



WOMEN IN SPORT LEADERSHIP SNAPSHOT

2025 – 2026 NATIONAL REPORT



LEADERSHIP SNAPSHOT

BEYOND DIVERSITY

Advancing Equity and Inclusion
in Sport Leadership



If you're asking about gender equity [in sport leadership], I would say it's steady progress. If you're talking about inclusion, I would say that it's not even close.

– Provincial Sport Governing Body & Multisport Service Organization (MSO) Board Member

Land Acknowledgement

From coast to coast to coast, we acknowledge the ancestral, unceded, and unsundered territory of all the Inuit, Métis, and First Nations Peoples that call this land home. We also acknowledge the deep-rooted grief, trauma, and loss caused by Canada's colonial systems and policies. As we engage in sport and physical activity across Turtle Island, we recognize the caretakers of the land where we live, work, and play. Above all, we recognize and respect Indigenous Peoples' connection and kinship to the land.

To deepen your relationship with the land where you live, work, and play, we invite you to learn more about the Indigenous territories, languages, and treaties connected to your area by visiting [Native-Land.ca](https://www.Native-Land.ca).



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A Note on Language

Language is constantly evolving, and individuals and communities may use different terms to describe their identities and experiences. In this report, we aim to use language that is respectful, inclusive, and widely recognized, while acknowledging that no single term will reflect everyone's preferences. For example, some people prefer identity-first language (for example, disabled person) while others prefer person-first language (for example, person with a disability). Where possible, we prioritize language that reflects participants' self-descriptions, while recognizing and respecting that individuals are best positioned to name their own identities. For a closer look at the terms used in this report, please explore the Definitions and Acronyms section on page 29.

How to Reference This Report: Canadian Women & Sport. (2026). Women in Sport Leadership Snapshot: 2025-2026 National Report.





A CATALYST FOR CHANGE

Strengthening Women's Leadership in Sport



The sport system largely remains a landscape designed by and for men. It reflects their needs, perspectives, and priorities. We need to ask: **What could happen if we put women at the centre of that design?**

Allison Sandmeyer-Graves, Chief Executive Officer (CEO), Canadian Women & Sport

Sport is stronger when leadership reflects the diversity of the people it serves.

Research consistently shows that sport organizations with diverse boards and leadership teams are more innovative, better at managing risk, and more responsive to community needs. Diverse leadership expands access to talent, drives innovation across sectors, and improves organizational performance. In fact, [a 2020 study of national and provincial/territorial sport organizations](#) by Wicker and Kerwin shows that organizations with boards that are more than 45% women generate higher per capita revenues and demonstrate stronger governance practices.

In 2018, [the federal government set an ambitious goal](#) of achieving gender equity across all levels of sport—from playground to podium—by 2035. At the same time, the Federal-Provincial/Territorial Sport Committee (FPTSC) Work Group on Women and

[Girls' called for system-wide changes to address the barriers that girls and women face.](#) The [Canadian Sport Policy \(2025-2035\)](#) and the [Future of Sport in Canada Commission's Final Report](#) have reinforced the need for continued, system-wide action to advance gender equity in sport.

While these goals and reports help champion the need for equity in sport, the sector requires both a clear-eyed assessment of its progress and tangible solutions to help drive change forward. Currently, there is a disconnect between where we aspire to be and where we currently are.

Canadian Women & Sport's Leadership Snapshot provides the evidence, insights, and accountability needed to ensure that equity commitments translate into real, systemic change.

Building on nearly a decade of historical insights, the 2025-2026 Leadership Snapshot tracks who holds power in the sport system, how representation is changing, and what barriers and enablers shape women's experiences. By compiling insights from a national survey of sport organizations, in-depth interviews with women leaders, and a comprehensive review of policies and resources, this report provides one of the most detailed looks at sport leadership in Canada today.

The report reveals a system capable of change, one where more women are leading on boards and many

organizations have taken meaningful first steps toward equity. It also highlights that progress toward Canada's gender equity goals is still uncertain. Thankfully, women are sharing what they need to stay, advance, and thrive as leaders in sport.

A more equitable sport system won't happen without coordinated, accountable leadership. By providing critical insights and a path forward, the Leadership Snapshot supports the sector in taking action to build a thriving sport sector that reflects the best of Canada.

KEY INSIGHTS

1

MORE WOMEN IN BOARDROOMS, BUT FEWER IN THE TOP JOB.

Women hold 45% of board seats and 48% of board chair positions, but only 34% of CEOs and executive directors (EDs) are women—the lowest since 2018.

WHY IT MATTERS

Women's gains are primarily in volunteer roles, not in the paid executive positions that shape strategy, culture, and accountability.

2

DIVERSITY ≠ EQUITY FOR ALL WOMEN.

To mirror Canada's population, sport organization boards would need 2.4x more racialized women, 2.0x more Indigenous women, and 6.4x more women with disabilities.

True gender equity requires equity for all women, not just those who face the fewest barriers to progress.

3

POLICY WITHOUT PRACTICE KEEPS CHANGE FRAGILE.

While 6 in 10 national organizations have a broad EDI policy, only 1 in 10 have a stand-alone gender equity policy—and fewer than 10% link policy to strategic plans or programming.

Making policy commitments without resourcing or measuring them stalls progress toward meaningful change.

**CANADA'S
SPORT
LEADERSHIP
LANDSCAPE
IN 2025-2026**

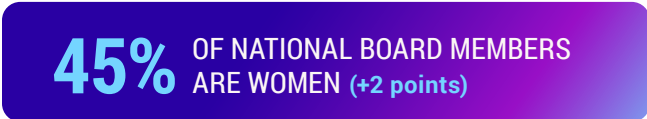




CANADA'S SPORT LEADERSHIP LANDSCAPE IN 2025-2026

The 2025-2026 survey reveals a sector in transition: while more women hold board and senior staff roles, they remain under-represented in executive leadership. Women from equity-denied groups are being left even further behind.


