



Introduction

vicsport, with the support of VicHealth, has conducted research into the lack of women currently sitting on boards within the sport and recreation industry. Interviews were conducted with nine women who currently, or had previously, held a board position. The purpose of the interviews was to gather views based on firsthand experience and observations regarding common barriers faced by women, pathways onto board positions and possible strategies to encourage more women to get involved in governance positions of sporting organisations. Board positions held ranged from sporting clubs, State Sporting Associations (SSAs), peak bodies and government agencies.

One of the key themes discussed was a lack of confidence despite skills.

Lack of confidence despite skills

Despite having the appropriate skills and experience to apply for board positions, some women lack confidence to apply for board positions. Similarly, once appointed into a board role some women also acknowledged that they lacked confidence in their performance and contribution at the board table. This lack of confidence described by female directors can stem from a variety of factors:

- low self-efficacy
- a feeling of intimidation due to the culture and perception that boards have traditionally been a male-dominated environment
- lack of understanding about the roles and responsibilities of board members
- lack of understanding about how to seek out and apply for board positions
- poor board induction
- a lack of role models and support.

vicsport asked the women interviewed if they believed that a lack of confidence was a barrier for them or other women applying for board positions. Secondly, they were asked about their thoughts on possible strategies to increase women's confidence to apply for board positions and to feel more comfortable once sitting on boards of sporting organisations.

Is confidence a barrier?

- Some women reported that they struggled with a lack of confidence applying for and sitting on boards and today they still see evidence of that in other women however not all women interviewed agreed that confidence was a barrier in applying and seeking board positions for women.
- One director was of the belief that, "Women as a general rule do not take risks and put themselves out there. This may be due to fear of failure and confidence has a big role to play in this."



- One woman believed that it was not so much of a lack of confidence as a lack of knowledge in how to go about obtaining a board position. Another director went further to say that if you lack confidence then a board position is not the right role for you to be pursuing.
- Confidence was generally seen as a self imposed barrier for women. Despite holding the same skills and qualifications as their male counterparts their confidence levels can be greatly reduced in comparison.

How to increase confidence

- A thorough induction process was considered important to increase the confidence of new directors so that they were made to feel welcome, included and appropriately informed to contribute to discussion and decision making. The interviewees also considered the chairperson an important person to providing support and create a positive board culture for new directors.
- It is thought that increasing one's experience on boards, committees or sub-committees will increase confidence levels. While one woman cited experience on sporting committees as a key to increasing her confidence before joining a board another believed that although these positions were beneficial they did not translate into increased levels of confidence.
- "What needs to be taken from this is that all women are different and will need varying methods to increase confidence. Gaining experience through sitting on sporting committees and the like may be beneficial for some but not all. Try different things, such as public speaking, and see what works for you."
- A few of the women interviewed believed that women may lack confidence as they either do not value their own skills or overestimate the skills required to successfully hold a board position, or a combination or both. Education, support and mentoring were viewed as important factors to help overcome these barriers.
- Details about the exact roles, responsibilities and skills required to be a board member should be made available to potential applicants (board role descriptions). This may assist women to be appropriately informed about the skills required for a board position and potentially increase the likelihood of them applying.
- One woman mentioned that it can take up to two years to feel confident enough to fully contribute at board level. This is ultimately a waste of everyone's time and can be avoided with a good induction process and if the Chair facilitates discussion so that everyone's opinions are heard and considered.



Recommendations	Rationale
Educate and empower women with potential sports governance skills	Increase confidence, self efficacy and knowledge of the skills required to be a board member.
Mentoring for women in and or considering board positions	Provide appropriate support and encourage more women to apply for positions.
Promotion of female role models	Break down barriers and challenging perceptions of boards being a male's domain by highlighting the success of female directors.
Implement induction processes for all new boards members	Allows new members to contribute to board discussion and decision making sooner reducing the time needed to "settle into the role" and make a meaningful contribution.
Educate and encourage women, Chair's and organisations to explore various pathways onto board positions including gaining experience on club committees and/or sub-committees.	Increase awareness about lack of confidence as a potential barrier and allow time for women to develop skills and gain confidence and experience.