

Background

- In 2019, the Australian Human Rights Commission released the “*Guidelines for the promotion of equal opportunity for women and girls in golf*” (AHRC Guidelines) to guide the golf industry on how the Federal Sex Discrimination Act (1984) applies to common golf policies and practices. *The AHRC Guidelines state:*
 - o *Traditionally, men have held the leadership positions in golf clubs. This culture limits the ability of women and girls to participate in the governance of clubs. One way in which these barriers to participation in the governance of a club have historically been addressed is through the establishment of women’s committees. The role of the women’s committee varies from club to club and may change over time. Generally, women’s committees do not have any official role in the governance of a club (in other words, they are not a sub-committee of the board). In addition to this cultural challenge, membership categories can also affect the ability of women and girls to participate in the governance of a club. In many clubs, only ‘full’ or seven-day members are able to:*
 - *vote at the annual general meeting*
 - *nominate for the Board.*

Without representation in leadership positions, women and girls may continue to face barriers to participation in golf. (AHRC Guidelines, p. 28).
 - o *Many golf clubs have women only committees. The role of women’s committees varies between clubs. Generally, clubs do not have men’s committees. A women’s committee should not generally be regarded as an alternative to women participating in the central governance of a golf club (for example, on the Board). (AHRC Guidelines, p. 37).*
- Following their publication, golf clubs have been encouraged to review the AHRC Guidelines in relation to their own policies and practices to ensure clubs minimise their risk of litigation. One such area is the existence of women’s committees.
- Historical gender discrimination in golf saw women being unable to become full members of clubs. As this was required to join club boards women were historically unable to join club committees and play a leadership role in the overall management of golf clubs
- The establishment of women’s committees evolved from this culture and process
- Women were given/created their own time, space and committee to lead their golf on their terms
- Historically, women’s committees empowered women, giving them a space to lead and autonomy over their golf experiences.
- As society has evolved to increase its value in gender equality, there has been a greater desire to integrate the management of both women’s and men’s golf for many reasons.
- Gender integrated leadership of golf clubs has the potential to create more efficient and streamlined management, and a diverse decision-making lens that takes into account the needs and experiences of all genders.
- A gender empowered club board instigates and/or role models many social, cultural and health benefits of gender equality within their golf communities, including:
 - o Valuing and respecting women in leadership and decision making
 - o Challenging historical gender role expectations and stereotypes that women’s and men’s golf remain separate and/or played on certain days of the week
 - o Valuing mutual respect between women and men, boys, and girls in golf and in the community

Current role of women’s committees

- Currently, in most clubs where a women’s committee exists, the women’s committee oversees the delivery of:
 - o All female golf competition including:
 - Weekly women’s competitions
 - Honour board events
 - Interclub competitions
 - Women’s Gala/Charity/Open days
 - The setting of the syllabus and playing conditions for women’s golf within the club
 - o All female social engagement
 - End of season presentations
 - Seasonal celebrations
 - Induction and mentoring of new women members
 - Women’s Gala/Charity/Open days
 - Managing women’s locker room
 - Catering and kitchen rosters
 - Kitchen audits
 - Cleaning schedules for the club house

Role of Women’s Captain or Women’s President in Club Governance

- Membership of a women’s committee will include a Women’s Captain and/or a Women’s President
- How a Women’s Captain or Women’s President is engaged with/by the club committee differs between clubs. Here are some examples:
 - o The Women’s Captain or Women’s President is also an automatic member of the club committee and does or does not have a vote in overall club governance
 - o The Women’s Captain or Women’s President attends club committee meetings to provide a women’s committee report only and is not present for any other part of a club committee meeting
 - o The Women’s Captain or Women’s President plays no role in the club committee processes

Legitimacy of this Structure

From the AHRC Guidelines: *Whether a women only committee is permitted under the Act as a ‘special measure’ will depend on the particular objects and activities of the women’s committee, and any other relevant facts. A women’s committee is more likely to be a ‘special measure’ if one or more of its objects and activities are focused on achieving substantive equality between all women and men at a golf club. For example, promoting increased female membership of a club, or facilitating training opportunities for female members.*

Excluding men from membership or providing women but not men with a committee to oversee their golf competition maybe seen as breaching the Federal Sex Discrimination Act (1984). *A women’s committee is more likely to be a ‘special measure’ if one or more of its objects and activities are focused on achieving substantive equality between all women and men at a golf club. For example, promoting increased female membership of a club, or facilitating training opportunities for female members. (ARHC, 2019)*

What is the Value for a Club in Having a Women’s Committee?