1. WOMEN HOLD MORE NATIONAL BOARD SEATS THAN EVER BEFORE



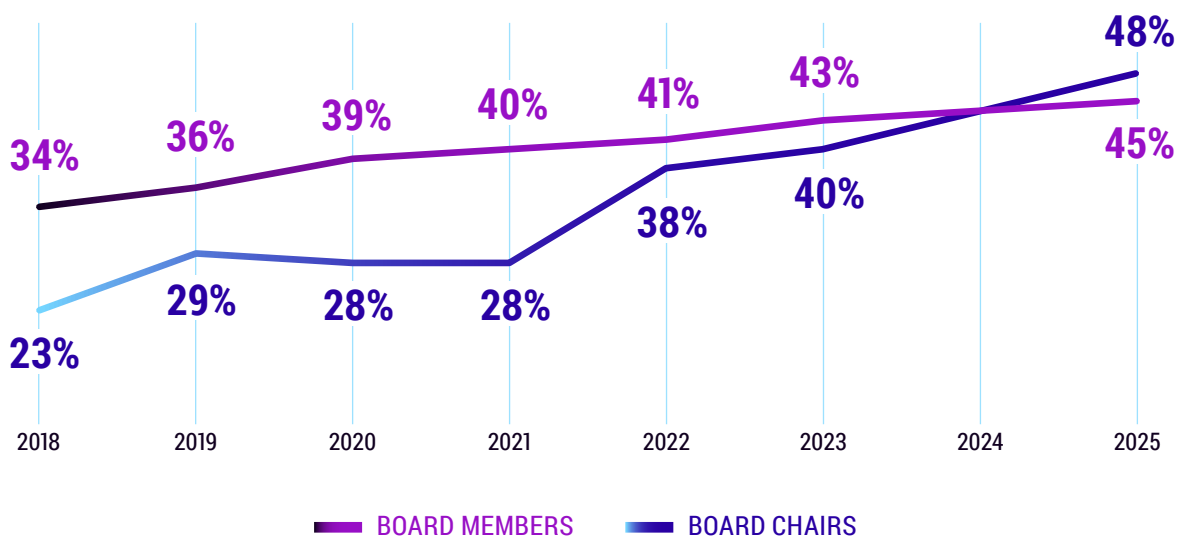
Percentage point changes reflect comparison with 2023.

Women now hold 45% of board seats and 48% of board chair positions among National Sport Organizations (NSOs), National Multisport Service Organizations (MSOs), and Canadian Sport Centres or Institutes (CSCIs)—almost a 50/50 split with men after nearly a decade of steady growth. This puts sport ahead of corporate Canada, where only 31% of board seats are held by women according to a 2025 report by Osler. While women are well-represented on the boards of NSOs and MSOs, the boards of CSCIs continue to lag.

What Momentum Means
Gender-balanced boards make better decisions, improve governance, and help organizations manage risk more effectively.



The percentage of women sitting on and chairing boards at the national level has risen steadily since 2018



The Women in Sport Leadership Snapshot tracked women’s representation in board membership and board leadership annually from 2018 to 2023. Since 2023, Leadership Snapshot data is collected every two years.

At the provincial and territorial (P/T) level across Canada, women make up 45% of board members—mirroring the national statistic. But other indicators of progress fall short. When we look at the percentage of organizations that have gender-balanced boards, the story is a little different. Only 39% of provincial/territorial sport organizations (P/TSOs) have boards with 40–60% women, compared to 71% at the national level. Likewise, 40% of P/T board chairs are women—showing that women are present on boards but not advancing into top roles at the same rate.



Why It Matters

Leadership pathways flow through the provincial and territorial level. When representation lags here, it limits who gets into the leadership pipeline—and who reaches the national stage.



Photo Credit: Sask Sport

2. NEARLY HALF OF SENIOR STAFF ARE WOMEN, BUT ONLY ONE-THIRD ARE CEOs

48% OF NATIONAL SENIOR STAFF MEMBERS ARE WOMEN (-3 points)

46% NSO
(no change)

58% MSO
(+12 points)

33% CSCI
(-13 points)

34% OF NATIONAL CEOs AND EDs ARE WOMEN (-8 points)

32% NSO
(-6 points)

46% MSO
(-13 points)

29% CSCI
(no change)

47% OF SURVEYED P/T SENIOR STAFF MEMBERS ARE WOMEN (-1 point)

46% OF SURVEYED P/T CEOs AND EDs ARE WOMEN (no change)

Percentage point changes reflect comparison with 2023.

Across the national sport system, women make up 48% of all senior staff—but hold only 34% of CEO and ED roles. That’s the lowest percentage of women in the top job since we began collecting data in 2018. This decline now places sport behind Canada’s corporate sector, where women held 41% of executive roles in 2025 according to the [Prosperity Project’s Annual Report Card on Gender Equity and Leadership](#).



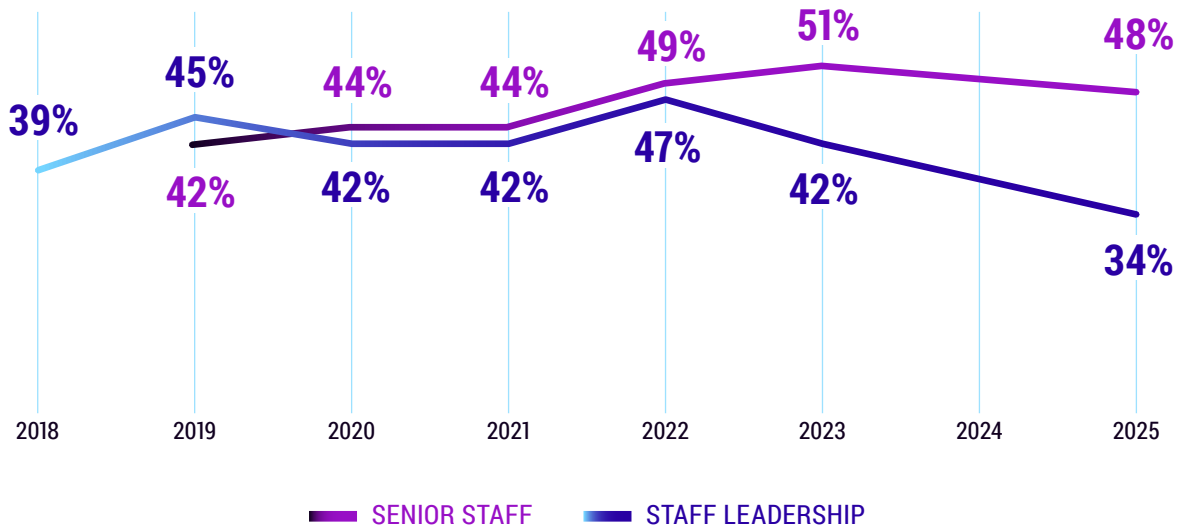
Why It Matters

CEO and ED roles carry real decision-making power. When women are missing from the top job, they have less influence over strategy, resources, and organizational culture.




