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POWER & PRIDE

SUPPORTING WOMEN, TWO-SPIRIT, AND LGBTQ+ INDIVIDUALS TO STAND FOR RURAL MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

PREPARED FOR

City of Rossland

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Acknowledgements

Gratefully,

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Executive Summary

Funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada in partnership with the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Power & Pride: Supporting women, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ individuals to stand for rural municipal government was a place-based approach that used participatory action methods to understanding barriers that exist for women, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ communities.

The research was carried out in three phases:
1) Literature review of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ in Canadian politics, with a focus on rural
2) Environmental scan of Rossland's policies, programs, and local context
3) Participatory Action through youth and LGBTQ+ community engagement

The literature review of both gender and sexuality issues on candidacy barriers yielded the following common core barriers:
● Safety concerns
● Lack of confidence & knowledge
● Structure of the job
● Lack of stability (Social issues)
● Voter preference & bias

Identified best practices were largely drawn from experiences of women in politics. This is a reflection of the low body of research on Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ experiences, particularly with a rural and/or local government focus. Recommendations for the City of Rossland were organized and aligned with the Federation of Canadian Municipality's *Run, Win and Lead: Toward Parity in Municipal Politics* framework. This framework identifies four pillars to successful actions:
● Improved Access to Information
● Enhanced Inclusion
● Increased Support
● Improved Governance and Structures

Recommendations spanned internal workplace and policy developments or amendments, participation in events and advocacy, and improving relationships with organizations and groups. They were developed by drawing from the community engagement learnings from youth engagement, community surveys, and interviews.

The overall conclusion from this research is that the City of Rossland is well positioned to create a safe and inclusive community through improved relationship development and taking on a strong leadership role, both within the public and through internal policies and practices.

Introduction

This research considered barriers to women, Two Spirit, and the LGBTQ+ communities for running for public office in rural municipal elections. Based in the southern interior of British Columbia (BC), Rossland has a population of 4,140.[1] Approximately 3.6% of the Canadian population over 15 years old identifies as lesbian, gay, or bisexual.[2] As will be explored in this research, safety remains a major barrier for people publicly disclosing their sexual orientation and, as will be explored in this research, for individuals in rural communities without a network of public support, this safety concern may be amplified.[3]

As is every municipality in Canada, the borders that exist now were not always here and this land was inhabited by First Nations people long before settlers came. The City of Rossland has undertaken efforts to embrace reconciliation efforts within the municipality, both with the Sinixt Nation (e.g., land acknowledgement policy) and for Indigenous individuals who reside here (e.g., reconciliation policy).

This project focused on colonial governance models - the model that exists within the City of Rossland. Furthermore, there are no land reservations within the City of Rossland. Thus, when discussing local government, it is constrained to the municipal ideation as set out in the British Columbia Local Government Act and does not intend to reflect, presume, or be transferred to or with Indigenous models of governance. Under Two-Spirit and Decolonzing Queer Understandings, greater detail on how municipalities can work towards decolonizing their approach to governance is explored.

This research was funded by the Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) and a partnership between the City of Rossland (CoR) and Seven Summits Centre for Learning (Seven Summits). It was designed as a place-based (local knowledge) and participatory action project to allow local voices to be heard to identify local solutions. The research was carried out in three phases:
1) Literature review of Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ in Canadian politics, with a focus on rural
2) Environmental scan of Rossland's policies, programs, and local context
3) Participatory Action through youth and local LGBTQ+ engagement

Given the overall lack of data on rural communities in Canada,[4] place-based research approaches become an opportunity to learn from existing best practices, which are often urban-centric, but ensure a rural lens is applied. For example, while many best practices note that LGBTQ+ candidates should connect with their local Pride organization for support, in rural communities, that organization may not exist.

A note on terminology is required, particularly as it relates to the "rainbow alphabet".[5] This report will use the term LGBTQ+ to represent the demographic that may be commonly known as "queer", although not all individuals appreciate this term and for some it can be derogatory. ""Queer" refers more to civil-society and social-movement politics than to institutional and electoral politics."[6] Additionally, gender, gender-expressions, and gender-diversity are separate from sexual orientation and they are not interchangeable. Caution should be used when applying the LGBTQ+ acronym to a demographic as not all will identify with it.[3]

Two-Spirit is another term that requires greater understanding and awareness from settler society. The proposal submitted to the FCM noted the focus on the LGBTQ2S+ communities. There has been pushback from some Indigenous communities to shift "2S" to the front (i.e., 2SLGBTQ+) to better recognize the unique relationships that Indigenous peoples have with government institutions as well as

combat the co-opting of the Two-Spirit term from non-Indigenous people. Indigenous Peoples and Indigenous Nations are not equivalent to non-profit organizations and have rights that are constitutionally recognized. As efforts for reconciliation move forward in Canada, there may be a need to further separate out Two Spirit from the acronym to better reflect the differences since identifying as Two Spirit may not equate to identifying as LGBTQ+. For this report, Two-Spirit has been intentionally separated from the acronym to allow space to discuss specific aspects related to the municipality's role in decolonization and reconciliation.

Two-Spirit and Decolonizing Queer Understandings

A note of caution about essentializing and homogenizing Two-Spirit understandings and Indigenous culture is required. The breadth of variations across Nations means that no one definition of Two-Spirit can adequately encapsulate every interpretation or experience that exists. This section is intended to allow the City of Rossland a starting point for a conversation on decolonizing their understandings of Two-Spirit and Indigenous representation within the LGBTQ+ communities.

To date, the bulk of research and resources on gender and sexuality have been conducted from a settler colonial perspective: decolonizing these understandings have been peripheral.[7] The gender binary concept was not the norm in Indigenous cultures[8] and, prior to colonization, genders "were as diverse as Indigenous cultures themselves."[9] Of the 200 native languages in North America, two-thirds have words to describe people who are neither men nor women.[9] Pre-colonization, Two-Spirit people were held in esteem, included and loved by their communities,[10] and held various roles related to mediation, healing, visioning, match-making, and parenting.[11]

Both gender and racial categorizations are central to the Canadian settler colonial project, which sought the erasure of Indigenous peoples and continues to this day as a political structure and system.[7,12] Legal avenues, such as the Indian Act, forced people to identify as either male or female. Studies and analyses of power and governance in Indigenous communities reinforces the gender binary by reducing it to male or female roles, ultimately erasing those who do not identify as either/or.[9] Residential schools inflicted homophobic and transphobic ideologies[8] into young children as well as prescribed appropriate gender presentations and roles, such as boys having short hair and girls wearing dresses.[7] By separating boys and girls into different schools or dorms, residential schools also imposed sexualities onto children, denying the varied traditional roles that existed across many Nations.[9] The religious values and beliefs systems condemned any diversity of sexuality or gender identification resulting in Two-Spirit people being killed, forced to assimilate, or to go into hiding.[11]