Women’s committees are seen as both a positive and a challenge for golf clubs.

Challenges: The particular objects and activities of a women’s committee will likely determine whether it is permitted under the Federal Sex Discrimination Act as a special measure. As such, having a women’s committee within a club could pose some legal risk if the particular objects and activities do not meet special measures criteria.

The gendered segregation of governance in clubs may see:

- Women’s needs not considered at club committee level because assumptions may be made that such responsibility falls to the women’s committee
- Women’s play/competition needs not considered at match sub-committee level because that responsibility has been delegated to the women’s committee
- Women’s committees governing only for women who participate in all female competition play and therefore not considering the needs of women who can only or choose to play on weekends and/or in mixed sex competitions
- Women’s committees governing only for women who participate in all female competition golf and not considering the needs of women who are social or non-competition players
- Women in clubs seeing the women’s committee as their leadership opportunity without consideration for joining the club committee, thereby creating an unconscious leadership ceiling for women in clubs

Positives: There are many challenges attracting and retaining women in golf clubs as members. Female membership numbers have declined significantly since 1970, from 34 percent of membership to approximately 20 percent in 2020. Women and girls report facing unique real and perceived challenges or deterrents in joining a golf club such as:

- Lack of time, including the time golf takes to play
- Affordability of membership, lessons, and/or equipment
- Ability
- Dress code
- Access to instruction/coaching
- Working responsibilities
- Family responsibilities
- Lack of fun
- Low confidence
- Perception that golf is hard to play
- Perception that it is a game for older people or men/boys

To help new women overcome some of these challenges and perceptions, women’s committees can help their club provide safe, supportive and welcoming policies, processes and culture. Examples of women’s committee initiatives include:

- Offering mentoring for new women to learn the on and off course rules, expectations, policies and culture
- Facilitating social events and gathering to connect new and existing women
- Delivering club inductions to ensure new women understand club operations, policies, processes, and personnel
- Following up with new clinic participants and existing but lapsed/disconnected members

Implementation Guide

The Women’s Committee TOR template has been written so that you can easily make some adjustments to implement at your club. This guide will highlight some key roles & responsibilities that may exist in your current Women’s Committee that will need to be re-delegated, and the parts of the template that will need to be tailored to your clubs unique circumstance.

Existing Committee Responsibilities.

It is critically important that during the transition process to the modern Women’s Committee, you do not lose the functions of the previous Women’s Committee.

- Match representation & responsibilities
 - The Roles of the Women’s Captain & Vice Captain need to be integrated into the Club’s Match Committee, with the Match Committee’s terms of reference being adjusted accordingly.
- Regular social event responsibilities
 - Integration of these events and responsibilities into either a social committee or an event managers role, with genuine representation of the women of the club help decision making.
- Integration of Women’s representation onto the main Committee.
 - The Women’s Committee has traditionally been the ‘voice’ of the Women and given allowance to act as such. With the change in role of the Women’s committee, there need to be a mechanism by which diverse Women are represented onto the main committee of the club, to help guide and influence the decision making of the club.

Editing the Women’s Committee TOR for implementation

- Purpose
 - Its important that the 4-3 dot points that are included summarise the overall reason for being of the Women’s Committee. The 3 listed are relevant to those clubs who wish to have a modern Women’s committee, for the reasons explained throughout this documents.
- Objectives
 - Again, these are listed as they are relevant to the modern committee. You’ll note that they all relate to either the attraction and retention of female members & participants. If you have specific objectives that relate to your strategic plan, you should include them here.
- Structure
 - Noting that the larger Club representation should have positions on the main committee, adjust these roles to suit your resources and requirements.
- Responsibilities
 - Should tie back to the achievement of your objectives
- Duties
 - Should be consistent with other committees of the clubs and your committee member code of conduct.