We are seeing great progress in MSOs where almost half of CEO roles and more than half of senior staff roles are held by women. However, only about one-third of CSCI senior staff and CEOs are women, meaning that the sport science and support systems guiding Canada’s top athletes might not optimally reflect what women athletes need to succeed.

The percentage of women on senior staff and in top staff roles at the national level reveals inconsistent gains over time




The Women in Sport Leadership Snapshot tracked women's representation in top staff (CEO or ED) leadership annually from 2018 to 2023. Senior staff representation was added in 2019. Since 2023, Leadership Snapshot data is collected every two years.

At the P/T level, representation among senior staff is holding steady. Women make up 47% of senior staff and 46% of CEOs and EDs, showing greater stability in leadership pipelines outside the national system. Still, progress is uneven: 10% of national-level organizations and 24% of P/T organizations have no women on their senior staff teams.



Why It Matters

Organizations with no women in senior staff and executive roles lose critical perspectives that improve governance, risk management, and the quality of programs they deliver.



3. WOMEN FROM EQUITY-DENIED GROUPS ARE VASTLY UNDER-REPRESENTED

If national sport boards and senior staff reflected Canada's demographics:

INDIGENOUS WOMEN WOULD HOLD

2.0x more board seats
7.3x more senior staff roles

RACIALIZED WOMEN WOULD HOLD

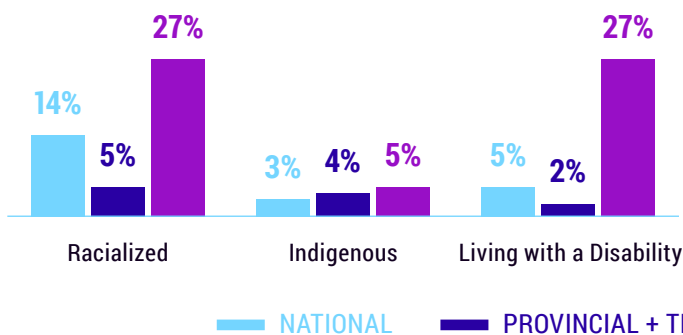
2.4x more board seats
4.3x more senior staff roles

WOMEN WITH DISABILITIES WOULD HOLD

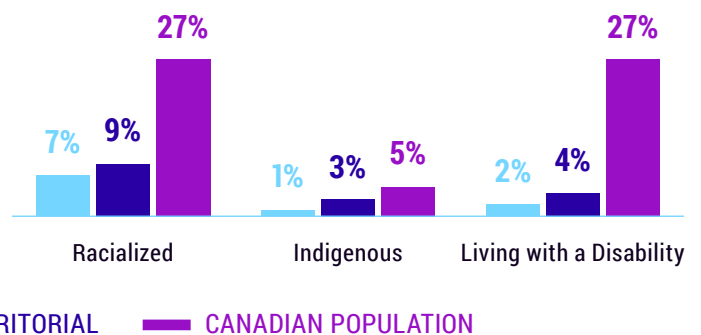
6.4x more board seats
19.7x more senior staff roles

Across the Canadian sport system, women who are Indigenous, racialized, and/or living with disabilities are vastly under-represented on boards of directors and in senior staff roles—and men from these groups experience similar gaps. The overall pattern is consistent: representation is strongest on national boards and weakest among national senior staff, while representation at the P/T level lands somewhere in between.

The percentage of women from equity-denied groups on national sport boards of directors



The percentage of women from equity-denied groups in senior staff roles



Data for equity-denied groups collected in 2025-2026 is not directly comparable to data from previous reporting years (2022, 2023) due to updates in measurement and categorization. Comparisons to the Canadian population are based on the most recent (2021) Canadian Census by Statistics Canada.

Where We Go From Here

Women from equity-denied groups face a steeper climb into leadership because the system wasn't built with them in mind, and they are more likely to serve in unpaid board roles than in paid staff positions. When their voices are missing from governance and leadership, we lose perspectives essential to creating safe, inclusive sport spaces. Addressing the systemic barriers these women face is key to unlocking the full potential their perspectives would bring to the system.

4. THERE ARE EARLY SIGNS OF GENDER DIVERSITY, BUT POWER GAPS PERSIST

The most recent Canadian census shows that gender-diverse people make up roughly 0.4% of the Canadian population, and representation on sport boards is beginning to reflect that.

In 2025-2026, 3 national board members (0.4%) and 4 P/T board members (0.1%) identified as gender diverse—showing early signs of proportional representation at the governance level. At the senior staff level (the level just below the CEO or ED) representation is proportional but still minimal: 1 national senior staff member (0.3%) and 2 P/T senior staff members (0.3%) identified as gender diverse.

The picture shifts when we look at who holds power. No board chairs or CEOs identified as gender diverse among NSOs, MSOs, and CSCIs. At the P/T level, 2 board chairs (0.5%) and 2 CEOs (0.8%) identified as gender diverse.

Why It Matters

The numbers show early progress toward gender diversity in sport leadership, but that progress is concentrated in lower-level roles. Without diverse representation in top leadership, the system cannot fully reflect or respond to the needs of the people it serves.



THE SPORT SYSTEM IS CAPABLE OF CHANGE—BUT NOT YET BUILT FOR IT.

The landscape of Canadian sport leadership in 2025-2026 shows us that the sport system is capable of change but not yet designed to sustain it. Women are gaining seats at the table, yet the gaps at the CEO level—and the deeper inequities affecting equity-denied and gender-diverse leaders—signal that leadership pathways remain uneven and fragile. Without coordinated action to strengthen equity across all levels of leadership, progress risks stalling or sliding backwards.



PROGRESS, PAIN POINTS, AND POSSIBILITIES

Perspectives from
Women Leaders

“

Women will tell you exactly what their experience is. The question is whether anyone cares enough to listen and then do something about it.

– NSO Senior Staff Leader & Former P/TSO Executive Director

PROGRESS, PAIN POINTS, AND POSSIBILITIES

Perspectives from Women Leaders

While women are increasingly represented at the board and senior staff levels in Canada, **having a seat at the table does not guarantee having a voice, influence, or support—especially for women from equity-denied groups.**

Much of Canada’s sport system was built by and for men. Even today, the sector often carries forward those old habits, unintentionally favouring men’s leadership and participation over others. This legacy continues to influence who gets hired, how decisions are made, and what organizations prioritize in their culture and policies.