Settler colonial views of the gender binary are a disruptive reality for Indigenous peoples today. By redefining gender and imposing settler colonial views of gender, expression, and sexuality on Indigenous peoples and their Nations, the settler colonial project maintains a system of erasure on Indigenous culture, beliefs, and values.[7] Through the insertion of strict views of gender and unrealistic social and sexual expectations, Two-Spirit people continue to be pushed further to the margins of society[13] and many Two-Spirit teachings have been lost.[8]

The term 'Two-Spirit' emerged in the 1990s from a meeting of Indigenous activists and scholars in Winnipeg, as part of a broader movement to include and frame Indigenous sexualities differently than had been occurring.[3] Two-Spirit was developed by, and is reserved for,[11] Indigenous peoples.[9] It embodies a deep and complex connection to spirituality, culture, gender roles, and gender and sexual diversity in Indigenous cultures,[11] including varied understandings and roles of Two-Spirit people across

Nations.[10] Two-Spirit people continue to be misunderstood and face discrimination and harassment, contributing to greater mental health issues and a 10% higher suicide rate than other Canadians.[8] They face increased rates of violence, homelessness, poverty, and lack of access to healthcare services.[13] As Indigenous Peoples reclaim their culture, and settler society simultaneously takes meaningful steps towards decolonization efforts that are aligned with the Truth and Reconciliation Recommendations, United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People, and the Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls Calls to Action, Two-Spirit teachings are coming back. Youth, in particular, are pushing the movement by asking questions of their elders, trying to bring that knowledge to the forefront.[8] As Jack Saddleback states[8], there are literal lives to lose if Two-Spirit people continue to be silenced: "it's violence against our own people…it's violence against our own future generations".

Sinixt Nation: A conversation with Marilyn James

In addition to the impacts of colonization many Indigenous people in Canada experienced, in 1956, the Sinixt experienced bureaucratic genocide when the federal government declared the nation extinct to facilitate damming the Columbia River.[25] When it comes to understanding Two-Spirit history, culture, and values system for the Sinixt, as has occurred across Turtle Island, those teachings have largely been erased.

The teachings that have survived emphasize love, acceptance, and respect. Being Two-Spirit is not a mix-up or confusion of genders, but an assignment of alignment between the physical and spiritual selves: the body was assigned one gender but the character aligned itself with another. There are parallels with the settler concept of being transgendered. The belief is that had the technical and scientific skills to perform what is known as gender affirming surgery existed, it may have occurred; however, the person was fully accepted and respected in Sinixt circles, regardless of the presentation of the body.

As the City of Rossland continues with relationship development and reconciliation efforts with the Sinixt Nation and all other Indigenous people who walked on and cared for these lands before us, the evolution of learning what Two-Spirit, gender, and orientation identities mean will have to be similarly dynamic.

Part I: Political diversity in Canada

Despite studies indicating the public believes it's important for women to be elected and that women can positively impact policy, actions, and decisions,[14] the gender imbalance persists in all levels of government in Canada.[15,16] As of July 1st 2022, Canada ranks 59th in the global ranking of women in national parliaments.[15] While British Columbia is leading the country in female municipal councillors, at 36.7%[16], it is still far from parity. For mayoral representation, only 19% municipalities in Canada have a female mayor.[16]

When considering political representation of the Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ communities, the numbers drop even further. While LGBTQ+ candidates have been increasing overall at the provincial and federal levels, most candidates are in urban centres and few rural ridings have fielded LGBTQ+ candidates.[17] In 2021, Blake Desjarlais became the first open Two-Spirit person elected as MP for Edmonton Griesbach. This also represents the first time any openly Two-Spirit person has been elected at any level in Canadian government. While some data does exist on LGBTQ+ representation at the federal and provincial levels, aside from news stories of the "firsts", no collective or historical data could be found for the number of municipal governments in Canada who have a Two-Spirit or LGBTQ+ elected representative. This is problematic for a couple of reasons. First, without data we can never fully

understand the scope of a problem or how to solve it, including addressing barriers and increasing supports. Secondly, and to the core of the issue of lack of representation, it is indicative of the fear that many members of the LGBTQ+ communities face in being both 'out' and 'public'. There are many Two Spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, non-binary, and intersex people who are running *and* representing us but safety concerns have prevented them from being able to fully and authentically live their lives. This feeds back into the first issue of how to address diversity concerns since visibility is a recognized way to do so (in conjunction with other measures).

To date, no person who publicly identifies as Two Spirit or within the LGBTQ+ communities has run for office in Rossland. While some gendered research for women has been conducted – and the City of Rossland is a signatory on a Community Accord regarding the importance of women in the community – gender parity in Rossland government has been declining.[18] The overall body of research on systemic inequities to the Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ communities in Canada is low,[19] with most research being US[20]- and urban-based.[21] Narrowing the focus to both rural[3] and politics, the body of research is even less. In addition, it is recognized that while access to rural data is a common problem across the country, in British Columbia, those gaps are even more prounounced.[4] There is a high-level need for a rural-specific focus of Two Spirit and LGBTQ+ concerns in politics in Canada.

About the Job: Eligibility, Pay, and Hours

While the eligibility for running local government in BC are minimal – one must be 18, be a Canadian citizen, and be a resident of BC for at least six months[22] – the job does require flexibility during the day and the evening to attend meetings and review various materials. No minimum education is required.

In Metro Vancouver, these jobs are largely considered full-time and the pay is commensurate with that role. In the rest of BC, being a councillor is considered a part-time position, with pay ranging from $5,000 - $30,000 a year.[23] Regionally, the number of hours per week spent on local government activities varies and there exists a fluctuation throughout the year, such as budget season where the hours required increase. One survey respondent for this project noted that in their first term the hours were "endless…realistically close to full time" but that as their term is ending and they are stepping down, their hours have reduced to as low as 3 hours per week. Another noted her hours included working on various provincial jurisdiction demands and tallied her time as 52-79 hours per week. Most regional estimates fell between 20-25 hours per week.

