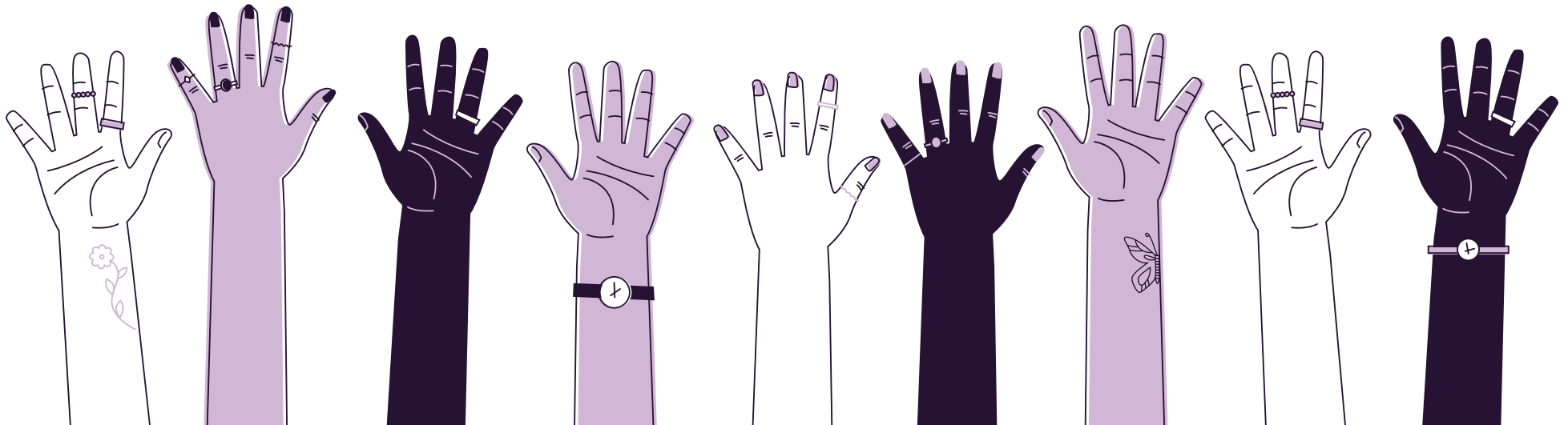


2022 INDUSTRY REPORT

**Pathways to Board Work for Women and Gender Diverse People:
Understanding Experiences and Barriers**



P. 3	INTRODUCTION
P. 4-5	WHO WE TALKED TO
P. 6	A PRIMER ON BOARD TYPES
P. 7	OTHER RESEARCH
P. 8	WHAT'S DRIVING PARTICIPATION
P. 9-13	THE BARRIERS
P. 14-17	TAKEAWAYS
P. 18	REFERENCES

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This industry report was created in partnership between DirectHer Network and Mount Royal University. The research was led by Dr. Rachael Pettigrew, an associate professor at Bissett School of Business, with the support of Quinn Pelland, an HR student and research assistant.

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KEEP AN EYE OUT.

Throughout the report, you will see footnotes indicated with our eye-con. The footnotes provides important additional context about the issues and research.



Social Sciences and Humanities
Research Council of Canada

Conseil de recherches en
sciences humaines du Canada

HERE'S THE PROBLEM:

GENDER DIVERSITY CONTINUES TO ELUDE BOARDS.

THE GOOD NEWS:

In Canada, since the implementation of board composition disclosure practices,² there has been an increase of women on boards.

In 2021, women held 33.2% of board positions among S&P/TSX 60 companies, an increase of 11.2%^{1,2} since disclosure was first required in 2015.

THE BAD NEWS:

Change has been slow, with year-over-year increases of ~2.2% and almost 20% of disclosing organizations still have zero women on their boards.¹ Additionally, the issue is even greater when looking through an intersectional lens.

First, disclosure requirements about the representation of racialized people, persons with disabilities, and Indigenous peoples are limited. This impedes our ability to understand the true status of representation and effectively advocate for change. Where data is available, representation is low - recent reports show board distribution of racialized ² people between 4%-10.2%, and persons with disabilities between 0.3%-3.4%.^{3,4}

THE GOAL OF THIS RESEARCH

This research aimed to explore the diverse viewpoints of women and gender diverse ² individuals and capture the broad array of board experiences, aspirations, barriers, and training needed on their path to board work.

This research is unique in two ways:

1. It speaks directly to women and gender diverse people to capture the nuance and challenges in their board journeys. To date, most research has focused on analyzing limited, corporate disclosure information to understand trends in gender representation on boards.
2. It speaks to women and gender diverse people along the continuum of board experience, including those with extensive board experience to those with board ambition but little to no board experience. Given the often cumulative nature of board experience, it is critical to understand the challenges women and gender diverse people navigate throughout the board pipeline, including the front end, where talent is grown and developed.

METHODOLOGY

This study was conducted using a mixed-method approach, including an online survey followed by four one-hour focus groups exploring board experiences, board aspirations, perceived barriers, and training experiences. All data was collected between February and June of 2022. Women and gender diverse individuals were recruited for participation through an extensive social media campaign, invitations for distribution to members of a variety of professional organizations, and sharing within professional networks. The survey had 358 respondents (complete surveys included in the analysis) and each focus group had between 6-8 participants, which were conducted to illuminate recurrent themes gathered from the survey. The quantitative data from the survey were analyzed using descriptive, bivariate, and multivariate analyses to explore and understand the characteristics and experiences faced by women and gender diverse individuals on boards. Thematic analysis was completed through multiple rounds of open-coding by researchers for both the short answer section from the survey and the focus groups. The preliminary findings from the research are shared in this report.

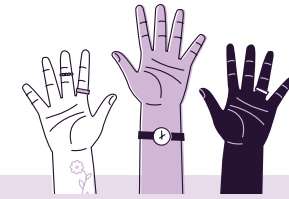
² Disclosure practices only apply to certain for-profit organizations.