We talked to current and former women sport leaders at the national and P/T level in Canada about their leadership pathways and their experiences of equity, diversity, and inclusion along the way. Many of these women described:

- ▶ being present but unheard
- ▶ feeling pressure to represent an entire group
- ▶ being “set up to fail” or challenged without adequate support
- ▶ being expected to feel grateful for receiving a seat at the table



These biased expectations undermine women’s sense of belonging in sport, particularly for those with diverse identities. By examining what makes women feel limited, excluded, and challenged, alongside what they need to feel supported, included, and empowered, we can uncover insights that help women reach and stay in sport leadership roles.



What Holds Women Back

1. Legacy practices that limit women’s leadership
2. Identities that are privileged more than others
3. Low compensation and limited opportunities for advancement



What Drives Women Forward

1. Effective, active mentorship
2. Inclusive organizational cultures
3. Policy that reflects accountability and measurable action



WHAT HOLDS WOMEN BACK

1. LEGACY PRACTICES THAT LIMIT WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

For progress to be made toward creating gender equitable boards and senior leadership spaces, we must first recognize why disparity exists. Women are capable and willing to take on higher levels of responsibilities within their organizations but are not always given a fair chance. **Decision-making spaces dominated by men, tight informal networks, and outdated governance practices continue to limit women's advancement and shape their experiences once in leadership spaces.**



If someone met me for the first time, they would assume I was the wife of one of the men in leadership. They would assume that I was volunteering, or that I was leading women's [sport]... There was still tremendous bias that presented itself.

– Former P/TSO Executive Director

Similar to broader societal trends, hiring practices in sport are often shaped by a “who you know” culture as opposed to clear, consistent systems of evaluation and promotion. Similarly, leadership circles—often made up of older white men—hold power without much accountability. This contributes to stereotypes surrounding women's (expected lack of) motivation to work during childbearing years and a lack of attention toward all the administration and care-based services women are often expected to provide for their sport organizations.



It's interesting because on the provincial board there are more men than women, but the women are probably doing the majority of the workload. I mean, they are definitely doing the majority of the workload.

– P/TSO Board Member

Fixing the System, Not the Symptoms

Create Decision-Making Structures with Women in Mind

To advance equity and inclusion, organizations need to modernize how they make decisions and manage talent so that leadership opportunities are open, transparent, and based on merit that is relevant and applicable to the positions and context.



Photo Credit: Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network



WHAT HOLDS WOMEN BACK

2. IDENTITIES THAT ARE PRIVILEGED MORE THAN OTHERS

Not all women experience the same barriers or access to belonging within organizations. Progress toward gender equity has largely benefited white able-bodied cisgender women. Leaders who identify as racialized, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, and/or living with a disability describe being isolated, tokenized, or excluded altogether. In other words, progress for some does not mean progress for all.



I would say we're half successful because yes, we've opened the door for more women, but we still only open the door for a certain kind of woman. It's not open to all, and it hasn't been open to all. So, the question is, will there be a level playing field?

– MSO Chief Executive Officer

Even as diversity targets improve—like the gains seen on boards—women's experiences show that inclusion and equity are still falling behind. Being present in a room does not mean diverse women are given the same attention and opportunities as everyone else.

Women describe:

- ▶ Being the “only one” in leadership spaces
- ▶ Experiencing inclusion in name only, without real voice or influence
- ▶ Dealing with organizations lacking the capacity to address overlapping forms of inequity



I'm always the only Black woman. I'm not always the only woman... but I am always and have still to this day been the only Black woman [on the board of directors].

– P/TSO Board Member

Simply providing a seat at the table isn't enough. Without real influence, diverse women miss out on leadership advancement opportunities and organizations lose the opportunity to understand fresh, varied perspectives on the issues at hand.

Fixing the System, Not the Symptoms

Take an Intersectional Lens

Progress requires applying an intersectional lens that ensures leadership spaces aren't just diverse, but genuinely inclusive and empowering. When diverse representation is visible and actively influencing strategic planning, policy, and programming, organizations become more equitable and inclusive at every level.



WHAT HOLDS WOMEN BACK

3. LOW COMPENSATION AND LIMITED OPPORTUNITIES FOR ADVANCEMENT

Women leaders consistently pointed to low pay and limited opportunities to advance as major reasons that they struggle to stay in their roles. Those who felt excluded also said their leaders made little effort to understand or support their needs—especially around balancing work with family responsibilities.



The problem with sport is that there's not a lot of vertical advancement, period... And it might be that [you've been with the organization] so long that they've kind of exhausted the pay grade for a manager—you're open to kind of advancing it to a director. But on the flip side, it may be that you don't have the budget to do that.

- MSO Chief Executive Officer

Organizations must take an intersectional gender equity lens to the supports and resources available for their staff. Fair pay, flexible schedules, and solid benefits—including supportive parental leave policies—are essential to gender equity. Retention depends on creating roles where people can grow and succeed without personal or financial sacrifice.

Fixing the System, Not the Symptoms



I think one of the things that would certainly help is an equitable salary and benefits... you know, benefits that actually identify the need for a work life balance—and that's not easy with sport.

- P/TSO Executive Director



Value—and Compensate—Women's Work Equitably

Creating workplace environments with women in mind is essential for addressing experiences of exclusion and building leadership pipelines that are stable, diverse, and truly equitable. When scheduling and benefits reflect women's realities, it's easier for them to commit to their roles for the long haul.



WHAT DRIVES WOMEN FORWARD

1. EFFECTIVE, ACTIVE MENTORSHIP

Mentorship is one of the most consistent and powerful drivers of women’s leadership growth and retention. It impacts confidence, offers critical insight, and builds awareness of advancement opportunities. This matters when leadership structures operate on unspoken rules and “who you know.”

Women leaders stressed that active mentorship is what really makes a difference—not just offering advice, but showing up, advocating, and opening doors. Formal programs help, but informal, ongoing relationships also play a crucial role in helping women see themselves as valued and capable leaders.



I’m going to say throughout my career there have been many men who have been there for me, especially in the earlier stages because there were few, if any, women around. And I would say for me, it’s always that they saw the opportunity available for me before I saw it myself, and that’s always been key for me.

– MSO Chief Executive Officer

Effective, active mentorship shapes both the leadership pipeline and the day-to-day experience of women leaders. This requires real advocacy: **women need allies who understand the systems they navigate and sponsors who amplify their skills and accomplishments.** They also need hands-on support and coaching during pivotal career moments, not just at the beginning.

While anyone can be a good mentor, having women in leadership creates the conditions where mentorship for women is built into the system, not an exception. Many women described intentionally mentoring others because of the mentorship they’d received from women leaders—creating a chain of support that builds belonging for women across the sport community.