Rossland Hours and Pay

In general,[24] the City of Rossland has Regular Council meetings scheduled for the 1st and 3rd Monday of every month at 6:00pm, but exceptions exist. During the months of December, January, July, and August, the meetings are reduced to once a month, however, that may change based on the workload. Special meetings or Committee of the Whole meetings occur once per quarter and arise when there are complex issues that require lengthy discussion, although it is feasible for none to occur in a single year.

Councillors can miss a maximum of 3 council meetings in a row and attend 3 meetings per year virtually, although it was noted the policy will "likely change" when a new building with updated technology is completed. No electronic voting is presently permitted. In addition to council meetings, councillors are expected to act as liaisons throughout the immediate and general communities.

Total number of hours vary greatly during the year. The range given was between 8-50 hours per week, while some councillors noted that 10-12 hours would be the average. An increase in wages for Mayor

and Councillors has been approved for the upcoming 2022-2026 term. Up to this point, and what could be a potential contributing factor to limited diversity, the salaries were $18,691 and $9,532 respectively. Salaries will be increasing to $30,000 and $15,000 per year, respectively, and now align with communities of similar sizes in BC.[23]

Part II: Literature Review – Barriers & Best Practices

An in-depth literature review occurred to understand barriers, motivators, and associated best practices to support the increase of women, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ candidates in rural, local governments. The review began with a focus on women in politics in Canada and drew from resources developed by organizations such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Equal Voice, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, and Women Transforming Cities. During this review, only one resource was found that referenced rural, remote, and Northern communities (see: Brooks, 2015).

The review then explored resources related to Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ in politics. While there is a growing field on LGBTQ+ in politics, the body is small for Canadian politics and is largely constrained to federal or provincial levels. No resources or research related to Two-Spirit individuals in politics could be found. A Canadian organization, Proud Politics, emerged from this search. This organization's focus is to celebrate and support LGBTQ+ candidates.[i] For rural specific concerns of LGBTQ+, the body of research was constrained to two researchers (see: Wendy Hulko and Valerie Korinek), however, neither focused on rural LGBTQ+ politicians, of any level.

Barriers

The focus of this research was to identify ways in which the City of Rossland can improve their workings to better encourage and support local candidacy diversity. Understanding barriers to individuals can help the City prioritize funding, staff time, and policies to increase the likelihood of diverse candidates running, which increases the probability of diverse candidates being elected: a diverse candidate cannot be elected if they don't run. It's important to recognize that, when it comes to diverse candidates, *barriers are more powerful than motivators*.[14] Thus, working towards dismantling the systems that exist to prevent and limit diversity – misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, racism – is required. An internal policy without training or organizational culture change will do little to address the real safety concerns people feel.

There are several Canadian organizations that have conducted studies and analyses of barriers to women running in government, such as the Federation of Canadian Municipalities, Equal Voice, Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women, and Women Transforming Cities. Each of these organizations have identified similar barriers, coming up against similar concerns across elections. Barriers women face are multifaceted and span the individual, structural, and systemic.[25] There are self-imposed barriers (such as a lack of confidence), to public concerns of safety (virtual or in-person), to workplace scheduling conflicts, and the behaviours and preferences of voters.[25,26] These barriers exist for women-identifying and women-presenting individuals, regardless of orientation.[6]

With little research on LGBTQ+ candidates and the political process in Canada, other disciplines and indicators are required to expand on understanding the factors that may prevent LGBTQ+ people from

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[i] Unfortunately, multiple attempts (including website contact form, emails, Facebook messenger, and network connections) failed in connecting with this group. The organization is 100% volunteer run and speaks to the lack of capacity many non-profit organizations face.

running openly as a LGBTQ+ candidate. In addition to the barriers women face, members of the LGBTQ+ communities face overlapping barriers, including overall rates of lower income, increased rates of homelessness, and increased rates of discrimination and harassment. Two-Spirit understandings within the context of settler colonial governments have very little research. To better promote reconciliation and decolonization, Two-Spirit understandings have been pulled out separately to respect the deep connections Indigenous people have to this land as well as the unique relationships and history of genocide that exist with colonial governments.

When considering gender and sexuality, barriers to running are thematically similar across those demographics.[6] The differences are found in the intensity level of those barriers and based on identity factors. Some of those identity factors can be hidden; others cannot. For example, a gay, white male can choose to hide his sexuality and present as a heterosexual, white male for the duration of the campaign (or however long he feels is necessary). A white female who is transgendered can hide the fact that she is transgendered but will still be exposed to misogyny. A bisexual, Asian woman may choose to hide her sexuality but is unable to shed her racial identity, thus, she is exposed to both misogyny and racism.

In the examples above, the person hides a piece of their identity. This prevents people from living their most authentic lives, which increases mental health concerns.[2,19] The reasons individuals choose to hide are based on a variety of fears - including employment loss or opportunities, harassment and violence, or familial rejection.[27,28] These identity factors overlap and intersect (intersectionality[29]) and play a significant role in one's experiences. Some identity factors are more visible than others, which further influences how others may interact with that person.[30,31] In this context, it must be emphasized that the current social and economic systems disproportionately impact Indigenous peoples and equity-seeking groups.

The literature review of both gender and sexuality issues on candidacy yielded the following common core barriers:
- Safety
- Structure, opportunity, & confidence
- Job flexibility & resource constraints
- Lack of stability (Social issues)
- Voter perception & bias

Safety
Safety concerns routinely surface as a top barrier for all equity-seeking groups. The concept of safety may be perceived or real; from the public during a campaign or from the workplace culture at City Hall; and from online and/or in-person. It spans physical safety concerns to exacting a toll on mental health.

Women in politics have routinely cited experiences of harassment, sexism, misogyny, and racism during campaigns and within their workplace.[25,26,32] The Centre for the Study of Democratic Institutions conducted the first analysis[33] of online incivility by monitoring social media feeds of female candidates in the 2019 Canadian federal election. They found that 40% of tweets were uncivil and 16% were abusive and while women and racialized candidates did not necessarily experience higher rates of incivility, the impacts were greater as they amplified real life experiences of threats, harassment, and violence. Messages to women were more likely to be highly gendered and "undermined a candidate's right and ability to participate in politics [with] attacks…on their bodies or appearance, with messages like 'you're

a bimbo'…or comments about female genitalia".[33] A recent Abacus Data study reported that 73% of women cited that online harassment *and* physical safety are barriers to entering politics.[14]