As stated in Diversity Leads, the term "racialized person" recognizes race as a social construct. However, it should be noted that this term encompasses all non-Caucasian persons. It is a blanket term that does not capture the varied experiences of different racialized groups (e.g., a person of East Asian descent may experience racialization differently than a Black Canadian) https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/DiversityLeads_2020_Canada.pdf. Depending on the data set, Indigenous peoples may or may not be included within the definition of racialized people. Where identified separately, the representation of Indigenous peoples on corporate boards is between 0-0.3%. Where available, this report will provide information on both groups, however recognize that in some data sets these two groups are collapsed.^{3,4}

As stated by A Gender Agenda, "Gender diversity is an umbrella term that is used to describe gender identities that demonstrate a diversity of expression beyond the binary framework... Umbrella terms such as non-binary, genderqueer or X gender are adequately broad descriptors for gender diverse people. Individuals, however, may use more specialised personal terms to describe themselves within their own peer group and safe spaces." <https://genderrights.org.au/information-hub/what-is-gender-diversity/>

WHO WE TALKED TO

The survey sample includes 358 women and gender diverse individuals. The sample is representative of the Canadian population with proportions of Black, Indigenous, women of colour (BIWOC), and sexual and gender diversity mirroring that of the broader Canadian population. However, this sample had much higher levels of education, income and household income, and professional achievement than the Canadian population averages. This sample includes exceedingly successful, well-educated women, and a range of representation from senior executives (18.4%) to employees (28.2%) and between. Those identifying as immigrants (13%) and having disabilities (10.3%) were represented in slightly lower proportions in this study than in the Canadian population.



GENDER DIVERSE STUDY PARTICIPANTS

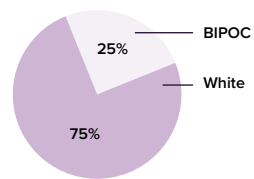
We were explicit and intentional about our recruitment and inclusion of gender diverse folks, not just women. As such, throughout this report, we will be using the term participant or folks rather than women and BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, people of colour) versus BIWOC, to accurately reflect the sample. Census data presumes that less than 1% of the Canadian population self-disclosed being transgender or non-binary,³ though there is likely to be some under-reporting. Approximately 2% or 7 people in our sample identified as either non-binary, agender, genderfluid, or genderqueer. Though this proportion of gender diverse participants is representative of the population it should be noted that, despite our intention to, the number is too small to statistically compare to other groups. That said, to build the lacking research body on gender diverse board representation, here is what we learned from this sub-sample:

- Their board experiences were exclusively on not-for-profit (NFP) boards.
- They aim to sit on boards of all types.
- They hold a range of employment roles - including executive, management, and employee.
- The majority work full-time, held a bachelor's degree or higher, had a partner, and were younger than 40.
- None were parents.

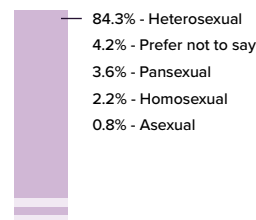
WE SURVEYED 358 WOMEN AND GENDER DIVERSE INDIVIDUALS

IDENTITY & RELATIONSHIPS

RACIAL IDENTITY?



SEXUAL ORIENTATION?

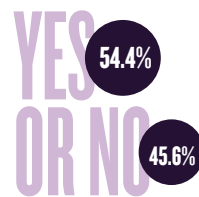


IN A RELATIONSHIP?



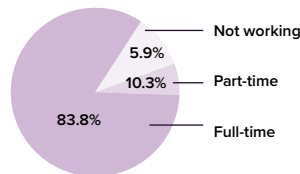
56.1% legally married, 17.2% living in common law, 17% never legally married, 6.4% separated, 8.4% divorced, 0.8% widowed, 1.1% preferred not to say.

PARENT?



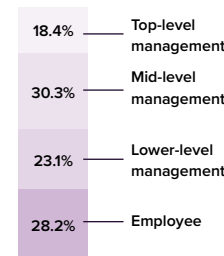
EMPLOYMENT

CURRENTLY WORKING?

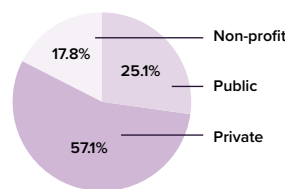


63 (17.6%) are self-employed.

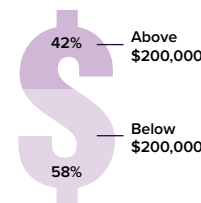
WHAT LEVEL?



WORK IN WHAT SECTOR?



HOUSEHOLD INCOME?



As of July 2020, women represented 50.3% of the population, of which 23% reported being members of a visible minority group (exclusive of Indigenous peoples) and 5% identified as Indigenous <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/89-28-0001/2018001/article/00020-eng.htm>. In this study, 25% of the sample identified as racialized, inclusive of Indigenous peoples (4.5%). As of 2018, 4% of the Canadian population identified as LGBTQ2+ <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/210615/dq210615a-eng.htm>. In this study, 8.6% identified as LGBTQ2+.

The survey used a Statistics Canada Census question (15 options) to identify racial, ethnic, or cultural origin https://www.statcan.gc.ca/en/statistical-programs/instrument/3901_Q8_V2. Participants in this study identified being white (75%), South Asian (e.g., East Indian, Pakistani, Sri Lankan) (6.4%), Chinese (4.2%), Black (3.6%), Filipino (2%), Arab (1.4%), Latin American (1.4%), Southeast Asian (.8%), Japanese (.5%), Indigenous (4.5%), and other (.2%).

THE BOARD EXPERIENCES OF PARTICIPANTS



Regarding past board experience,

250 (69.8%)

of participants reported some level of previous board experience.

Only 8 (3.2%) participants in the sample reported sitting on a publicly traded board.



The largest proportion of these participants worked on



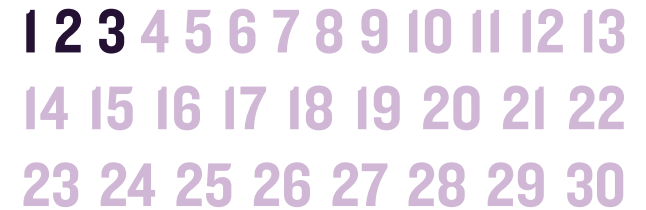
followed by



with the smallest proportion serving on



Participants' board experience ranged from serving on **0 to 30 boards**, with an **average of 3 board experiences**, exemplifying the level of experience in this sample.



When we narrow in on those with one board experience, we see it was almost exclusively in the not-for-profit sector, with the exception of one executive who joined a small for-profit board as their first board experience. Therefore, the vast majority of participants started their board career pathway in the NFP sector, in which there appear to be fewer barriers to entry.

A PRIMER ON BOARD TYPES

In this study, we asked participants about their board experience, aspirations, and barriers by twelve board types² in three major categories (not-for-profit, government, and for-profit).

NOT-FOR-PROFIT BOARDS



Not-for-profit boards govern organizations that are structured such that the intent is not to earn a profit.⁶ The not-for-profit entity has members, as opposed to shareholders, therefore, the organization does not distribute ownership through shares.^{6,7} The term “not-for-profit” is a large umbrella term and includes organizations in professional associations and unions, health, environment, and social services, to name a few,⁸ with operational budgets that vary from thousands of dollars to tens of millions of dollars.