I came up in a time where oftentimes I was the only woman in the room, or certainly the only woman representing [type of sport]... And so, I was witness to a lot of what I’ll call ‘old boys’ network behaviour, and if not for really strong female mentors and female leaders who paved the way, I think it would have been a lot harder.

– P/TSO Executive Director

Fixing the System, Not the Symptoms

Be an Active Mentor

Mentorship isn’t optional—it’s a core ingredient for helping women advance and stay in leadership. When mentors actively sponsor, advocate for, and coach women, it helps break down exclusionary networks and opens real pathways for women to access, grow in, and thrive in leadership roles.



WHAT DRIVES WOMEN FORWARD

2. INCLUSIVE ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURES

We can't assume that creating equity-based policies and quotas is all it takes to develop inclusive workplaces. Organizational culture and leadership behaviour are what make the real difference. In fact, women consistently linked their sense of belonging to leadership actions and inclusive culture—not to gender-equity statements.

Inclusive cultures are empathetic, flexible, and intentionally supportive. In these cultures, diverse experiences and needs are genuinely recognized and valued. Support for things like sudden childcare needs, menopausal symptoms, and disability accommodations, to name a few examples, help women feel they truly belonged.



[The leaders in my organization] basically said, 'Tell us what you need.' Because, I said, 'Physically, I'm not as capable as I used to be. I need support on the road.' I had a whole list of things, and they said, 'OK, we'll do it.'

– P/TSO Executive Director

But equity, inclusion, and accessibility won't happen on their own—they need to be led and modelled every day. When leaders treat equity as something that makes the organization stronger, ask people where they feel excluded, and work to remove those barriers, women are better able to take part and move up.



When you have a program coordinator, they stay for two years and then they go on to the next level... You need to create career positions where people will stay with you longer than the two years in order to really start to make an impact. So, [my CEO at the time] said, 'Well, if I created this position for you, would you stay?'

– MSO Chief Executive Officer

Fixing the System, Not the Symptoms



Listen to Women's Needs—and Act on Them

Inclusive cultures—rooted in empathy, flexibility, and intentional support—create the conditions where women leaders can truly thrive. They also send a powerful message: equity isn't extra work, it's essential to organizational success.

Photo Credit: Sport Information Resource Centre



WHAT DRIVES WOMEN FORWARD

3. POLICY THAT REFLECTS ACCOUNTABILITY AND MEASURABLE ACTION

Policies alone don't create equity for diverse women. They only work when organizations track their progress, hold themselves accountable, and follow through with action. Women told us that while gender quotas are becoming more common, there is still a need for much stronger follow-through to turn these commitments into everyday practice.



There's so much data to show that diverse representation leads to more profitability, means better-operating organizations that leads to all these positive outcomes... What is really important is not just the quota, it's the implementation and the environment.

– Former P/TSO Executive Director

That's because equity and inclusion aren't checkboxes—they're ongoing practices that require learning, reflection, and steady action. As our understanding of what best supports diverse women evolves, our policies need to evolve too. Policies need to change as we learn, not stay static on paper.

Data is one of the most important tools for making this happen. It helps organizations see who is represented—and who isn't. To do this well, organizations need to check their progress regularly and report it openly. This makes it easier to celebrate wins, fix gaps, and adjust goals. Keeping policies and practices up to date based on what the data shows is essential to supporting women across the system.



We have written policies, but they might not always be followed... It's easy to write a policy and state that you have it, but have you gone back and looked at it? And the next question is: Are you following through with it?

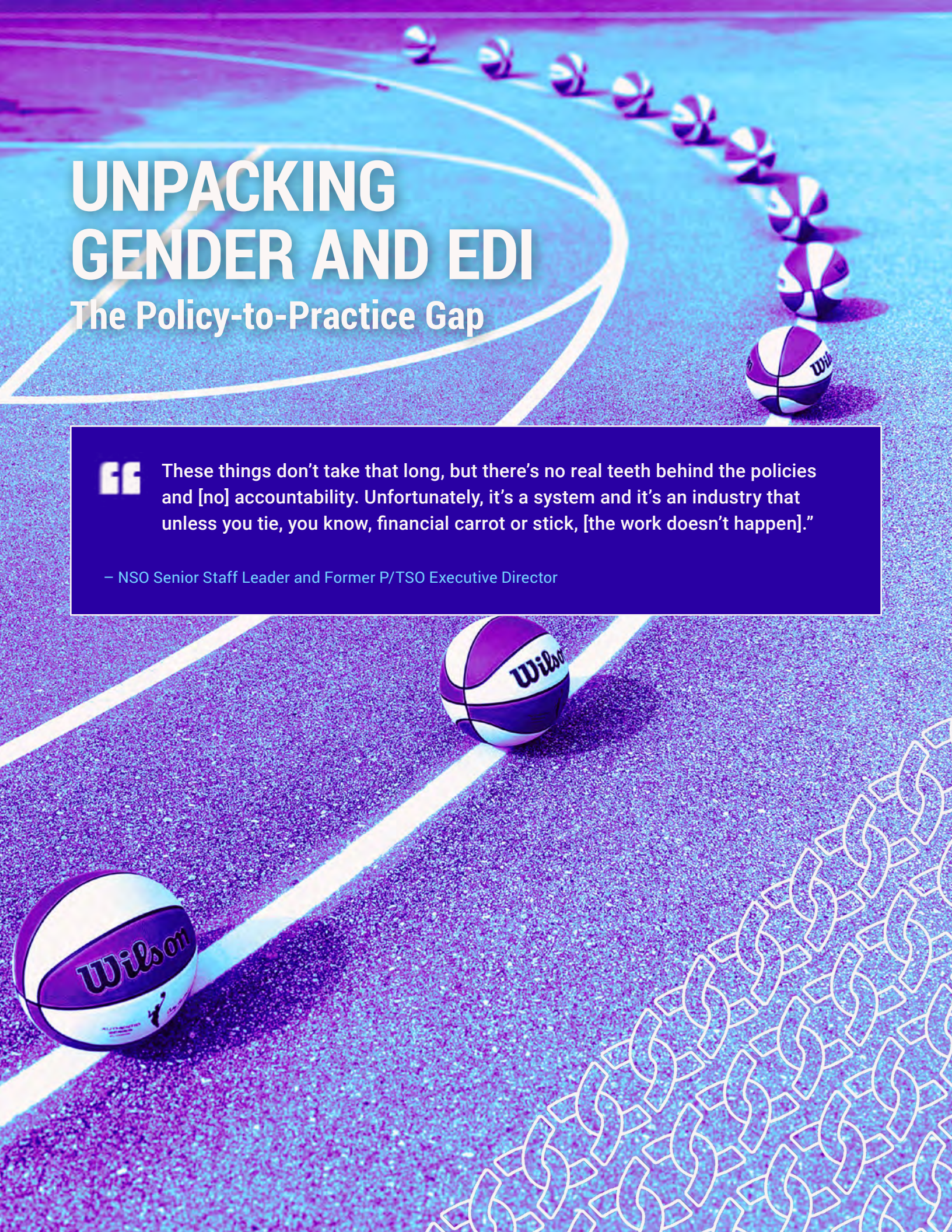
– P/TSO Executive Director

Fixing the System, Not the Symptoms



Back Policies with Data and Action

Using good data and clear evaluation processes helps organizations move from intention to sustained progress—making sure gender equity efforts show up in who gets to lead.



