

IT'S TIME

Embedding Equity from the Outset: A Starter Guide for Professional Women's Sport Organizations

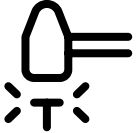
The time for creating an equitable and inclusive professional women's sport ecosystem is now. Building this industry from the ground up presents an unprecedented opportunity to embed equity and inclusion from the start and reap the **benefits of enhanced decision-making and performance** while creating structures that recognize, value, and respond to the diverse experiences and needs of all girls and women in sport.

From grassroots to professional and from field to front office, we can harness the professional women's sport movement to disrupt the status quo and embed gender equity into every level of Canadian sport.

Canadian pro women's sport organizations and decision-makers have an opportunity to rise to this challenge and systematically embed equity and inclusion into their operations and culture. When done right, inclusive environments attract more participants and fans, and in turn, strengthen business.

This guide—informed by Canadian Women & Sport's extensive research, advocacy, and experience advancing gender equity in sport organizations—outlines key practices for pro women's sport teams and leagues committed to embedding gender equity into every level of their organizations. Organizations can consider this a starting point in an ongoing journey to develop tailored approaches that align with their unique goals and challenges.

1 BUILD THE FOUNDATION



Organizations can begin embedding gender equity by building a strong foundation. This means developing a clear vision and strategy grounded in equity and inclusion, fostering committed leadership at all levels, and creating robust supports to embed gender equity practices. These fundamental elements help ensure that gender equity isn't just an add-on initiative but an approach that is woven into the organization from the start.

KEY ACTIONS

- ☐ Establish a clear organizational understanding of gender equity by developing comprehensive principles (e.g., intersectionality, equitable access and opportunity) that guide everything from team operations to player development and fan engagement.
- ☐ Embed gender equity and inclusion into the organization's mission, vision, and values by building a brand identity and market position around creating new standards for equity in professional sports.
- ☐ Ensure senior leadership actively advances equity initiatives by focusing business development on equity and positioning the organization as a market leader in inclusive sport.
- ☐ Formalize commitments through comprehensive policy development, such as ensuring equitable access to resources and professional development across all roles.
- ☐ Create accountability mechanisms to track and measure progress by examining key business metrics through a gender equity lens, from revenue streams to fan demographics and leadership representation.
- ☐ Communicate equity commitments through the organization by providing regular training and education for all employees, ensuring everyone shares a common understanding and language for advancing equity and inclusion goals.

2 STRENGTHEN THE INTERNAL CORE



Once a strong foundation is established, organizations can strengthen their internal core by examining and enhancing their day-to-day operations through a gender equity lens. This means developing inclusive human resource practices and creating supportive workplace policies that recognize and respond to diverse needs. By intentionally building inclusive processes and culture, organizations can create an environment where equity and inclusion inform every decision.

KEY ACTIONS

- ☐ Implement targeted **recruitment strategies to attract diverse talent** by partnering with professional networks and sport organizations that connect with under-represented groups in coaching, executive, and support roles.
- ☐ Design selection processes that minimize systemic bias through structured interviews focused on skills and competencies, along with diverse hiring panels that bring multiple perspectives.
- ☐ Establish robust mechanisms for addressing harassment and discrimination by implementing confidential reporting systems backed by mandatory training for all employees.
- ☐ Create **flexible workplace policies that support diverse needs** by offering comprehensive benefits like parental leave, travel support, and wellness resources that enable women to thrive in their careers.
- ☐ Monitor and evaluate employee experiences across different identities by gathering regular feedback on workplace culture and advancement opportunities to inform targeted improvements.

3 EMBED THE LENS EXTERNALLY



With a strong foundation and robust internal practices in place, organizations can effectively embed gender equity in their external operations and relationships.

This involves integrating equity principles into partnerships, sponsorships, marketing, communications, and fan engagement strategies. By taking deliberate action in these areas, organizations can extend their impact beyond their immediate operations and contribute to lasting systemic change across the sport ecosystem.

KEY ACTIONS

- ☐ Develop pathways for women in technical leadership roles by creating paid opportunities for former players and establishing clear advancement tracks into coaching, officiating, and sport science positions.
- ☐ Ensure marketing and communications reflect diverse fan communities by developing content strategies that authentically showcase different fan experiences and stories.
- ☐ Build inclusive community partnerships by collaborating with organizations that expand access to sport for girls while building new fan bases in diverse communities.
- ☐ Design sponsorships that promote gender equity and inclusion through strategic partnerships that align with your equity goals and demonstrate the business value of women's sports.
- ☐ Prioritize procurement from women-owned and equity-aligned businesses by establishing vendor diversity programs that create opportunities while building brand authenticity.

»» READY TO GO FURTHER?

Connect with Canadian Women & Sport to learn how we can support your gender equity journey.
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