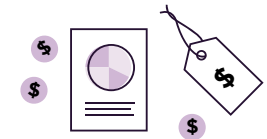
The way all boards govern varies widely. In addition to fulfilling governing responsibilities in risk management, performance oversight, and strategy, a board may also be responsible for operational execution. This dual functionality can sometimes be seen in not-for-profit boards, given resource constraints, however it should not be assumed. Not-for-profits tend to have more members than most for-profit organizations, averaging 16 members.⁹

GOVERNMENT BOARDS



The term board, agency, and commission are often used interchangeably to describe a number of board types in the government sector that vary in function. These functions can include providing strategic direction and oversight to a corporation, advising the government on a particular issue or topic, and serving as an appeal body for a government agency. For the purposes of this study, we did not distinguish government boards by their function, but rather considered whether the board was a municipal, provincial or federal appointment. Regardless of their function, government boards are associated with a wide array of industries including banking, infrastructure, healthcare, education, and more.¹⁰ Such boards have operational independence, however, directors are generally appointed through a government process.¹⁰

FOR-PROFIT BOARDS²



For-profit entities are primarily structured in a manner that allows for the distribution of profits to equitable owners.⁶ For-profit entities can be publicly traded or privately held. Publicly traded corporations are commonly referred to as distributing corporations.¹¹ The Government of Canada defines distributing corporations as “a corporation that files documents with a securities commission and sells shares on a stock exchange.”¹² Privately held companies do not offer equity through shares on a stock exchange and are wholly owned by individuals or organizations.¹³

In Canada, for-profit boards are obligated to serve the “best interests” of the organization, which can include a range of stakeholders such as shareholders, employees, consumers, and governments, to name a few.¹⁴ While all incorporated entities technically operate with a director or board of directors, there can be a significant distinction in the makeup and function of privately held and publicly traded boards. This is a result of the regulatory rigour publicly traded companies are subject to, which impacts the composition and function of the board.² Generally, for-profit boards tend to be smaller than not-for-profit boards, with an average of nine members holding board positions.⁹

The twelve board types are: 1) Government, broken down by a) municipally appointed board b) provincially appointed board c) federally appointed board and d) government committee, task force, or advisory board; 2) Not-for-profit, broken down by a) board for a small organization (> \$500K), b) board for a mid-sized organization (\$500K - \$10M), c) board for a large organization (> \$10M), and d) not-for-profit committee, task force, or advisory board and 3) For-profit, broken down by a) board for a privately held small to medium size enterprise board < \$10M, b) board for a privately held large corporate board >10M c) board for a publicly listed enterprise, and d) for-profit committee, task force, or advisory board.

For example, boards of distributing corporations listed on the Toronto Stock Exchange are subject to the following rules: <https://www.tsx.com/ebooks/en/technical-guide-to-listing/16/>

Within the for-profit sector, boards may be advisory (a result of contract without a legislative fiduciary duty) or fiduciary.¹⁵ Our analysis of the for-profit sector does not differentiate between these two types.

WHAT WE KNOW ABOUT GENDER DIVERSITY ON BOARDS

FROM OTHER RESEARCH



NOT-FOR-PROFIT

The highest proportion of women participating in board work in Canada is at the not-for-profit level. Depending on the source, representation figures vary from 43%,¹⁶ to 59%,⁸ often influenced by industry type. Women's representation is highest in organizations engaged in social services and the environment, whereas women are least represented in sports and recreation and religion.⁸

Unfortunately, there is limited data that explores sector-specific intersectional representation on boards.⁸ However, given what is available, we can infer that intersectional representation on all boards, including not-for-profit boards, is not proportionately representative. Data specific to the not-for-profit sector (that is not considerate of intersectionality) shows board positions are allocated to racialized individuals at 11-14%,^{16,8} persons with disabilities at 6%, and LGBTQ2+ individuals at 8%.⁸ Data considerate of intersectionality (that is not sector-specific) shows white women outnumber racialized women anywhere from 7:1-13:1 in all board types across major Canadian cities.¹⁶

GOVERNMENT

Our ability to understand gender representation on government boards is heavily dependent on data collection, which is influenced by each government's priorities.

This data is scattered but examples include:

- In 2017, the Alberta government reported women held 48% of positions with provincial agencies, boards, and commissions.¹⁷
- In 2019, the City of Edmonton reported women's civic engagement on boards at 53%.¹⁸
- In 2022, the City of Toronto reported 49.8% representation of women on city boards, 8% representation of Indigenous peoples, 12.3% representation of persons with disabilities, and 31.6% representation of racialized people.¹⁹

FOR-PROFIT

Public Corporations

In Canada, most provincial distributing corporations are obligated to disclose the representation of women at the board level.²⁰ Similarly, all federal distributing corporations are required to disclose the representation of four key groups on their board of directors and senior management teams: women, Indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, and members of visible minority groups.⁴ Additionally, both provincially and federally distributing corporations have additional disclosure requirements related to the adoption of policies and processes to increase the representation of the named group(s).^{21, 22, 23}

Of the four groups requiring some level of disclosure, women show the greatest representation.²⁴ However, even amongst women, for-profit board representation is highly dependent on the data set, ranging from 17% amongst federally distributing corporations,⁴ to 33.2% representation within S&P/TSX 60 companies.¹

Federal data indicates racialized people hold 4%-6.8% of board seats, persons with disabilities hold 0.3%-0.5% of boards seats and Indigenous peoples hold 0.3%-0.5% of board seats.¹⁴ This data is not considerate of intersectionality

Private Corporations

As disclosure is not required of private enterprises, the true number of women on boards in this sector is difficult to identify. However, Statistics Canada released information stating that less than 1 in 5 directors of privately held corporations was a woman in 2018 and 2019.²⁵ Furthermore, a study in the United States found that within 500 private corporations, 14% of board positions were held by women, and almost 40% of organizations had zero women on board.²⁶ Additionally, "Only 3 percent of all directors are women of colour... and more than three quarters of company boards (78 percent) do not include a single woman of colour".²⁶



Intersectionality, a term created by civil rights advocate and legal scholar, Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw, is "a lens, a prism, for seeing the way in which various forms of inequality often operate together and exacerbate each other. We tend to talk about race inequality as separate from inequality based on gender, class, sexuality or immigrant status. What's often missing is how some people are subject to all of these, and the experience is not just the sum of its parts." <https://time.com/5786710/kimberle-crenshaw-intersectionality/>



In "Diversity of charity and non-profit boards of directors: Overview of the Canadian non-profit sector" 11% of study participants identified as visible minorities and 3% identified as First Nations, Metis or Inuit.



