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Recruiting the New Generation of Local Elected Officials Seven Strategies Laid Out in *The Municipality*

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Madison, WI – Continuing their groundbreaking work to determine why relatively few women run for local office in Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin-Extension (UWEX) Local Government Center Educators Jennifer Erickson, Dan Hill, Melissa Kono and Victoria Solomon provided seven strategies taken from their focus group work to encourage women to run. Their work was published in the League of Wisconsin Municipalities November 2018, *The Municipality* magazine.

Erickson stated, “This work is important because diverse governing bodies make better decisions. According to the Center for American Women in Politics (CAWP), when women serve they provide a different perspective. They are more likely to raise concerns about safety in the community, gender equity issues, education and economic issues related to children and families.”

Strategies include:

- ✓ **STRATEGY 1: Identify the position and be clear on why you are recruiting for that particular position.**
 - Consider starting with a vacant position.
 - It may be easier to recruit women to boards/councils where there is already one woman serving.
- ✓ **STRATEGY 2: Build trust with the candidate.**
 - Make “the ask” comfortable, face to face, and informal.
 - Find someone to help you who has a previous relationship with the recruit.
 - Include different kinds of people in the recruitment process—local elected officials, friends, influential people, and/or family members. It may be beneficial to find other women to help you recruit women.
 - Conduct a one-on-one with the possible candidate without any kind of request. This is an opportunity to get to know someone better—what their interests are, what their concerns are, where their passions lie. This could take the form of asking them for what they would look for in a good candidate for the position you are targeting.
- ✓ **STRATEGY 3: Be persistent.**



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- The candidate may never have considered running for an office. The recruitment process may be similar to planting and nurturing a seed. You will likely need to give them time to internalize the idea of running and seeing themselves in the position.
- Ask multiple times in multiple ways. Consider a step-by-step approach, including encouraging different people to make “the ask.”
- ✓ **STRATEGY 4: Make it clear that you believe in them.**
 - Candidates need to hear that they are viewed as leaders; that they are competent, that they have the necessary skills, that they will do a good job, and that they are respected in the community.
 - Convey that you are interested in them as a candidate because you believe in their strengths and what they would bring to elected office – it’s not just about filling a position.
- ✓ **STRATEGY 5: Emphasize that they can make a difference.**
 - Focus group participants indicated that they want to make a positive difference in their communities. They are less interested in having a particular position. For this reason, it’s important to know what their priorities are.
 - Many women in our focus groups referred to themselves as advocates. This can be a selling point in recruiting women; they can be an advocate for a cause, a group, and their community.
- ✓ **STRATEGY 6: Assure the candidate that she can learn on the job.**
 - Assure her that she is already qualified to begin the job.
 - Focus on the candidate’s strengths and not on what the candidate does not know – parliamentary procedure, zoning codes, cube and gutter dimensions, etc.
 - There is lots to learn, but that comes with time in the position and there are lots of resources to help support elected officials.
- ✓ **STRATEGY 7: Be prepared to commit to supporting the candidate.**
 - Help with figuring out the nuts and bolts of getting on the ballot, campaigning, building a support network, fundraising, etc.
 - Remember that support will be needed before, during, and after the campaign.

The process of electing local officials starts now. Candidates are required to declare their candidacy, complete and submit a registration statement and submit nomination papers by January 2, 2019. The Wisconsin Elections Commission checklist for local candidates can be found online here:

<http://bit.ly/LocalElections2019>

According to the Wisconsin Women’s Council, the 2019-2020 class of Wisconsin State Legislators will include 35 women (27%) which is an increase, but falls just short of the historical level of 28% set in



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1998 and 2003. "It will be interesting to see if the national trend of more women running for office nationally will be true at the local level," Solomon added.

For more information about how you can help, contact Jennifer Erickson, UWEX Community Development Educator at jennifer.erickson@ces.uwex.edu or 608-355-3250.

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The League of Wisconsin Municipalities advocates for Wisconsin's cities and villages, large and small, urban and rural, speaking up for local democracy and common-sense citizen led government. Learn more at <http://www.lwm-info.org/>.

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