The concept of safety routinely comes up for LGBTQ+ individuals. Particularly for racialized individuals, police presence instills a sense of fear instead of safety. In 2016, Black Lives Matters protested the presence of police in Toronto's Pride march and banned uniformed officers from participating in 2017.[34] Similar bans followed in both Calgary and Vancouver.[34] It was only in December 2020 the Canadian Association of Chiefs of Police issued an apology for the historic mistreatment of the LGBTQ+ communities.[35] For individual concerns of violence, sexual orientation targeting made up over half of the hate crimes reported (53%) and of those hate crimes, 52% were violent. LGBTQ+ individuals are twice as likely to experience inappropriate behaviours, whether in public, online, or in the workplace.[2]

Safety also impacts youth in school. Nearly half (47%) of post-secondary students witnessed or experienced discrimination based on gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation.[36] In the Second National Climate Survey on Homophobic, Transphobia, and Biphobia in Canadian Schools,[27] 64% of all participants reported hearing homophobic comments daily or weekly at school, 57% of trans respondents experienced rumours or lies spread, and 30% of 2SLGBTQ respondents reported cyberbullying, compared to 8% of cisgender heterosexual respondents. In rural schools, the usage of homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic language was more frequent and more prevalent than their urban counterparts, confirming that queer phobia still exists in every school in Canada.[27] In rural areas, with few – if any – safe spaces to gather, this absence of space has a negative impact on individuals' perceptions of safety.[28]

Structure, Opportunity, & Confidence

Indigenous people and equity-seeking groups are typically outside of existing power structures. As outsiders, they may lack the opportunities that are offered naturally to those in power, such as networks, mentorships, and awareness of opportunities. In addition, systemic barriers (e.g., sexist views; racism. See also: Voter perception & bias) requires that they are competing to even start on a neutral or even ground as those in power. The lack of opportunities can often result in a lack of confidence, concerns of acceptance (by the public or by the organization), and contribute to concerns of physical and emotional safety.

One study found that, amongst women, a lack of confidence and knowledge was a greater barrier than safety.[14] A lack of confidence and knowledge was also associated with women as they have smaller formalized networks and have access to fewer networking opportunities due to less representation in corporate leadership, advisory committees, and other community leadership roles.[25,26,37] Despite concentrated efforts within the corporate sector over the last decade, women still only hold 23.4% of board seats and only 4.8% of TSX-companies have a woman serving as CEO.[38] This lack of representation is even more striking for Two-Spirit, LGBTQ+, and racialized peoples[33] with "visible minorities" making up only 6.8% of board positions. For Indigenous peoples, the representation is paltry at less 0.03%: 8 of 2,200 board positions were held by an Indigenous person.[38]

In addition to increasing confidence in the skills required of political leadership (e.g, decision-making, public speaking), these roles are also key to increasing knowledge and awareness about the opportunity to run. While both men and women say it's important to have women elected, men are more than twice as likely to get approached to run for a political role.[14] Reasons for not approaching women to run include the above noted lack of networks; however, that one in five Canadians hold explicit sexist views

cannot be overlooked.[26] When presented with a female-sounding name, women are routinely and significantly ranked lower in competencies, such as intelligence, likeability, and their credentials over men.[26]

Job Flexibility & Resource Constraints

Structural barriers of the job are contributors to preventing women and LGBTQ+ individuals from entering politics. This spans from the campaign - where time, energy, and money are required - to the job itself where time, commitment, and scheduling are concerns. Local government can have some influence on addressing the structure of the job to promote policies that allow flexibility to mitigate some of the concerns.

Women continue to be the primary caregivers and primary house managers within a household.[25] Along employment lines, women continue to dominate fields that require shift work, such as healthcare, social work, and retail.[39] These responsibilities can conflict with the time and energy available for campaigning as well as, if elected, required council meetings and responsibilities.[14,25] Similar to being the primary caregivers, the work-family balance becomes a factor for young women and younger people in general who either want to start a family or have a family with young children.[26]

Money and fundraising for a campaign can be a barrier. While data does not exist at the local level, at the federal level, white men receive more money from their Party than their female counterparts.[15] While less money is required to run municipally, the perception of needing to fundraise can represent a hurdle for some and was a noted barrier for women.[25] Additionally, without a Party system at the municipal level, individuals have fewer overall supports[25,32] (e.g., communications, volunteers, research notes), which can be overwhelming if the candidate is required to develop them on their own. A lack of volunteers can also mean candidates are managing their own social media and being exposed to abuse without sufficient supports in place.[33]

Lack of Stability (Social Factors)

As noted above, certain resources are needed to run, such as money, time, and flexible and/or supportive employment and employers. Stable employment and secure housing are directly related to the status of an individual's mental and physical health. Therefore, having stable employment and safe and secure housing will increase the likelihood a person even considers running for council as their physical and mental needs are being met. Equity-seeking groups and Indigenous peoples experience higher rates of homelessness, under- and un-employment, and fewer services for health.

The gender pay gap continues in Canada and ranges between $0.69 to $0.89 for every dollar a man earns.[39] This is based on many factors including race, age, and disability.[39] Employment indicators show that gay and bisexual men and bisexual women earn less than their heterosexual counterparts. They also receive fewer interviews, lose promotions or raises, and struggle to fit into the workplace.[20] 41% of LGBTQ+ Canadians earn less than $20,000 per year, compared to 25% of the heterosexual population.[2] For transgendered people in Canada, the wage gap is greater and estimates show that 49% earn less than $15,000 per year.[19]

The health system has traditionally ostracized the queer communities[19] and inequities continue to exist for transgendered people in the Canadian healthcare system.[40] Mental health indicators show that poor mental health is pervasive for LGBTQ+ individuals, with rates nearly tripled over the heterosexual population (32% versus 11%).[2] Suicide ideation and mood disorders see similar overrepresentation

within the LGBTQ+ communities, where 40% have contemplated suicide and 41% report a mood disorder (compared to 15% and 16%, respectively).[2]

As is elsewhere in Canada, Rossland is experiencing a housing crisis with ten percent of renters in extreme core housing need and a lack of options for low-income singles, families, and single-family households,[41] the latter of which is more than twice as likely to be headed by a woman.[1] While no data exists locally for LGBTQ+ individuals and housing in Rossland, looking at the broader Canadian population, the risk of homelessness is greater, with 27% of the population likely to experience homelessness or housing insecurity compared to 13% of the heterosexual population.[2] For youth, 25-40% of homeless youth identify within the LGBTQ+ communities[42] and rejection from parental household increases the risk to 35% compared to 24% of non-LGBTQ+ youth.[2]

While many of the systemic issues that cause these social factors to persist may not be directly under the jurisdiction of municipal governments, there are steps that local governments can take to help mitigate some of these negative impacts.

