

Knowing Your Community



CAMPAIGN**SCHOOL**
for women

Many thanks to **Sharon Davis-Murdoch** for developing this booklet, which provides important information and food for thought for women pursuing political leadership – challenging everyone to explore this key question: *how well do you really know your community?*



Sharon Davis Murdoch, 2017 Commissioner,
Effective Electoral Representation of Acadian and African Nova Scotians
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Knowing Your Community

As an elected woman in Nova Scotia, you will have the honour and responsibility of representing Nova Scotians across their diversity. To do this effectively, representation must be more than an ideal written in campaign literature or a “nice to do” that comes after the priorities of the political party you represent, or the well-articulated demands of the most powerful in your riding.

As an elected woman in Nova Scotia, you will have the opportunity to entrench service to a diverse Nova Scotia in your thoughts, your policy recommendations, your actions, and your accomplishments.

First, you need to know who Nova Scotians are – all of them.

You will be challenged to know:

- the histories of populations
- their lived realities
- their aspirations
- the systemic barriers faced by the most marginalized among them.

Understanding these realities will not be simple, but it will increase your chances of a successful campaign. You will be well prepared to represent Nova Scotians in all their diversity, to take on the hard work of understanding the systemic barriers faced by the most marginalized among them.

Your journey to learn about the diversity of people you will represent will be enhanced by your development of *Cultural Competence*.

Cultural Competence: the awareness, knowledge, skills, and policies needed to better serve Nova Scotians across their diversity. It is lifetime learning, not a goal to be reached or a box to be ticked.

Cultural Competence can be viewed as a process.

Sensitivity **Awareness** Knowledge **Skills** Competence

Cultural competence is:

- A journey, not a destination: standing still is not an option.
- An openness to recognizing one's own beliefs, values, and biases, and being transformed through better understanding other world views, other ways of being and doing and being enriched by this insight.

You will be a policy maker. Public policies that work across sectors to address factors such as poverty reduction, health, education, employment, justice, and other areas are essential. Without intersecting approaches that respect and respond to differences between and among populations in Nova Scotia, this will fall short.

The fundamental first step is to accept that *equity* promotes fairness and justice, and is not the same as *equality* in this context.

Culturally effective approaches may look different and materialize as different responses given the unique needs of the community or population served.

This knowledge, and your commitment to act on it, will serve you well in becoming a responsive and equitable representative.

It is also important to remember that under-representation of women, most especially marginalized women, exists across all sectors. Beyond elected representation, voices are needed on agencies, boards, and commissions, in the public service and in communities. Without a breadth of representation at all levels in Nova Scotia, we will not achieve the substantive change we hope for.

When we treat people equally, we ignore differences.

When we treat people equitably, we recognize and respect differences.

There are **2 kinds of electoral representation**, substantive and descriptive.

Substantive representation is when your MLA champions your values and views.

Descriptive representation is when you and your political representative share a characteristic that is important to you like race or language. Both forms of representation are valuable.

Women in Nova Scotia can and should be substantive and descriptive representatives, whether they are running for office municipally, provincially or federally. Like their male counterparts, women who run are willing and able to provide substantive representation that has insight about the values and views of the Nova Scotians they represent.

For example, due to increasing rural depopulation and the service differential between urban and rural Nova Scotia, representing a rural riding will place different demands on you.

The Commission on Effective Electoral Representation of Acadians and African Nova Scotians (2017) heard about the challenges of travel to reach constituents, the difficulties of being the “go to” person for services, and problem solving of all kinds. All provincial and federal representatives will be challenged by the implications for equitable services for rural Nova Scotians across their diversity.

Unlike men who run, women, regardless of intersecting identities, can provide descriptive representation. They share a reality with all other women in Nova Scotia by virtue of being women.

No women anywhere are spared the reality of historic and systemic sexism. Many women

also know the intersection of sexism with racism. Others must deal with the additions of classism, xenophobia, homophobia, or transphobia. Nova Scotia has a history of white male political power, privilege, and patriarchy, “the old boys’ clubs”, families who groom generations of male politicians, and ongoing male employment and economic advantages. These realities construct a political landscape and infrastructure that few women have dared to navigate. Even now, political parties are slow to recruit, run, and meaningfully support women candidates, and even slower for marginalized women and, in particular, women of colour.

Yet, perhaps this is a time like no other in Nova Scotia.

Change is possible in areas such as electoral boundaries, immigration, and policy development. From municipal representatives to senators, women with power are “lifting as they climb”. At no previous time have the voices of marginalized women been so sought, or have multiple pathways been envisioned. Against a global backdrop of “Me Too” and women collectively saying, “Time’s Up” for sexual assault, discrimination, and inequities of all kinds, a woman’s place in Nova Scotia’s politics is a place of unprecedented potential.

Ten Things Worth Remembering and Acting On

1

DON'T DENY that systemic 'isms' exist. 'Isms' do exist, so work to change them.

Action: Take the time to decide what you believe about 'isms' then think about how that translates in your policy priorities.

2

DEFINE your vision for change.

Action: What do you really want to accomplish? Practice articulating it in plain language so that everyone will be inspired by it.

3

RELY on substance over style, they are not equal.

Don't take pictures with people if you don't intend to act on their policy needs and priorities.

Action: Begin your career with authenticity and integrity, and check in regularly to see that your constituents recognize that as your brand.

4

RECOGNIZE that your job is to serve all people across their diversity.

Stand firm against criticism that you spend too much time on the marginalized. There is a shift happening. Recognize that so called "minority concerns" are the equity issues of not only now but well into the future.

Action: Think about how you will respond to criticism that you aren't focusing on "the important issues". Prepare your response and be ready to use it.

5

WELCOME the new day of more representation by and for the people in your communities that haven't had a voice.

You will not win or keep your seat by doing what's always been done.

Action: Represent the future – it's where we are all going.

6

ASK who is in your constituency, but first:

Action: Ask yourself, who am I and how will I serve?

7

RESIST gutter politics.

Action: Remember Michelle Obama’s advice: “When they go low, we go high”.

Decide your leadership style and give your constituents leadership they can follow.

8

USE the power of your example, not the example of your power.

(President Bill Clinton)

Action: Remember your actions speak louder than your word.

9

LIFT as you climb. (bell hooks)

We will not get where we need to be collectively without bringing others with us.

Action: Monitor your actions, and find ways to support or positively enable others, especially the most marginalized.

10

KNOW better to do better. (Maya Angelou)

Action: Prepare for office, acquire the skills to effectively represent the populations you serve, learn from the mistakes of others, build your credibility, and be consistent.





**Nova Scotia
Advisory Council on
the Status of Women**

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