UNPACKING GENDER AND EDI

The Policy-to-Practice Gap

“

These things don't take that long, but there's no real teeth behind the policies and [no] accountability. Unfortunately, it's a system and it's an industry that unless you tie, you know, financial carrot or stick, [the work doesn't happen].”

– NSO Senior Staff Leader and Former P/TSO Executive Director



UNPACKING GENDER AND EDI

The Policy-to-Practice Gap

Across the national sport system, many organizations are taking steps to support girls and women—but these actions are rarely grounded in clear policy commitments.

Our review of the public-facing policies, programs, and strategic documents on the websites of Canadian sport organizations revealed that while activities or initiatives are common, formal policy is not. **While about 6 in 10 organizations at the national level have a broad EDI policy, only 1 in 10 have a standalone gender equity policy.**

This means most gender-equity efforts are often happening without the structure or accountability that policy provides. Case in point: while nearly two-thirds of organizations mentioned gender equity in their strategic plans, only 8% linked a gender equity policy to that plan. Likewise, more than a quarter had gender equity programs or resources available on their website, but even fewer—just 2%—paired any policy statement with the programs or resources required to act on it.

Where policies do exist, they are often broad and aspirational rather than specific, measurable, or enforceable. Moving away from simple “grocery-list” inclusion statements toward an intentional, context-specific focus on gender equity creates stronger accountability and greater change. When statements end at stating certain groups should be included, the implementation of that goal is left to interpretation and little guidance is provided for actionable follow-through. Using clear, specific language alongside measures and timelines for success increases the potential for practical and positive change to occur.

Among NSOs, MSOs, and CSCIs...

63% MENTIONED GENDER EQUITY IN THEIR STRATEGIC PLAN

59% HAVE AN EDI POLICY ON THEIR WEBSITE

28% HAVE GENDER EQUITY PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES ON THEIR WEBSITE

10% HAVE A GENDER EQUITY POLICY ON THEIR WEBSITE

8% LINK GENDER EQUITY POLICY TO STRATEGIC PLANS

2% LINK GENDER EQUITY POLICY TO PROGRAMS AND RESOURCES

Policies and Values Statements Are Important—But They’re Only the Starting Point

Without clear standards and ways to track outcomes, gender equity efforts risk becoming inconsistent, vulnerable to leadership changes, and difficult to measure over time. Closing the policy-to-practice gap represents a critical next step in advancing women’s leadership—shifting from good intentions to measurable, lasting system change.



CALLS TO ACTION

Toward Equity and Inclusion



Photo Credit: Inclusion in Canadian Sports Network

The 2025-2026 Leadership Snapshot shows that the sport system can change—we're already seeing proof of what's possible.

But without consistent expectations, real accountability, and conditions that help women stay and thrive in sport leadership, progress will remain unstable and can easily backslide. **The biggest gap now is not intention, it's implementation.**

Much work is needed to meet Canada's commitments and calls to achieve gender equity at all levels of sport. To realize the vision of the [Canadian Sport Policy 2025–2035](#) and address the leadership gaps and weak governance highlighted in the [Future of Sport in Canada Commission's Final Report](#), the call







for change is clear: **strengthening women's leadership is central to building a sport system that lives up to Canada's values and delivers on its promises.** To move forward, the sport system needs coordinated action from every level.

On the pages that follow there are clear steps that governments and sport organizations can take to help turn commitments into real, lasting change.

GOVERNMENTS: Set the Standard and Support the System

The federal government plays a key role in shaping the direction of sport in Canada and funding the system at the national level. Provincial and territorial governments also play a critical role in shaping the sport system—setting priorities and directing funding that influence who participates, who leads, and how sport is experienced at the grassroots level. This work relies on close coordination with partner organizations—such as viaSport BC, Sask Sport, and Sport Nova Scotia—who often deliver funding, set standards, and provide day-to-day support to P/TSOs. Governments and sport-delivery partners work together to create a more aligned and effective system—one that both strengthens grassroots sport today and grows the next generation of women leaders.

GOVERNMENT DECISION-MAKERS CAN

- 
SET AND ENFORCE CLEAR EXPECTATIONS
 for gender equity in leadership for funded sport organizations, such as **gender targets** for boards of directors and senior staff teams.
- 
TIE FUNDING TO MEASURABLE ACTIONS AND OUTCOMES,
 not just policy statements. For example, a portion of funding is conditional on meeting agreed-upon **equity milestones**.
- 
TARGET INVESTMENTS IN WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT
 and equip organizations to **improve governance, HR practices, and daily work conditions** for diverse women across all levels of sport.
- 
STRENGTHEN SYSTEM ALIGNMENT
 by working collaboratively across Federal-Provincial-Territorial levels to **coordinate investment and action** on aligned priorities and drive support for equity throughout the leadership pipeline.
- 
CREATE OPPORTUNITIES FOR ALIGNMENT
 between sport organizations and other organizations that can support and guide action toward **intersectional gender equity practices**, including Indigenous-led, newcomer and immigrant-serving, racial equity, disability, and 2SLGBTQIA+ advocacy organizations.
- 
STRENGTHEN NATIONAL DATA SYSTEMS
 to track who is leading and how conditions are changing over time. Use data to drive decision-making and action plans.

SPORT ORGANIZATIONS: Create the Conditions Where Women Can Lead and Thrive

For NSOs and P/TSOs, the message is clear: this isn't just about bringing more women in—it's about building systems and cultures where women can succeed and stay.

The actions of sport organizations at all levels—in hiring, culture, workload, pay, mentorship, and governance—have the greatest impact on whether women feel supported, included, and able to succeed.