Voter Perception & Bias

While voter preference and behaviour is largely outside the scope of this work, it is important to recognize that stereotypes and perceptions persist[6] in communities and this impacts who gets elected and contributes to the barriers and reasons for limited diversity in candidates. For municipalities, this can shed light on how actions they take can contribute to reducing stereotypes in the community while simultaneously increasing public awareness.

There is a large body of research that exists surrounding voter perceptions. Broadly, they fit into two categories: character and competence.[43] As stereotypes endure,[44] when a candidate steps outside of the heteronormative male expectation of a politician, voters judge, infer, and make decisions based on embedded views.[6] Since women are viewed as less competent, particularly in relation to defence, economy, and crime, the bias that exists creates an immediate hurdle for them to overcome.[44,45] Simultaneously, they must not present themselves as aggressive or competitive or they risk being labelled a "nasty woman".[46]

Voters' decision-making in municipal elections is categorized as "low-information" context. Without party association, voters have no instant means to identify ideologies.[32] The lower media coverage of municipal elections compounds the issue.[32] Voters rely on other cues and tend to vote within the same lines of race,[32] gender,[6,32] or sexual orientation.[6] And while electoral institutions, such as municipalities, appear neutral, they are not: "they express power relations among citizens according to a plethora of factors such as gender, age, social class, residency, and race/ethnicity."[6]

Best Practices

This section provides a brief overview of what motivates an individual to run as well as the best practices that exist to support diverse candidates. Caution should be used when it comes to oversimplifying actions to cover all equity-seeking individuals as the bulk of the literature on best practices is focused on women. The literature covering broader diversity in politics, including orientation, is largely focused on identifying barriers that exist. Drawing from diversity work in the corporate sector can help provide guidance and support similar practices.

There are actions that individuals can take to improve a person's likelihood to run, such as ensuring a diverse set of people are asked, as well improving the odds that an individual is elected, such as being involved in local community organizations in a leadership capacity. These individually-focused actions are outside the scope of this report.

As noted in the Barriers section, barriers are more powerful than motivators.[14] Implementing actions that don't consider the underlying (systemic) issues will, therefore, not create the circumstances to encourage more diversity in local elections. The barriers identified were:
- Safety
- Structure, opportunity, & confidence
- Job flexibility & resource constraints
- Lack of stability (Social issues)
- Voter perception & bias

These barriers are interconnected and affect diverse candidates not only from running but from being elected. This means there are two approaches to consider when trying to increase women, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ candidates in local government, which may be complementary to each other but may have different strategies. The two approaches are:
1) Increasing the number of diverse candidates running.
2) Getting those candidates elected.

While increasing the number of diverse candidates running *may* increase the number of diverse candidates elected, voter behaviours and preferences come into play to impact who they vote for. Sexism, racism, homophobia, transphobia, socio-economic status, and even the media[26], all affect who actually gets elected.[32] Thus, separate strategies may be required, depending on the goal. Nonetheless, an overview of best practices on what assists diverse candidates helps shape the actions a municipality *can* take as well as lends credence to providing a supporting role for advocacy.

Workplace culture change is seen in both the public[37] and private[47] sectors as a primary method for improving diversity. Ensuring employees from diverse backgrounds are not tokenized (for example, "the" representation on a diversity committee) and are included in the organization as valued members will allow candidates to know they are entering an organization where they are valued for who they are as a total person versus a single viewpoint.[32,37]

A common method of embedding organizational change and concurrently ensuring decisions are being considered to improve the livelihood of all is conducting intersectional analyses.[37] Typically called a gender-based analysis plus (GBA+) in Canada,[48] this framework can be applied to all programs, policies, bylaws, and budgets.

Language matters and developing organizational statements explicitly raises awareness of values and ideologies, which leads to the attraction of diverse individuals to the workplace.[47] For LGBTQ+ candidates, language means use of gendered-neutral and preferred pronouns,[19] safe workplace communications, and decorum.[26]

Place and community matters, for women[25] and particularly for rural LGBTQ+ individuals.[21] Municipalities can support the sense of community by supporting community building,[21] safe spaces,[3] formal organizations (who are often serving large geographic areas in rural communities),[28] and improving relationships between Two-Spirit and LGBTQ+ communities and City Hall.[7]

Why do people run?

Given the barriers and potential for negativity, what drives diverse candidates to consider running in the first place? Understanding the reason or motivations, combined with what factors existed for equity-seeking and Indigenous people to run, helps prioritize actions for local government to consider.

While motivations to enter politics broadly fall under the ability to contribute to community,[14] the traits of women who are most likely to consider politics as a career include already being involved in the community in a leadership position plus learning about politics as an opportunity, for career or community contribution.[14] This learning may be informal[16,47] and as simple as being asked to run for office[14] or it may occur in a formal mentorship[25] or workshop capacity.[16,37]

Part III: Rural Realities and Rossland

This section begins to provide place-based information on barriers, solutions, and other considerations. Place-based, or local, knowledge and experiences are key to developing selective policies in rural governments.[49] A review of rural realities highlights both the challenges and strengths that exist. This is followed by the Rossland-specific data that was provided and reviewed as well as local context to understand the state of equity and diversity in the community and area. Lastly, a summary of the community engagement input is provided.

Rural Realities

Dismantling over a century of prejudice, bias, and stereotypes may seem daunting; however, local government does have tools available to assist in mitigating the conditions that prevent Indigenous and equity-seeking individuals from running in local government.[37] There are several unique challenges for rural communities to address. These include:

- The stereotype that rural and small communities are homogenous.[37]
- A small municipal staff required to cover a broad range of issues.[37]
- The distance from other communities can limit the creation of support networks,[37] in-person and virtual.[50]
- Limited data available, particularly disaggregated data.[4]

The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted rural inequities in health services, childcare services, and housing,[50] all of which are identified as barriers to Indigenous peoples and equity-seeking groups. As counter-migration patterns accelerate, these issues, particularly in relation to rising housing costs,[50] will continue to disproportionately impact equity-seeking and Indigenous people.[37]

For local governments, "awareness of power relations in the political reconstruction of rural place will be critical, as new approaches to rural services and supports".[50] This includes expanding the understanding that the role of municipal government extends beyond the infrastructure of water, sewer, and parks and into social planning.[51] Municipalities are key for supporting social inclusion and equity.[37] Councils must take a leadership role in passing policies, directives, and ensuring equity is considered in all decision making.[37] Local government can also represent a significant employer in the region.[52,53] City staff – particularly upper and middle management – are responsible for creating an organizational culture that is safe for everyone and have the power to influence the policies and decisions that occur.[37]

