

# FIX THE SYSTEM Get HER elected

March 17th (12:30-14:30 EST)

## Registration: [ngocsw.org](http://ngocsw.org)

This session will highlight the need for change of the electoral systems everywhere, so that women are voted into the political arena. The focus will be on the general working of the systems; on women's opportunities to put their candidacy forward and on what is needed to get women elected.

How did our panelists manage to be elected?  
What is their experience and advice?



## Ways women could influence formal processes...

- **Dórdís Kolbrún Reykþjörð Gylfadóttir** - Minister of Tourism, Industry and Innovation - Iceland
- **Raquel Dodge** - former Attorney General - Brazil
- **Bonita Zarillo** - City Council – Equality, Housing, Clean Air and Water – Canada

## Experiences on how to get in governmental positions...

- **Sonja Ýr Þorbergsdóttir** - Chair BSRB Union Icelandic Federation of State & Municipal Employees
- **Annemiek Jenniskens** – elected board member of a (river basin) water board - the Netherlands.
- **Marjon Verkleij** – former member of a waterboard and chair of a political party in a municipality – the Netherlands

**Feature:** **Mariet Verhoef-Cohen** – President Women for Water Partnership  
**Moderator:** **Lesha Witmer** – SC Women for Water Partnership

*Event flyer for Fix the System: Get Her Elected with all the speaker details.*

## CSW65 – parallel session: Fix the System: Get HER Elected!

Blog by Dawn Marie Lemonds, SI and Mariet Verhoef-Cohen, WfWP

A jam-packed interactive session featured Mariet Verhoef-Cohen as one of the keynote speakers along with other leaders from [Women for Water Partnership](http://www.womenforwater.org) and elected leaders - Rachel Dodge former Attorney General in Brazil, Bonita Zarrillo from Canada, and Sonia Thorbergsdottir from Iceland. (for session recording, click on womenforwater.org YouTube website link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QLvMuX-VBhs>). Interview Annemiek Jenniskens (member Dutch Water Board) and Marjon Verkleij (WfWP, city councillor and chair of local political party: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2OgpQJwlCoU>)

While the number of elected women leaders in the world has increased incrementally over the years, it will be many years before the percentage of elected women leaders is equitable if we continue to do as we have done before. It was astonishing to learn that the last country to give women the vote was Saudi Arabia in 2015! Only 22 women in the world serve as their countries Head of State. We have seen some progress for women have become more of a presence in certain fields such as climate, and it is great to note that many young women have become important activists and thought leaders. However, it is well known that politics has been seen as a “masculine space” where informal rules serve as barriers along with stigma, cultural norms, prejudice, access to finance, and media focus on superficial issues such as how a woman looks etc. It is also alarming that politically motivated violent behaviour is on the rise.

Rather than continuing with gloomy statistics, I want to highlight some of the great suggestions that came from the session to encourage us to find, be and support women who are going to be the elected and appointed leaders we need in all areas.

### **1. Find and create opportunities to run**

- Some leaders have filled a gap left by their husband or noticed when a vacancy was occurring and stepped ahead.
- Promote the need for women on boards, on committees, and in all parts of society, and then find/ be the someone to fill the space.

### **2. When elected, help position other women**

- Position other women where they can work for gender issues – particularly areas where they are greatly underrepresented.

### **3. Staying elected or appointed can be a constant challenge**

- You must be constantly relevant and current to be elected. Hold people accountable in sustaining the appointments of women, or to show valid reasons why they did not.

### **4. Affirmative action laws/ policies**

- This together with quotas may be the way to ensure that women are included.

### **5. Understand the power gap and stand in your power**

- Know that the system was not developed by or for women, and there is no protection from the way it operates. It is not a collaborative environment. It is human nature to want to be safe, which puts people in the position of conforming rather than speaking out. To combat that tendency to conform, you can follow these rules:
- **Push the envelope** to be the change – know the rules and enforce them. Figure out how to be noticed.
- **Protect your mental health** outside the system, where you will get affirmation and support and be an agent of change.
- **Help others that come behind you** and create an improved environment for those who follow in your footsteps.

### **6. Be Prepared, knowledgeable and enthusiastic**

- Become knowledgeable about the role you are pursuing and learn how to present yourself in the best possible way to your audience. Be prepared to have to make sacrifices of time and talent. Know that there might be a cost to your family.

### **7. Support other women and let them support you**

- Women have immense power when we collaborate, clarify agendas and do not compete with each other! Solidarity behind a cause can bring immense change.

## **8. Embrace an abundance mentality – not a scarcity perspective**

- There is room at the table for all of us.

In Short:

### Summary

- Promote mechanisms and campaigns to 'Vote for a woman'
- Support from women's organisations that help to build capacity
- Support from employers: time, flexibility, resilience
- Flexibility at home
- Stereotypes standing in the way



**Let's be courageous and Fix the System with women having seats at every table!**