



# Why Mentoring?

Mentoring in nonprofits and associations matters because it develops future leaders, strengthens mission impact, and deepens engagement and retention among staff, volunteers, and members.

Mentorship matters especially women in nonprofits and associations because it accelerates their path into leadership, builds confidence and skills, and connects them to influential networks that are often otherwise closed to them. It is also a practical way for mission-driven organizations to live their equity values while improving performance and retention.

## **The leadership and pay gap**

Women are the backbone of Canada's nonprofit and association sector, forming the majority of the workforce and a large share of leaders, yet still facing gaps in board and top-tier power.

## **Workforce and leadership presence**

Women account for roughly 75–80% of workers in Canada's charitable and nonprofit sector, especially in front-line and support roles.

Hold most senior executive positions in the sector—around 70% of nonprofit executive roles—though their influence drops in the largest, highest-resourced organizations.

## **Governance and board roles**

Across Canadian nonprofits, women now occupy about 47.9% of board seats overall

Higher representation in social services and environmental organizations

Lower representation in business, professional associations, unions, and religious groups.

Women still do not hold a majority of board power in many associations and larger institutions.

## **Community impact and leadership style**

Women lead many organizations focused on poverty, health, gender justice, and community development, bringing lived experience and community relationships that strengthen program design and trust.

Research on women's leadership in Canada emphasizes inclusive, collaborative approaches—prioritizing equity, participation, and care—which align closely with nonprofit and association missions.

## **Gaps and why their role matters**

Despite their central role, women in Canadian nonprofits face pay inequities, underrepresentation at the very top, and under-valuation of “care” work that props up the whole system. Expanding women's decision-making power in boards and executive roles is critical to fair workplaces, better governance, and more representative policies nonprofits and associations.



# Why Mentoring?

Women make up the majority of staff in many nonprofits, yet their representation drops sharply at the CEO and board level, especially in larger and higher-budget organizations. At the same time, women executives in the sector are often paid significantly less than men doing comparable roles.

Professional and industry associations show similar patterns: women participate heavily but remain underrepresented in top roles and on key decision-making committees. Mentorship helps counter these structural gaps by giving women targeted guidance on how to navigate organizational politics, succession processes, and board dynamics.

## **Skills, confidence, and readiness**

Mentors help women develop leadership capabilities that are essential for senior roles in nonprofits and associations: strategic thinking, communication and decision-making.

*Mentoring conversations* also provide a safe space to rehearse negotiations, difficult conversations, and board presentations.

Women who engage in mentoring and peer-mentoring programs report increased confidence, clearer career goals, and greater willingness to pursue stretch roles or elected positions within associations. This sense of readiness is especially important where women may face stereotypes about being “not quite prepared” for top jobs.

## **Networks, sponsorship, and visibility**

Access to informal networks and champions is often what determines who gets invited onto boards, task forces, or leadership slates in associations and nonprofits. Mentors open doors by making introductions, recommending mentees for key committees, and sharing insider knowledge on how decisions are made.

There is growing recognition that women are often “over-mentored and under-sponsored,” meaning they receive advice but not active advocacy. Strong mentorship in nonprofits and associations therefore needs a sponsorship element, where senior leaders actively put women forward for visible, career-making opportunities.

## **Culture, retention, and impact**

Well-designed mentoring and women’s leadership programs improve retention, engagement, and a sense of belonging, which are critical in often under-resourced nonprofit and association environments. Group formats such as mentoring circles or walks create community, normalize shared challenges, and reduce isolation.

As more mentored women move into leadership and board roles, they are more likely to champion fair pay, inclusive policies, and member or community-centered decision-making. This shifts nonprofits and associations toward governance that better reflects the people and causes they represent, strengthening both legitimacy and outcomes.