This influence is a rural community's strength[49]: the interconnectedness of people and neighbours means local leaders can shape public opinion[54] in a way that is truly meaningful. The local politician and

staff are not mere figureheads in a building downtown, but are integral members embedded within the fabric of the community.[49] Rural governments are adept at knowing how to collaborate across multiple jurisdictions and governments[49] and there are many examples that demonstrate the success of this cross-collaboration and interdisciplinary approach across social, economic, and environmental spheres.[ii]

Partnerships and relationships already exist – formal and informal – and can be drawn on to promote and support equity and diversity policies and actions. Known as social capital, these relationships are "a form of glue, able to hold people and groups together."[54] However, it is recognized that for long-term initiatives to be sustainable in rural areas, assistance from senior governments is required.[55]

Rossland

A full historical analysis of the makeup of candidates and elected officials was not possible within the scope of this project. The following data should be viewed with a high level of caution. Precautions include that only four data sets are available for review and that this data compares both three- and four-year council terms. In terms of analyzing this data to understand rates of gender-diversity, the binary male/female presentation means that those who wish to identify in other means cannot, and/or a person is masking their gender. Presented by CivicInfo BC[18], the benefit of this data helps demonstrate the importance of collecting and presenting disaggregated data. Through this data, we can see there has been an overall reduction of women running in the last four municipal elections, which is opposite the provincial trend. This insight is a valuable question worth exploring.

Figure 1 Percentage of Women Running, 2008-2018
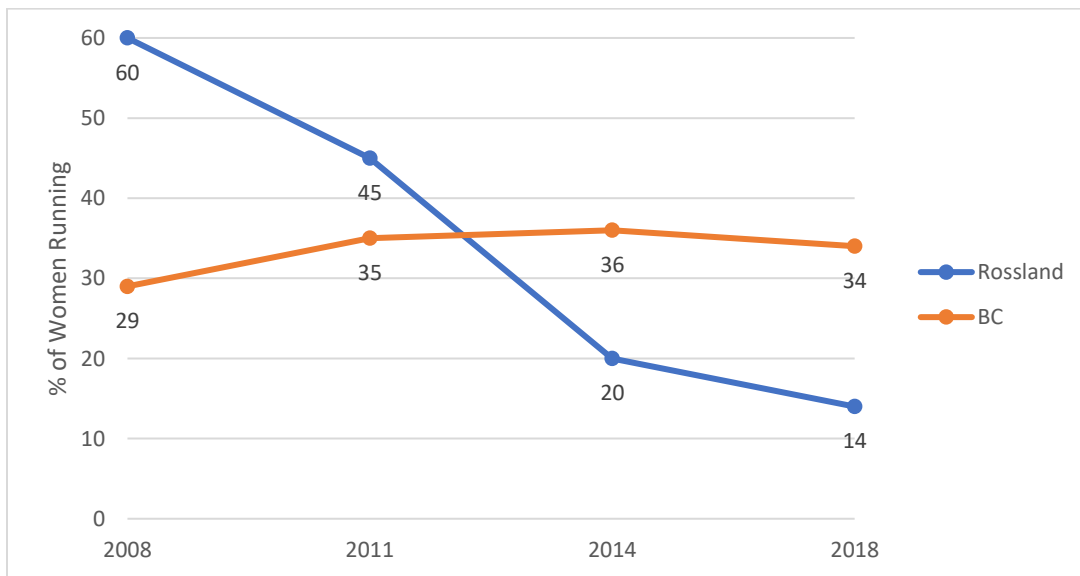
Environmental Scan: Policies, documents, programs

As part of the proposal, harassment policies, training, and other relevant documents were reviewed to understand areas for improvement of gender, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ competencies within the City of Rossland. This environmental scan is intended to flag areas for updating. Human resources and appropriate legal teams should be consulted.

[ii] See Canadian Rural Revitalization for examples https://sorc.crrf.ca/

The following documents and policies were provided for review:

- 2018 Municipal Package
- HR Policies:
    - HR 13 – Anti-Racism Policy
    - HR 12 – Respectful Workplace Policy
    - HR 5 – Employee Step Discipline
    - HR 3 – Employee Rules & Regulations Policy
- Corporate Policy Manual: C6 – Ethics, Conduct, and Conflict of Interest Policy

Analysis:

- Six gender-binary (he/she) references were found throughout all documents
- Some documents are to be updated this year (2022)
- One explicit Indigenous mention or consideration was made (HR 13)
- Sex and gender are noted as grounds for harassment or discrimination in some documents
- Sex is noted as grounds for discrimination in HR-12
- Step discipline lumps harassment under a general heading
- Code of conduct does not include gender or orientation

Additional inquiries were made to identify other City of Rossland documents, formal and informal actions, events, or activities that may support or inhibit women, Two-Spirit, and LGBTQ+ communities from running in local government. Five items were noted: 1) Community Accord; 2) Youth Action Network – LGBTQ+ group; 3) Pride Flag; 4) Rainbow Crosswalk; and 5) Rossland Summit School Pride Parade.

1) **The Community Accord** was a 2008 initiative from the Women Creating Change project.[iii] The project focused on the barriers and local solutions to women's economic security in the Lower Columbia Region, including conducting a gender-based analysis (GBA), the first of its kind in the area. The Community Accord was developed for municipalities, organizations, and businesses to recognize that 1) women make up 51% of the local population and 2) their contributions to the community are valuable and have largely gone unrecognized.

   Analysis: Today, this document would be considered performative as no actions, follow-up, or recommendations were associated with it. At the time, combined with the GBA, it shed light on the situation for women in the area. While the City of Rossland was a signatory, no initiatives, training, policies, or other actions have occurred since that time and the Accord does not appear to be used as a building block for promoting gender-specific analyses.

2) The **Youth Action Network (YAN)** has a LGBTQ+ club that has seen many iterations and varying uptake and attendance since its inception in 2015 (originally called Creating a Supportive Rossland). Initiatives include the Rainbow Crosswalk, window stickers for businesses in town to demonstrate a safe space, community video discussing inclusivity, and meet-ups with other Kootenay queer youth. In winter 2022, the club started again with 6 youth and speakers from programs such as Trans Connect (Nelson-based) but folded in the Spring as attendance slowed.

[iii] The author was the project manager for Women Creating Change.

