

## **Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts Leadership Institute for Political Impact**

The Women's Fund Leadership Institute for Political Impact is designed to address the civic interests and skills requested by women from the counties of Berkshire, Franklin, Hampden and Hampshire, Massachusetts. After conducting three annual discussion forums in each of the four western MA counties, participating in dialogues initiated by other organizations, and exploring best practices among women's funds both nationally and globally, the Women's Fund of Western Massachusetts has designed an institute with a unique scope of material and structural design.

When asked why they haven't attempted to run for public office a majority of women will first cite a perceived lack of skill or preparedness; women very often underestimate their abilities. Therefore, in addition to skills, the institute will provide women with increased confidence and awareness of their political leadership potential and ability.

The Institute advisory committee comprised of six women leaders, together with staff will select eight to ten participants from each county based on their level of skills, commitment and ability to participate as described in their application. The Women's Fund is committed to composing a diverse and committed body among institute participants.

The goals of the Women's Leadership Institute are as follows:

### **Process Goals (Immediate)**

- Help participants develop political literacy and competencies
- Provide participants with knowledge and information about Massachusetts' legislative processes
- Help participants overcome perceived barriers and increase their confidence in participating in legislative processes
- Provide an opportunity to develop cohort relationships among county representatives

### **Outcome Goals (Short-term)**

- Facilitate the production of state policy that reflects the needs of Massachusetts' women, girls, and their families and communities
- Increase community-based participation in policy formation and implementation
- Build the capacity of participants to share their expertise as a means to build community capacity to use policy and legislative processes to address problems
- Strengthen relationships and collaboration among social justice organizations and women's groups in western Massachusetts

### **Impact Goals (Long-term)**

- Improve the lives of all people in western Massachusetts communities
- Create cadres of women in the four counties with expertise in the legislative process
- Increase the numbers of women across western Massachusetts running for public office at all levels

WFWM's institute will include four primary focus areas that will build a cumulative portfolio of knowledge and skills. These include personal leadership, community organizing, legislative process and policy, and running for political office.

### **Personal Leadership**

The WFWM Institute will begin with an exploration of leadership using processes developed by the Women's Learning Partnership for Rights, Development and Peace (WLP), an international women's leadership movement. This session will allow women to explore their strengths and challenges in all the leadership roles they already possess, and determine what steps they need to take to address barriers and enhance their skills.

Session Facilitator: Carla Oleska

### **Community Organizing**

The next session will be an examination of models of community organizing, addressing communities ranging from neighborhood, to city/town, to county, to state. Community organizing skills also serve as basic building blocks for political campaigns. One very important aspect that will be included is the use of technology and social networking skills.

Session Facilitator: Staff of Neighbor2Neighbor (pending)  
National community organizing organization

### **Legislative Process and Policy**

A major portion of the calendar will be devoted to the legislative process and policy. This is an area that most women specifically cite as their weakest in terms of competency for public service. This is the most "fluid" of the focus areas. The cohort will ultimately decide to address one policy issue as a full group, or they will address policy issues as county groups.

Sessions will be facilitated by Maggie Bergin, Principal, *The Art of Politics*  
Members of Moms Rising, Massachusetts  
UMASS staff and faculty

### **Running for Public Office**

The final stage will cover all aspects of running for public office. By placing this topic at the end of the institute program, women will have established a portfolio of personal awareness as well as those skills and knowledge sets that are so often cited as the obstacles to women running for office.

Sessions will be facilitated by Nicole Lachapelle, Campaign Manager  
Suzanne Guthrie, Bold New Directions (pending)

**All full group sessions will also include presentations by women currently holding public office and/or those who are former public officials. The sessions focusing on policy will also include presentations by women from various community groups who have worked on moving policy forward.**

**The sessions on running campaigns will also include the use of social networking and media in today's campaign world.**