SPORT ORGANIZATION LEADERS CAN

- ✓ **FORMALIZE GOVERNANCE AND HR SYSTEMS**
by **standardizing hiring and evaluation**—for example, using structured, equity-focused interviews, requiring diverse hiring panels, and building equity criteria into annual reviews.
- ✓ **EXPLICITLY NAME AND COMMIT TO GENDER EQUITY**
in **strategic plans and initiatives**, not just in values and policy statements.
- ✓ **IMPROVE WORKING CONDITIONS**
—including **fair pay, flexibility, and parental supports**—to strengthen retention of women.
- ✓ **CREATE SUCCESSION PLANS**
that prepare women for leadership positions and reduce reliance on informal networks, including identifying women leaders early and providing stretch opportunities and sponsorship—not just mentorship.
- ✓ **COLLECT AND USE DEMOGRAPHIC DATA**
to understand **who is advancing and who is being left out**. Let that data guide strategies and decisions.
- ✓ **BUILD PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS SPORT LEVELS**
to **share data, align learning, and create mentorship pathways** that strengthen the leadership pipeline for women, including identifying and removing barriers along the leadership pathway.
- ✓ **HOLD LEADERSHIP ACCOUNTABLE**
for progress by linking executive performance and compensation to measurable gender equity outcomes.



CONCLUSION

Canada’s sport system has demonstrated that change is possible. But to transform pockets of progress into sustained, system-wide equity—and to realize Canada’s commitments to a more equitable sport system—**governments and leaders at every level must commit, and be held accountable, to closing the gap between what we aspire to and what we consistently do.**

At the same time, advancing gender equity in sport isn’t only the responsibility of those with formal authority. Coaches, parents, volunteers, athletes, and community members all have a role to play.

In fact, anyone can champion gender equity in sport with a few simple actions like:

- ✓ Building awareness about the barriers women and girls face in sport
- ✓ Starting conversations that shift perspectives
- ✓ Championing inclusive practices in clubs and communities
- ✓ Questioning when leadership doesn’t reflect the diversity of participants
- ✓ Advocating for equitable opportunities
- ✓ Supporting organizations that are taking meaningful action



We have a lot of strong women leaders heading up large organizations, and they’re incredible role models and mentors to so many young women in the sports sector... It’ll be interesting to see who fills up those seats when they move on, and I hope it’s another strong woman because I feel the sector is better with women at the top. I really do.

– MSO Chief Executive Officer

Everyday actions matter. They help create the conditions for change: strengthening accountability, building momentum, and reinforcing that equity is a shared responsibility across the system.

More women in sport leadership is not only the right thing to do—it’s a catalyst for a thriving Canadian sport system, one that is as inclusive, resilient, and vibrant as the people it serves.

Be Part of What Comes Next

Canadian Women & Sport supports leaders, organizations, and systems working toward gender equity in sport through research, programs, and practical tools.

Learn more or connect with us at womenandsport.ca or info@womenandsport.ca.

We’d also like to hear from you. Share your reflections on this report by completing our **short feedback survey** and let us know how these findings connect to your experience.

APPENDIX

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PROGRAMS, RESOURCES, AND SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS

Organizations Supporting EDI & Leadership Development in the Sport Sector

The organizations below offer national-level expertise, resources, and partnerships that can support organizations in advancing the calls to action in this report. While not exhaustive, they represent key system partners contributing to EDI and leadership development across Canadian sport.

- Aboriginal Sport Circle (ASC)
- Canadian Centre for Diversity and Inclusion (CCDI)
- Canadian Olympic Committee (COC)
- Canadian Paralympic Committee (CPC)
- Canadian Women & Sport
- Coaching Association of Canada (CAC)
- Egale Canada
- Inclusion in Canadian Sport Network (ICSN)
- MentorAbility Canada
- Sport Information Resource Centre (SIRC)

Resource Hubs

- Canadian Women & Sport Learning Library
- CAC Mentorship Resources
- Egale Canada Resource Hub
- ICSN Resource Hub
- SIRC Leadership & Governance Resources
- CCDI Resources and Reports

Toolkits, Training & Education

- CCDI Toolkit: Creating a Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Strategy
- CCDI Toolkit: Inclusive Hiring Practices
- CCDI Toolkit: Using Data to Inform your DEI Work
- Play Fair: Anti-Racism in Sports Toolkit by ICSN
- Gender Equity Lens E-Learning Module by Canadian Women & Sport
- The Gender Equity Playbook by Canadian Women & Sport
- Women in Sport Leadership Workshop by Canadian Women & Sport

Mentorship & Leadership Development Programs

- BIPOC Mentorship Program by ICSN
- Women in Coaching Mentorship and Apprenticeship Programs by CAC
- Women in Sport Science Mentorship Program by OTP
- Workplace Mentorship Program for Persons with Disabilities by MentorAbility

Organizations Supporting Women's Leadership & Career Advancement

- Catalyst Canada
- The Prosperity Project
- Women's Executive Network (WXN)



DEFINITIONS AND ACRONYMS

GLOSSARY

2SLGBTQIA+: An acronym for Two-Spirit, Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning, Intersex, Asexual or Aromantic and additional sexual orientations and gender identities. Increasingly, this acronym (or similar versions) is used to describe a broad community of sexually and gender-diverse people.

Cisgender: A person whose gender identity corresponds with what is socially expected based on their sex assigned at birth (for example, a person who was assigned male at birth and identifies as a man).

Diversity: The presence of differences within a given setting. This can include differences in race, ethnicity, gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, age, socio-economic status, disabilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies.

Equity: The practice of ensuring fair access, opportunity, treatment, and advancement for all people by recognizing and addressing systemic barriers, power imbalances, and differing needs. It involves allocating resources, designing programs, and making decisions in ways that respond to varying circumstances, rather than treating everyone the same, so that all people can participate fully and benefit equitably.

Equity-denied groups: Communities that experience systemic barriers to access, opportunity, and resources due to historical and ongoing discrimination. The term equity-denied emphasizes that inequities are created by systems and structures that actively restrict participation—not by individual or group characteristics—and places responsibility for change on institutions and decision-makers.

Gender: Roles, behaviours, expectations, and ways of expressing oneself that society associates with being a woman, a man, both, or neither. These ideas are socially created, can change over time, and vary across cultures. Not everyone experiences or expresses gender in the same way.

Gender binary: The idea that there are only two genders—woman and man—and that everyone must fit into one of these categories. This framework assumes that gender is fixed, opposite, and aligned with assigned sex (female or male).