Section 72.2(4) of the Canada Business Corporations Regulations, 2001 (SOR 2001-512) requires disclosure for "designated groups" as defined in the Employment Equity Act (EAA). In defining designated groups, the EAA uses the term visible minority, and that is why it is used here. The Diversity Institute's Report, Diversity Leads succinctly identifies why the term visible minority is problematic: "As the Ontario Human Rights Commission states, the use of "racialized person/group" is preferred to the outdated and inaccurate term, "visible minority". "Visible minority" sets white or Caucasian as the norm and identifies people based on "deviation" from that "norm". It also indicates that the racialized group is fewer in number than the non-racialized population, which is not always true. https://www.torontomu.ca/diversity/reports/DiversityLeads_2020_Canada.pdf

WHAT'S DRIVING PARTICIPATION

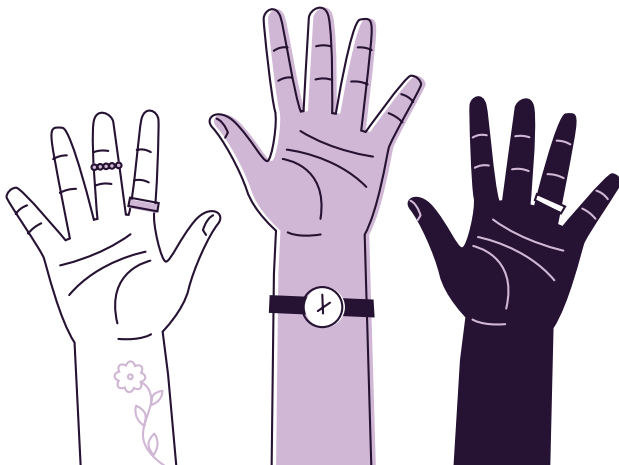
ON VARIOUS TYPES OF BOARDS?

PROFESSIONAL TRAJECTORY

Given the breadth of experience in this sample, different pathways to board work emerged. For some, board work supports a professional trajectory. Those on this path view their participation on not-for-profit or government sector boards, at least in part, as a means to build the skills needed to serve on boards in the for-profit sector.

“ I’VE DONE NOT-FOR-PROFIT AND A GOVERNMENT BOARD. MY ASPIRATION IS TO GET TO PAID BOARDS.”

Specifically, of those that have served on not-for-profit boards, 144 (60%) are interested in serving on for-profit boards of any kind and of this group, 62% aspire to publicly traded board positions.



GIVING BACK

For others, board work primarily serves as a way to give back. These participants reported that their board work is driven by a passion for the cause or organization that they serve. A focus group participant commented,

“ I FEEL A PROFESSIONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO SERVE ON BOARDS THAT COMPLIMENT MY PROFESSION, AND A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO GIVE BACK TO MY COMMUNITY.”

Specifically, 71 participants (30%) indicated they have no interest in serving on for-profit boards. This increases to 91 (38%) of women and gender diverse participants having no interest in for-profit publicly traded boards. This means that roughly a third of the participants do not aim for the upward trajectory of board work, but instead aim to give back to the community. More white participants (20%) reported serving on boards as a passion project compared to participants of colour (13%). While participants of colour reported their reason for serving was to give back to the community more often (53%) than to white participants (39%).

GOVERNMENT SERVICE

There does not appear to be one single driver for pursuing government board service, for example:


“ I’M MOST INTERESTED IN GOVERNMENT OR NON-PROFIT BOARDS BECAUSE I’D RATHER SPEND MY EXTRACURRICULAR TIME TRYING TO DO GOOD WITH MY SKILLS.”

That said, 60% of the sample expressed interest in government boards, with more interest in municipal or provincial boards, than federal. 96% of those who served on government boards also served on not-for-profit boards. Of those who have served on for-profit boards, 47.5% also served on government boards and 70% still aspire to serve on government boards.

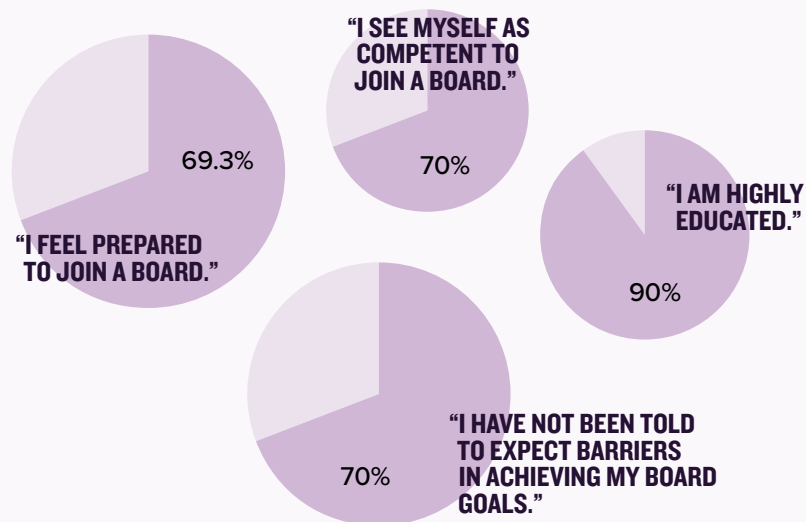
SUMMARY

The data demonstrates that while there are participants who are solely focused on serving on not-for-profit boards, the majority of participants are interested in pursuing for-profit boards, and many use not-for-profit and government board service as stepping stones in an effort to achieve this goal. This also highlights the substantial pool of qualified, highly-educated, and experienced women that are available as potential candidates across all board types.

WHAT'S GETTING IN THE WAY?

The survey asked participants about **15 professional barriers** and **8 personal barriers**  to better understand what participants felt impeded their access to board work across board types.

Positively, the majority of participants reported being prepared to join a board (69.3%), saw themselves as competent to do so (70%), are highly educated (90% with a bachelors or higher), and have not been told to expect barriers in achieving their board goals (70%).



However, this doesn't mean barriers are not present. We highlight the most frequently cited barriers in order to make recommendations on how boards and individuals can work to remove them. Broadly speaking, participants cited fewer barriers in the not-for-profit sector, greater barriers in the government sector, and the most barriers to entering the for-profit sector.