Analysis: While not exclusively intended for younger youth, YAN tends to attract youth under the age of 13. This has created a gap for teenagers, particularly for those between 15-17 years old. The LGBTQ+ club is subject to the interest and capacity of the Director. Limited funds and limited staff may contribute to the lack of consistency.

3) The **Pride Flag** at City Hall was first raised in 2016. Creating a Supportive Rossland (from YAN) brought the request to council at the same time as a request for a Rainbow Crosswalk (see below). A grant was secured to purchase the flag and a flag raising ceremony occurred with Mayor Moore, YAN, and members of the public.

   Analysis: Raising the flag is an important and symbolic demonstration of support for Pride. However, the history surrounding the flag and what the flag stands for does not appear to be well known within City Hall, which leads to the conclusion that raising it is largely performative. The flag itself is also an older version that is not inclusive of trans people or racialized individuals.

4) In 2015, the Youth Action Network fundraised for a **Rainbow Crosswalk**, located between Rossland Summit School and the Youth Action Network's building. Crosswalks can be done with either more expensive (i.e., highway grade) paint, as Trail Pride did, or with cheaper paint that requires reapplication each year. Rossland YAN has gone with the reapplication of paint each year.

   Analysis: This grassroots initiative brings people together and is another visible indicator of Pride support in Rossland. The location is prominent and receives significant foot and vehicular traffic. Every year, the re-painting becomes a public event during Pride Month (or as weather allows).

5) 2022 was the first year Rossland Summit School organized a **Pride Parade** and the first Pride Parade in Rossland. While intended to be for students, parents and community members showed up in support. An estimated 200 people were involved and walked from the school, through downtown, and back up to the school.

   Analysis: Overall the event was well received, with businesses and traffic (foot and vehicular) cheering as the parade went by. One downtown business posted a public appeal against it. The event was not publicly advertised and was during the middle of the work and school day, preventing many from participating. While one city councillor did attend, there was not explicit support from the City of Rossland on this initiative, staff or council. It is recognized that this may have been due to no invitation or advertising.

Regional Context

Supports

Rossland is part of a larger region in which many commute for work, errands, healthcare, and recreation. Particularly for rural areas, working with other organizations and municipalities is one way to overcome limited resources and lower population densities. Thus, what occurs outside of City Hall limits and municipal boundaries must be taken into consideration (both positive and negative). Events, protests, and public proclamations from local businesses impact a person's perception of safety. Presence of the Freedom Convoy, Yellow Vest movement, Sons of Odin, Confederate Flags, and 'thin blue line' stickers on RCMP uniforms send clear messages to the LGBQT+ communities that they are not

welcome. These movements and symbols have strong roots in the 'alt-right' ideology that seeks to oppress LGBTQ+, racialized, women, and Indigenous peoples and their inherent rights and freedoms. All of the above have had a presence in the Lower Columbia region and/or in Rossland itself. To paraphrase an interviewee from the project: by tolerating organizations and movements that have these beliefs a little bit means it's tolerated a lot (see: LGBTQ+ Engagement section).

Simultaneously, the region has an overwhelming number of programs, events, and supports that explicitly recognize the need for increasing social inclusion and diversity. Celebrating the efforts is important to countering negative events. By celebrating the positive, it normalizes the conversation that diversity is here and wanted, creating social inclusion, cohesion, and improving safety of the many.

The following is a list of organizations and events that have supported gender, LGBTQ+ communities, Indigenous reconciliation or decolonization, or other inclusion and equity efforts. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list but a sample of organizations that this project was made aware of.

Rossland Library

The library has participated in several events related to gender; LGBTQ+ events and authors; Indigenous displays and authors; displays, lists, and Book Club suggestions or options that celebrate racialized authors and creators; materials and information on anti-racism and how to be an ally; and promotions of various cultural events and celebrations. The general reception to displays and content has been positive but the underlying theme from library patrons highlights a disbelief that issues on gender, identity, orientation, Indigeneity, or race exist in Rossland. See Appendix A for a full list of events, as supplied by the Rossland Library.

Rossland Museum and Discovery Centre

The Rossland Museum and Discovery Centre (RMDC) has increased their public outreach and events related to inclusion and diversity, with a particular focus on reconciliation with the Autonomous Sinixt. The RMDC now hosts an annual event on Indigenous Peoples Day as well as providing online content and resources throughout Indigenous History Month. In 2020-2021, a major women's history research project (a first) was completed to develop online content and a history brochure to share for International Women's Day and Women's History Month. 2022 is marking the first year the RMDC is embarking on LGBTQ+ content and research. They attended the 2022 Trail Pride event in an effort to solicit more information for future projects and events, including increasing content for Pride Month.

Gold Fever Follies

The Gold Fever Follies is a local musical revue based on Rossland's history that tells stories based on real events, people, and local lore (along with artistic licence for embellishment) and has a history of employing members of the LGBTQ+ communities.

In 2016, Casey Gray wrote the first script (*Love and Business*) that began to highlight and address the inequities between men and women after becoming aware of how women had been written out of history. This was also the first year that a First Nations land acknowledgement occurred. Ever since, the scripts have had a theme of women and the issues they face. In 2021, *The Great Invention* introduced Butch Manly and Ethyle Padonka, two characters who did not fit the cis-binary world: Butch preferred women's clothing and Ethyle was constantly fighting to be accepted in the 'man's world'.

Trail Pride

Trail Pride is an informal group (it is not a formally incorporated society or charity) that came together in 2018 to advocate at the City of Trail for a Rainbow Crosswalk. In 2019, the crosswalk was painted in a highly visible area and was a result of joint efforts from local community members, businesses and organizations, and with near unanimous support from the City of Trail Council and Mayor. The group hosted their first Parade in 2019, which was well attended, and works to maintain a social media presence. The group is fully reliant on volunteers and is largely run by one individual. COVID-19 affected the group's ability to host subsequent parades and events throughout 2020-2021 but, in 2022, Pride events occurred in Trail (Kootenay West Distillery) and Rossland (Rossland Brewery) as well as a parade (August).

Trail and District Arts Council

The Trail and District Arts Council (TDAC) offers programming that supports marginalized and underrepresented groups. While informal, part of their analysis in choosing programming is based on supporting and promoting content that has an equity, diversity, and inclusion focus. Routinely, they have put on shows and events that push the gender-binary boundaries and showcase various underrepresented demographics, including Indigenous artists, women, and LGBTQ+ communities. Internally, they participate at Pride events and continue to support reconciliation efforts with the Sinixt Nation.

