the data collected, respondents discussed that gender diversity strengthens board effectiveness by bringing different perspectives, experiences and professional backgrounds into discussions, which may assist in identifying risks earlier, identifying “blind spots” and making more informed decisions. Other viewpoints suggested that diversity would assist NFP boards to better understand community needs, such as within the Family Domestic Violence sector. Respondents suggested the use of formal gender targets for board representation was positive, however emphasised that targets should be implemented with genuine intent rather than a “tick-the-box" exercise. It was suggested that some of the respondents’ boards had achieved and maintained a diverse board without a target but felt it may assist other boards that have been unable to achieve gender equity. Respondents discussed strategies to ensure diversity leads to meaningful influence rather than symbolic representation, which included maintaining and reviewing a board skills matrix, creating an inclusive culture where members felt respected and encouraged to contribute, strong induction processes, governance education and training, and effective mentoring. In relation to barriers that may prevent women from accessing governance roles; respondents reflected on the improvements made, however discussed there were still systemic barriers, such as, recruitment processes relying on informal networks, and managing caring responsibilities and work/life balance pressures which are more influenced with the increasing demands of those on boards and in governance positions.

## Summary

Gender equity is beneficial in governance and board decision-making. Overall, there has been progress in increasing the representation of women in governance, however there are still improvements needed across organisations and sectors. The qualitative data highlighted the benefits of gender diversity on boards and identified strategies to support gender equity in governance and leadership positions. This research will be valuable for boards seeking to strengthen gender equity, providing research of its benefits and strategies to support more inclusive governance and leadership.

## References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