#1. BARRIERS RELATING TO OPPORTUNITIES

SPONSORSHIP

Sponsorship topped the list of barriers, with 46% of participants citing this as a barrier to board service in the not-for-profit sector, 59% in the government sector, and 71.5% in the for-profit sector. Sponsorship, defined as leveraging one's network to champion another individual into a role, is a critical component in career advancement.²⁷ Research shows that while women and men both receive mentorship, men receive greater benefit from senior mentors who become sponsors and increase the likelihood of a fast-tracked career path.^{28, 29}



SUGGESTIONS FOR BOARDS:

- Review your board's recruitment strategy and consider the implicit and explicit ways sponsorship impacts your recruitment pool. As you do so, recognize the benefits sponsorship can offer candidates, including:
 - Increased motivation (something research links most predominantly to men and high performing women candidates).³⁰
 - An informational advantage (about process, protocol, timing, and other opportunities).³⁰
 - A network of others familiar with board governance (which can increase the informational advantage a candidate receives and provide them access to other board opportunities).³⁰
- Consider an intentional sponsorship program, especially in partnership with groups whose perspectives and experience you are lacking on your board. A great example of this is [Youth @ the Table](#), a Volunteer Alberta program that provides governance opportunities to youth, with a mentorship/sponsorship component.

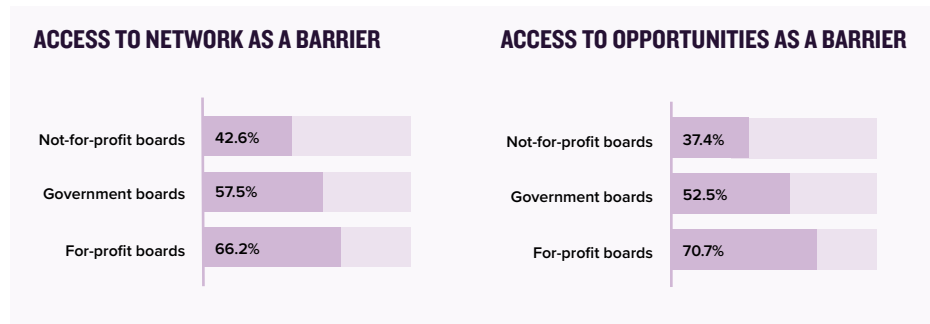
Personal barriers included: caring for children, caring for an aging adult, supporting a partner, being new to Canada, a demanding workload, geographic location (e.g., rural or region), personal finances- need to prioritize paid work and volunteer obligations.



Professional barriers included: having relevant board education or training, having a specific professional skill set, job title, or rank, having relevant past board experience, being prepared, the ability to add value, fitting the role, having access to opportunities, having access to network and connections, negative past board experiences, feeling a lack of confidence, being competent, having financial literacy/acumen, other technical skills, having a lack of professional support, having a lack of network.

ACCESS TO NETWORKS & OPPORTUNITIES

Related to sponsorship, having access to networks and board opportunities was a frequently reported barrier, cited by up to 70% of participants, depending on board type.



As one participant said,

“ BARRIERS ARE CENTERED AROUND RELATIONSHIPS AND OPPORTUNITIES. IT ‘APPEARS’ ONE MUST KNOW SOMEONE TO BECOME A MEMBER OF A BOARD.”

This finding and comment should be considered in the context of existing research, which has found that women often do not experience the same opportunities to network and be championed, and in fact, women are often excluded from informal networking events.²⁷



SUGGESTIONS FOR BOARDS:

- As part of your board recruitment strategy, consider how insular your marketing efforts may be, even if unintentional. Research shows that we see those similar to us to be a better fit for the positions we are looking to fill, leading to similarity bias.³¹ Cast an intentionally wide net to counter this.
- Develop relationships with board listing services/platforms, recruiting agencies, professional associations, and diverse community groups to intentionally expand awareness around your board opportunities. As you do so be mindful of two things:
 - If working with community groups, value the time and effort they have spent to build a community when asking them to share your opportunity.
 - Recognize that some board listing servers require potential candidates to pay a sometimes sizable fee to access opportunities. This can create an additional barrier in ensuring broad and diverse access to your opportunity.

#2. BARRIERS RELATING TO A CANDIDATE’S QUALIFICATIONS

There appears to be a common assumption that those with a specific title or training have an easier path to board work. This perception arose repeatedly during focus groups. For example,

“ I HAVE THIS IMPRESSION THAT [FOR] THOSE BOARDS YOU NEED THAT LEGAL BACKGROUND, ACCOUNTING BACKGROUND OR REALLY A LOT MORE UNDERSTANDING OF FINANCES AND THE SORT OF TECHNICAL EXPERIENCE THAT I DON’T HAVE, SO I SELF-SELECT MYSELF OUT OF APPLYING FOR THEM.”



57.6%

identified having the right job title as a barrier to board work.

197 participants (57.6%) identified having the right job title as a barrier to board work and this was cited most frequently by those between the ages of 30-49. A larger proportion of participants felt job title was a barrier for for-profit boards (50.8%), compared to government (39.7%) and not-for-profit (20.7%) boards. For some participants, this meant being a lawyer or accountant, but for others, this was perceived as a title within their organization. For example,

“ I DON’T FEEL I HAVE THE EXPERIENCE YET - I AM NOT A C-SUITE OR EXECUTIVE. I FEEL I STILL NEED TO CLIMB THE CORPORATE LADDER SO TO SPEAK. I DON’T HAVE EXPERIENCE RUNNING A LARGE NOT-FOR-PROFIT OR PRIVATELY HELD FOR-PROFIT COMPANY.”



SUGGESTIONS FOR BOARDS:

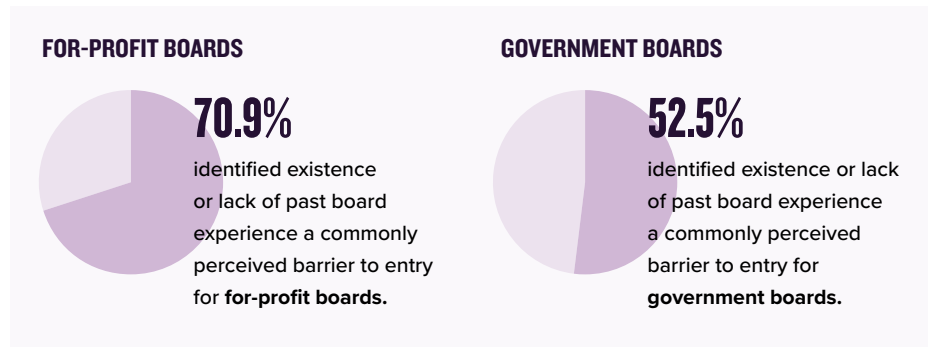
- Recognize that there is an assumption that titles matter, whether they relate to a specific profession (e.g., lawyer or accountant) or organizational rank (e.g., CEO, or c-suite).
- When filling a board position, identify if this assumption is valid in your recruitment needs. Clearly define the range of professional backgrounds, titles, and levels of experience that could bring the relevant perspectives and skills you are looking for.