Gender diversity: The presence of differences in gender identities, expressions, and experiences within a given setting. This includes women, men, Two-Spirit, non-binary, and other gender-diverse people, and it recognizes that gender is not limited to a single or uniform experience. Related terms include gender diverse and gender expansive, which refer to an expression of gender identity that falls outside of the gender binary (man or woman). Gender expansive was the term that was used in our survey.

Gender equity: The application of equity principles to gender. It focuses on ensuring fair access, opportunities, treatment, and outcomes for people of all genders by addressing gender-based barriers, biases, and differing needs. Achieving gender equity may require different approaches, supports, or structures so that women, girls, and gender-diverse people can participate fully and benefit equitably.

Gender identity: A person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is not necessarily visible to others, and it may or may not align with what society expects based on assigned sex (female, male, or intersex).

Inclusion: The practice of creating environments in which any individual or group feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued.

Indigenous: Within North America, Indigenous means “native to the area” and is an umbrella term for First Nations, Métis, and Inuit. It can be used to refer to these groups either collectively or separately. As a proper name for a people, the term is capitalized as “Indigenous Peoples.” Its meaning is similar to “Aboriginal Peoples,” “Native Peoples,” or “First Peoples.”



Person (living) with a disability: A person who experiences barriers, exclusion, or ableism due to physical, sensory, cognitive, intellectual, or mental health disabilities. Disability may be visible or invisible, permanent, temporary, or episodic, and is shaped not only by individual characteristics but by social, environmental, and systemic barriers that limit full and equitable participation.

Racialized: People who are categorized by society as belonging to a particular race based on physical characteristics, ancestry, or cultural background, and who experience unequal treatment, discrimination, or disadvantage as a result. The term highlights that race is socially constructed and that racism is produced by systems and structures, not by individual traits.

Representation: The presence and participation of people from diverse identities and backgrounds. Representation focuses on who is included, whose voices are present, and who holds influence—particularly in leadership and decision-making roles—and highlights disparities when equity-denied groups are missing, under-represented, or excluded.

Senior Staff: Staff members reporting directly to the CEO or ED who determine the long-term direction and viability of the organization, including executive and C-suite leaders.

Sport leaders: Individuals and groups who hold formal authority, decision-making power, and influence within a sport organization. In this report, leadership includes boards of directors, CEOs and EDs, and senior staff teams. These roles shape organizational strategy, governance, culture, and priorities.

ACRONYMS

CEO: Chief Executive Officer

CSCI: Canadian Sport Centre or Institute

ED: Executive Director

EDI: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion

FPTSC: Federal-Provincial/Territorial Sport Committee

MSO: Multisport Service Organization

NSO: National Sport Organization

P/T: Provincial and Territorial

P/TSO: Provincial or Territorial Sport Organization



RESEARCH METHODS

In collaboration with a Brock University research team, we conducted a study from November 2025 to January 2026 with multiple sources of data focused on Canadian sport organizations and their staff.

First, we distributed a survey to all NSOs, MSOs, CSCIs, and P/TSOs in Canada. The survey was open from November 25, 2025, to January 26, 2026. We used the survey to collect information about the demographic makeup of the senior staff leaders and boards of directors of these organizations, alongside organizational engagement with gender equity and broader EDI initiatives through policy, strategic planning, and operational commitments. In total, we received 385 survey responses for a 47.4% response rate (RR). This total includes: 47 NSO (75.8% RR), 20 MSO (84.4% RR), 6 CSCI (85.7% RR), and 312 P/TSO (43.4% RR) respondents. We supplemented the survey data by reviewing the websites of Sport Canada–funded sport organizations, increasing the total sample size to 55 NSOs, 22 MSOs, and 7 CSCIs—representing 90.3% of all Sport Canada–funded organizations.

Second, we scanned the websites of NSOs, MSOs, and CSCIs to locate gender–equity–specific policies, broader EDI policies, mentions of gender equity in strategic plans, and evidence of gender-specific programs and resources. In total, we analyzed data from 64 NSOs, 30 MSOs, and 7 CSCIs. The policy documents and values statements were used as indicators of how gender equity was communicated. The strategic plans, AGM meetings, and indication of programs on websites were used as indicators of operationalization. Based on these documents, the team mapped connections between policy statements and strategic plans, initiatives, and programs. We focused on how diversity, representation, equity, inclusion, accessibility, and integration were treated in these documents.

Third, we conducted semi-structured interviews with women-identifying sport leaders. We interviewed 21 current and former NSO, MSO, and P/TSO leaders between December 5, 2025, and January 9, 2026. The women we interviewed reflected varied years of leadership experience and intersectional identities,

including women who identified as racialized, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+, and living with a disability. These characteristics align with the findings presented in this report related to barriers for diverse women throughout the Canadian sport landscape. Questions focused on women leaders’ experiences of inclusion and belonging, how leadership selections were made, and the barriers and supports that shaped their advancement and retention at both national and provincial levels. We used an inductive, thematic analysis to construct the findings.

Canada’s sport system has not always been inclusive and has, at times, worked to exclude certain women. Furthermore, women hold differing labour experiences based on intersections of their identities, such as race and ethnicity, socio-economic status, ability, and 2SLGBTQIA+ identity. Our aim with this report was to build a more complete picture that includes all women. Any reference to women in this research should be read as self-identified gender, not biological sex assigned at birth. To protect participants’ anonymity throughout the report, quotations are attributed using generic titles. They have been intentionally selected from a wide range of participants, even where titles may appear similar.

As a research team of white, settler, cisgender women who do not live with disabilities, we recognize our limitations in understanding the lived experiences of equity-denied women. To this end, we ensured women with diverse experiences were included within our advisory committee. The feedback we received from this committee shaped our research design, survey and interview questions.

We share our process in the spirit of ongoing reflection and improvement in how we understand and support women leaders’ experiences of inclusion and belonging within the Canadian sport industry. We remain committed to evolving our approach to better represent and advocate for all women.

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Together, these contributions reflect a shared commitment to advancing equity, inclusion, and leadership in Canadian sport.

ABOUT CANADIAN WOMEN & SPORT

Canadian Women & Sport is a national non-profit and has been the leading voice and authority on women and sport for more than 40 years. We believe in the power of sport as a platform for advancing equity for women across all areas of society. As such, we are committed to creating a more equitable and inclusive sport system that empowers women and girls as participants and leaders, within sport and through sport.

www.womenandsport.ca



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