

## Empowering our silent majority

*Shelley L. Morse, President Canadian Teachers' Federation*



With nearly three out of every four teachers in Canada identifying as a woman, one could easily make the assumption that with women leading the way in the classroom they must also be leading the unions that represent them. Unfortunately, even with the odds seemingly in women's favour, the reality doesn't match the math. In fact, the opposite is true. Although the teaching profession is dominated by women, the statistics plainly show that we are significantly underrepresented among education unions' leadership ranks.

Despite the encouraging, though misleading, optics of being a woman president of the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF/FCE), there are far too few women heading up locals and filling positions on provincial and territorial structures throughout the country. The reasons for this vary, and much has been researched and published to get to the bottom of why more women are not holding leadership roles within their unions. Ranging in challenges from whether union structures enable or inhibit women's involvement, to the supports needed to open doors of opportunity, or the existence of strategies available to women, there is no simple one-size fits all answer to changing the gender composition of our unions.

Even with those obstacles facing us, if teachers are known for anything it's our resourcefulness. That eagerness to find a solution was clearly on display at the

2018 CTF/FCE Women's Symposium in PEI where a recommendation was made to start a new trend by creating something that would support women who may aspire to positions of leaders in their organizations. What began as a possible toolkit of resources came to fruition last year as a website dedicated to getting women elected in their teacher unions.

Francine Filion, former Communications Director at the CTF/FCE and staff consultant to the Advisory Committee on the Status of Women, took the lead on compiling the ideas from the symposium. In January, 2019 Francine, current CTF/FCE program officer Beverley Park, and CTF/FCE Secretary General Cassandra Hallett, collaborated with Ann Hawkins, former President of OECTA and CTF/FCE Board Member, along with Heather Smith, former President of the New Brunswick Teachers' Association and former President of the CTF/FCE to develop the concept.



The result of their work is the website [Fem-Lead-Fém](#) – aptly named to work with our bilingual membership. This living, breathing resource allows teachers across Canada the opportunity to contribute to the continued development of the site.

The web resource is built around three key areas that were too often missing when women sought

advice: Structures to open doors for women leaders; Supports that lead to essential networks to unlocking doors; and Strategies that are the keys to becoming a great leader. Beyond offering a definition of structures, strategies and supports, these sections also include facts, videos, analysis and reflection, and links to other resources –many from the CTF/FCE's Member Organizations.

Fem-Lead-Fém can assist with many things, including helping setup and plan election campaigns, kick-start workshop development, launch organizational reviews, enhance professional learning, and help foster 'femtoring' and mentoring.

The website is only the beginning of what we hope to achieve, but to do more we need your help, we need your ideas, your lived experiences. For the *Media* space on the site we invite you to submit your videos, your photos, and your podcasts. For *Learn More* we now have the links to the resources you gave us when we first asked for input. We know there are many others. We welcome your policy statements, workshop guides, conference agendas, and anything else you have to offer.

If you have other ideas or resources to contribute, please contact the [CTF/FCE](#).

Although the site is up and running, it is still a work in progress, no different from our struggle for equity. We are excited about what it is already, and what it can become. That is up to you.