EXISTENCE OF PAST BOARD EXPERIENCE

The existence or lack of past board experience was commonly perceived as a barrier to entry for for-profit boards (70.9%) and government boards (52.5%).

“ I DON'T FEEL THAT I HAVE EXPERIENCE OR KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IS REQUIRED OF A 'BOARD MEMBER'. THE TITLE MAKES THE POSITION SEEM INTIMIDATING AND UNACHIEVABLE.”

“ WITHOUT MUCH BOARD EXPERIENCE, I WOULDN'T HAVE A LOT TO BRING TO THE TABLE. GAINING EXPERIENCE ON SMALLER BOARDS IS A BETTER FIT.”



SUGGESTIONS FOR BOARDS:

- Make your expectations about a candidate's past board experience clear.
 - If you don't have an expectation of past board experience, make it known and eliminate a potential implicit assumption.
 - If you do have an expectation of past board experience, clearly identify the skills you are looking for that arise from past board experience. While certain skills will be unique to board experience, consider if the perspective you are seeking could arise outside board experience.
- Overall, understand that past board experience, as a blanket statement, does not equate to particular skills, expertise, or perspective, given the wide variety of board types and functions.

TRAINING

Not having governance training was cited as a barrier, with 58.7% of participants perceiving it as a barrier to for-profit board service, 47% as a barrier to government board service, and 26% as a barrier to not-for-profit board service. However, there was a significant relationship between having completed training and reporting board experience, with almost 50% of the sample reporting both having taken training and serving on a board. This is either an indication that those who get on a board seek training or training supports the acquisition of board work.

Additionally, there was also a significant relationship between having taken training and viewing it as a barrier or not - 68.8% of those who reported taking a variety of training did not see it as a barrier. In other words, training appears to reduce this barrier and be associated with increased reporting of board service. The biggest reasons provided for not completing training were a lack of awareness of options for training (51%), being too busy (21%), and the expense (13.6%). Specific to for-profit board work, understanding how to make the transition from not-for-profit to for-profit boards was cited as a barrier, with 72.9% of the sample identifying this as a barrier.

Training appears to be a critical component for those beginning their path to board work. The greatest benefit of training in relation to for-profit boards was its impact on increasing the confidence of the candidate.

1 2 3 4 5x — Those who have taken training are 5 times more likely to serve on boards than those who have not taken training.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BOARDS:

- Training doesn't hurt. Once candidates have training, they are less likely to see needing additional training as a barrier to obtaining their goals. Beyond knowledge acquisition, training often serves to crystalize potential candidates' confidence in their existing skill set. In this survey, 82.2% of participants indicated that training made them more confident as candidates. A variety of training options at various price points exist, including DirectHer's Board Basics, Financial Literacy, Introduction to Strategic Governance, and Building Board Resume courses.
- Given the benefit of training, especially for those that are joining their first board, contemplate how your board can provide board training for:
 - Existing board members - access to training can serve as an effective part of board onboarding and help get new board members up to speed faster, and
 - Potential board candidates - as a recruitment strategy.

CONFIDENCE

Though the majority of participants in this sample reported feeling competent and prepared for board work, lack of confidence was cited as a barrier by half the sample. Lack of confidence was cited as a barrier more often in relation to for-profit boards (46.6%), than for government (39%), or not-for-profit boards (28.8%).

There were limited demographic trends for those who lacked confidence. Interestingly, while in general the data suggests that as one progresses in their career their confidence grows, there were 14 executives, 51 people holding masters degrees, and 99 participants with past board experience who cited a lack of confidence as a barrier.

“ I DON'T FEEL LIKE I'M IN THE TOP 10% FOR MY PROFESSION AND THEREFORE I DON'T THINK PEOPLE SEE ME AS AN ASSET.”

“ LACK OF CONFIDENCE IS A RESULT OF NOT SEEING ENOUGH REPRESENTATION ON BOARDS (I.E., WOMEN OF COLOUR).”

“ SO, JUST TO BE HELD AT THE EXACT SAME STANDARD AS THE MAN WHO DOESN'T TICK THE BOXES, YOU HAVE TO TICK EVERY BOX. AND SO THAT FEELING OF NOT BEING GOOD ENOUGH IS VALIDATED BY THE DATA THAT SAYS ACTUALLY THEY WOULDN'T BE JUDGED DIFFERENTLY ANYWAY.”

This testimony highlights an important nuance around the topic of confidence. Confidence is not solely an internal or intrinsic quality - confidence is impacted by external realities, including the lack of representation. Confidence is also largely impacted by qualification expectations, with women and gender diverse people more likely to forgo applying for positions where they don't feel they meet all of the qualifications. ↻



SUGGESTIONS FOR BOARDS:

- Don't throw everything at the wall. Recognize that creating a vague or lengthy posting with many desired skills or perspectives can create a detracting assumption that a candidate must meet all criteria.
- Get clear on what skills and perspectives are “must haves” vs “nice to haves”.
- Consider identifying how the board will support the ongoing growth of skills throughout a candidate's tenure to show where you are open to skill potential compared to expertise.

3. OTHER BARRIERS

THE IMPACT OF EXTERNAL INFLUENCE

While not a frequently reported barrier, 30% of participants were told by external parties they would face barriers in realizing their board goals. 71% of the participants that reported being told to expect barriers were between 30-49 years old.

We queried, “What is the impact of being told you will face a barrier?” Does it become internalized and, as a result, become a perceived barrier? For three barriers - needing a specific job title, past board experience, and having an adequate network - there was a significant relationship. These warnings may be dissuasions meant to maintain barriers for entry into this board service sphere and may lead to some women and gender diverse folks unnecessarily self-selecting out of certain board roles.

The largest proportion of those that were told they required a specific job title were middle management (e.g., VP, senior leaders) (33%), followed by employees (25%), lower level managers (23.6%), and finally executives (18.1%) (e.g., Chair, Board of Directors, CEO, COO, CFO, etc). This warning seems unlikely given the participant's level of experience and responsibility, and therefore, may be an example of gatekeeping.

BIPOC were generally warned of barriers in similar proportions to white participants, but were significantly more likely to be warned of tokenism. This participant's experience speaks to the reality of tokenism,

“ BEING A WOMAN AND POC IN THE DEI SPACE, TOKENIZATION IN PLACES THAT ARE NOT WILLING TO DO DEEP WORK IS COMMON.”



SUGGESTIONS FOR BOARDS:

- Recognize that your recruitment of valuable candidates is impacted by external factors, including how governance is discussed broadly.
- Proactive boards may wish to expressly counter assumptions created by external influences by clearly defining your expectations around job titles, past board experiences, and connections to board members.

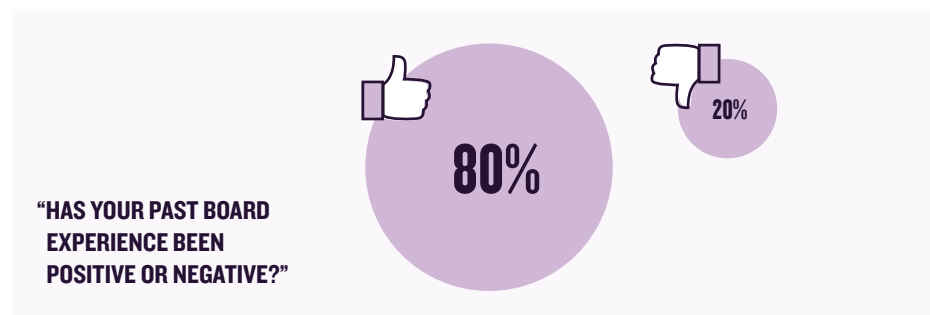


For example, in a Hewlett Packard internal report, men applied for a position where they met 60% of the criteria, whereas women applied where they met 100% of the criteria. Additionally, the Harvard Business Review found that women were more likely to not apply for a position because they weren't following the guidelines (as to what was required) and for fear of putting themselves out there and failing. <https://hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified>.

THE IMPACT OF PAST EXPERIENCES

The least cited barrier was negative past board experiences, cited by 5% of participants in relation to obtaining for-profit and government board positions and 10% of participants in obtaining not-for-profit board positions. This is understandable as 80% of participants reported their board experience had generally been positive or very positive. However, importantly, BIPOC reported more negative and very negative past board experiences. For example, one participant stated:

“ THIS BOARD IS UNPLEASANT AND DYSFUNCTIONAL TO THE EXTREME... AS A MEMBER OF A MINORITY GROUP, I HAVE BEEN LABELED WITH ALL THE NEGATIVE STEREOTYPES AND BEEN TOLD THAT “MY PEOPLE” ARE DRUNKS, LIARS, THIEVES AND WELFARE DEADBEATS. I HAVE BEEN PERSONALLY BULLIED, ABUSED, VERBALLY ATTACKED AND BEEN SUBJECT TO NUMEROUS RUMOUR MONGERING ATTACKS.”



SUGGESTIONS FOR BOARDS:

- Recognize that board culture plays a key role in its efficacy. Simply diversifying the board, but maintaining a hostile culture, is not effective and can be harmful to board members. Building an inclusive environment takes effort and intentional action.
- Collect regular feedback from all board members and implement a process to identify and prioritize change. Notice what technical and behavioral practices may be hindering the ability of board members to effectively participate and add value to the board.
- Work with board candidates and experts in IDEA (inclusion, diversity, equity, and accessibility) to ensure your board's practices are enabling the participation and inclusion of all board members and set the tone for organizational practices.

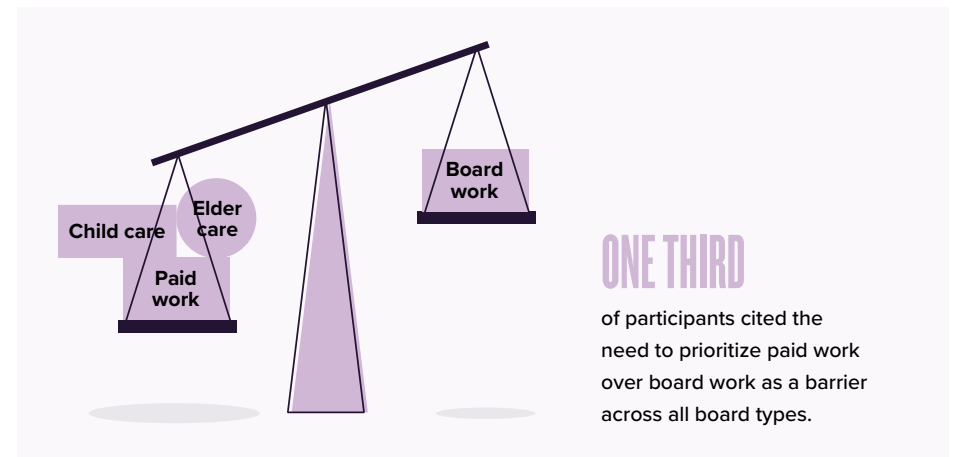
PERSONAL BARRIERS

Interestingly, all personal barriers were reported with less frequency than professional barriers across all board types. 20% of the participants see childcare as a barrier to board work on not-for-profit and government boards, which increased to 28% for for-profit boards.

About a third of participants cited the need to prioritize paid work over board work as a barrier across all board types, with one participant stating,

“ I’M ALSO A WORKING-CLASS PERSON, SO PAID WORK AND PERSONAL OBLIGATIONS WILL ALWAYS BE ON TOP OF MIND BEFORE TAKING UP ADDITIONAL BOARD WORK.”

Less than 15% of participants reported the remaining personal barriers: elder care, support from partners, geographic location, being new to Canada, and volunteer obligations.



SUGGESTIONS FOR BOARDS:

- Recognize that personal barriers exist. To the extent your board has developed or provides access to resources to mitigate the impact of these barriers - make it known. You will likely stand out amongst competing opportunities. For example, how do you account for a director's potential childcare responsibilities in scheduling your board's annual calendar of meetings?
- Acknowledge that all board members likely have care responsibilities, including elder care, child care, and care for adults with disabilities. These responsibilities are not gender specific; therefore, childcare support, if offered, should be offered to men, women, and gender diverse individuals.



NOT-FOR-PROFIT

TAKEAWAYS →

Given the vast diversity of those that serve on not-for-profit boards and their aspirations,

THE ONLY STATISTICALLY SIGNIFICANT FACTOR INFLUENCING NOT-FOR-PROFIT BOARD SERVICE IS HAVING TAKEN GOVERNANCE TRAINING.

Those who have taken training are

3X MORE LIKELY

to serve on not-for-profit boards.

No other participant characteristic significantly contributed to not-for-profit board service.

In light of the potential benefit of supporting new board talent through training, not-for-profit boards should contemplate and communicate **two things:**

ONE: What is our approach to board education for existing directors?

TWO: What is our approach to board education for potential candidates as a means to expand and diversify our recruitment efforts?

CANDIDATES CRAVE SPONSORSHIP.

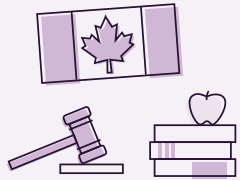
It's the number one barrier across all board types.

CONTEMPLATE HOW YOUR ORGANIZATION CAN CREATE MORE



BRIDGES

to support potential candidates through the recruitment process.



**DIRECTHER
NETWORK**

GOVERNMENT TAKEAWAYS →

82% of participants aspire to government boards.

Almost all participants looking to serve on government boards reported that **understanding role requirements** (including the need for past board experience and governance training), **the application process** (including where to access opportunities), and **the interview process were barriers**, indicating an opportunity to increase clarity around these processes to reduce barriers for applicants.

ILLUMINATING THE DETAILS OF ENTRY TO GOVERNMENT BOARDS



will likely demystify the process and reduce the perceived barrier to entry for applicants.

In this sample, the participant characteristics that significantly contributed to service were the number of

PREVIOUS BOARD EXPERIENCES AND EDUCATION LEVEL.

Results show that for each additional board one has served the odds of sitting on a government board increased. Additionally, those holding a masters degree were over 7 times more likely to sit on a government board than those who do not have a masters degree.

Those who were immigrants to Canada or worked in the private sector were **less likely** to serve on government boards. These statistics represent the current status quo. If your board is seeking to diversify representation then

PROACTIVE AND EXPLICIT EFFORTS NEED TO BE TAKEN TO CAST A WIDER NET FOR TALENT AND DISRUPT THESE TRENDS.

SPONSORSHIP REMAINS AN ISSUE FOR GOVERNMENT BOARDS.

Sponsorship is the largest perceived barrier across all board types.

Consider how your board can **build relationships** with an expanded pool of interested applicants.

DIRECTHER
NETWORK

FOR-PROFIT

TAKEAWAYS →

Women and gender diverse folks with aspirations to board work perceive for-profit boards as having the highest barriers to entry, compared to other sectors.

THESE PERCEIVED BARRIERS MIGHT REFLECT THE STAGNATION IN THE DIVERSIFICATION OF FOR-PROFIT BOARDS.

The data reveals that

AGE, EDUCATION, AND CAREER PROGRESSION

have a significant effect on serving on for-profit boards.

The participant characteristics that significantly contributed to for-profit service were the number of boards on which one has served and holding an executive role.

33%

of the sample had applied for a for-profit board position and were not selected.

The available pool of candidates may not be the barrier to shifting board composition that boards perceive it to be. **Challenging this assumption is an important start.**

Sponsorship is perceived as a major barrier in all board types, but was highest

(71.5%)

in the for-profit sector.

Clearly, more work needs to be done to reduce this significant barrier, as it is limiting access to a strong talent pool.

CONSIDER:



How are potential board members **approached, encouraged to apply,** and **supported** through the onboarding process?

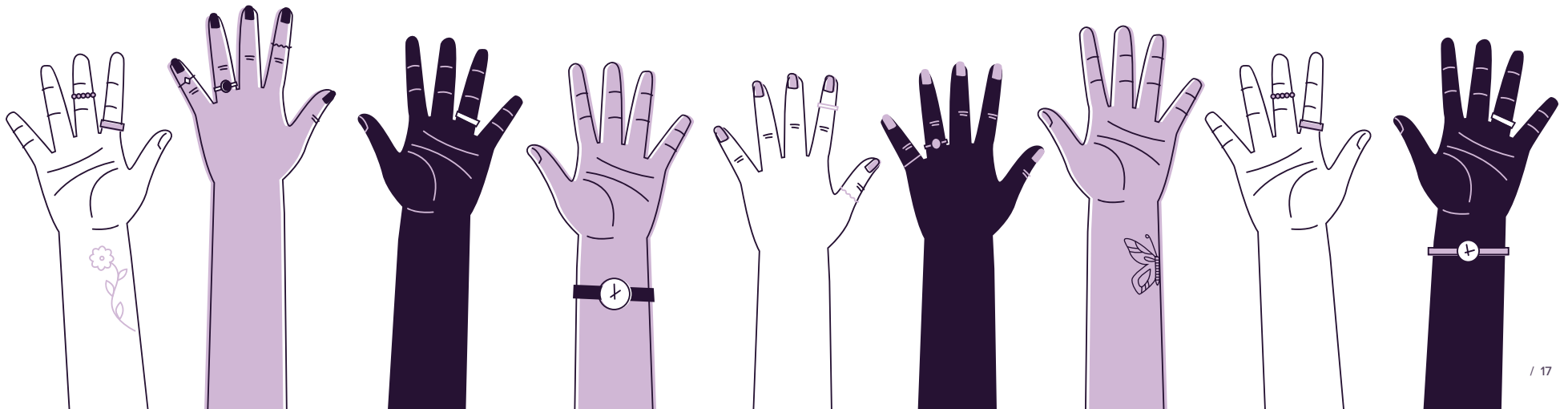
CLOSING WORDS

The authors extend their gratitude to all participants who shared their time and experience, either through the online survey or in the focus groups. Our data highlights a remarkable group of Canadian women and gender diverse folks pursuing and engaging in board work. We want to acknowledge their level of accomplishments and the important work they are doing through their commitment to board work.

This research has highlighted the depth of the talent pool available for board work of all types, but also that, surprisingly, even those with extensive board experience can sometimes question their qualifications or fit for this work.

Our closing comment is a word of encouragement to all women and gender diverse people interested in board service,

**DIVE IN & GET STARTED,
YOUR VOICE, EXPERIENCE,
KNOWLEDGE, & WORLD VIEWS
ARE NEEDED IN THESE SPACES.**



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WANT TO LEARN MORE?

This industry report shared our preliminary findings from this rich data. We have plans for more forms of dissemination, including both academic and industry venues. Ways to follow up on this research:

- Follow [DirectHer Network](#) for events related to this research, information on the upcoming academic paper on this topic, and all things board governance.
- Contact Dr. Rachael Pettigrew at rpettigrew@mtroyal.ca, [@RNPettigrew](#) or [LinkedIn](#).