One event is worth commenting on in detail: All Ages Drag Show. A first of its kind in 2019, this event included a week of workshops for youth that focused on authenticity and being one's self. Comments from parents were emotional and grateful, such as seeing their kids smile for the first time in five years. 650 people attended the event and while it was highly rewarding, it came with challenges and pushback from the Trail-area public. Pushback included complaints called into funders, posters removed, and being trolled online. A police report was filed to the local RCMP detachment – the response from the RCMP was calling TDAC to inquire whether they could attend and show up in support of the event. The general event was highly rewarding and something that was commented on by local LGBTQ+ survey respondents as highly positive and welcomed.

Trail RCMP

While the LGBTQ+ communities in Canada have had poor relationships with the RCMP, the Trail RCMP received several positive comments from local survey and interviewee respondents. An informal relationship was initially developed with a RCMP member and a local LGBTQ+ individual. This now has extended to awareness within the City of Trail, as well as a relationship with the Trail Pride organization and invitation and attendance to Pride events, including the Pride Parade. Internally, the detachment provides officers the opportunity to wear Pride pins, of which the majority of officers do wear. In addition to Pride, the detachment has also participated in the annual vigil for the National Day of Remembrance and Action to End Violence Against Women.

There is the explicit recognition from the detachment that more education, awareness, and support need to continue. Although no hate crimes have been reported locally that have targeted orientation or gender expression, the presence of these symbols and their groups does contribute to feelings of fear in the LGBTQ+ communities. This includes ensuring officers are not wearing symbols (e.g., pins; stickers) that are associated with groups who have ties to oppressive ideologies. The local detachment is taking active steps to develop a safe organizational culture by showing up to events and encouraging members to take the various equity and diversity trainings that exist.

Part IV: Participatory Action: Community Engagement

There were two methods for participatory action. These segments provided a place-based understanding of rural concerns. This feedback was incorporated to ensure locally relevant solutions. The two methods were:
1) Youth engagement program
2) Local surveys and interviews

Youth Engagement Program

Partnering with Seven Summits Centre for Learning, a group of 4 youth (ages 16-17) led a series of discussions with local, provincial, and federal politicians and organizations. With guidance and support from the project lead and the Seven Summits administrator, youth developed questions for the discussions and led those conversations.

Four discussions occurred and were a combination of virtual and in-person:
1) Amita Kutner, Interim Green Party Leader and the 1st trans person to lead a federal political party.
2) Trail Pride, local Pride organization.
3) Gay men in local politics panel, 4 men in local Kootenay government that included elected officials and staff.
4) Women in politics panel, including MLA Britney Anderson and Rossland elected officials Kathy Moore and Janice Nightengale.

From these discussions, the committee presented to Rossland council on what they learned as well as recommendations for council on how they can improve LGBTQ+ rights in Rossland. Their presentation and learnings highlighted two themes:
1) Education and awareness on LGBTQ+ issues.
2) Building partnerships with schools to increase political awareness in youth.

These themes formed the following recommendations for Council to invest in:
1) Implement diversity training for City Council that is recurring and allows for previous councillors to mentor the new councillors on how to apply learnings.
2) Bridge the divide and take the initiative to present and work with schools in Rossland.

Lastly, they concluded the presentation to council by asking them to reflect upon their actions to date with this question: *Have the past actions regarding LGBTQ+ issues and rights had more of a short-term positive effect (performative) or a deep lasting impact (substantive)?*

As far as impact of the project, each youth indicated it was highly positive and beneficial. Prior to the project, their knowledge of local government and municipal affairs was vague with two of the four youth previously considering running for public office. Post-project, three of four youth are now considering this a viable option and all of them reported a substantial increase in understanding of local government.

Local Surveys and Interviews

The surveys and interviews were broken into two streams, one for women in local politics and another for LGBTQ+ issues, both locally and in politics. The primary focus of this project was to work with and

understand barriers to LGBTQ+ people in rural areas which has led to the bulk of time and research spent on that topic. Nonetheless, understanding gender barriers to women locally assists in understanding local issues and concerns and relates to the gender expression of women and trans women.

Women in Politics

This piece focused on women in local politics in the Rossland, Trail, and Castlegar region. A survey was developed and distributed with assistance from Mayor Kathy Moore, and Councillor Janice Nightingale. The survey questions can be found in Appendix C. Both Mayor Moore and Councillor Nightingale participated in the Women in Politics Panel and were available to clarify information throughout the project, aiding in understanding Rossland government workings.

Survey Summary

The survey was distributed in April 2022 and received eight respondents, seven of whom were still serving at the time of research. The earliest date of election was from 2005, which also represents the longest serving elected official from the respondents. Seven of the eight respondents also served more than one term.

While the specific reasons for running varied, themes of wanting to see change for the community or concern with council decisions/direction were threaded through. These responses are aligned with the best practices literature on why women choose to run. Of note, one respondent specifically mentioned she was asked and felt it would be a good career progression. Another also included the desire to instill positive change to *"combat the negative right-wing activities that are increasing"*.

Regarding employment, five respondents noted they were employed full-time when they first ran, one was retired, and two were unemployed (one of whom was a stay-at-home parent). Six then indicated that council did affect their employment. Two women indicated their employers were not supportive. Responses included that *"a lot of"* vacation time was used to do council work and that their *"boss hated that I had other outside interests and felt it took away from my energy at work".* Another respondent noted she *"had to flex my hours"* to make it work. One had to step down from her employment role in order to serve. Two commented on the impacts it had on their family life and children, with one noting council provided her a more in-depth understanding of local issues and the other noting how it took time away from the family structure.

The amount of time and money spent on the first campaign varied widely and was based on memory. The time ranged from not campaigning to campaigning for *"days"* and *"40 hours a week".* One respondent noted she *"door knocked all of my area – about 2,000 residents"* whereas another provided an informal approach of just talking to friends and neighbours. Money spent was between $100-$3,500. Where the dollars were spent was not asked but respondents volunteered answers such as mailers and pamphlets.

For supports and networks, three indicated they had small support campaign teams of between five to nine volunteers and five indicated their teams were between zero to four people. Informally, friends and family provided emotional supports and encouragement. Five indicated they had strong or very strong supports, one ranked it as average, and one ranked as weak.

When asked whether there was hesitancy in running, three respondents indicated a concern. Specific concerns from these respondents included name-calling and the *"nasty nature of social media"*, their age and *"not being accepted"*, and whether they were *"strong enough"*. One additionally mentioned concern for work-life balance related to children. For those who indicated no concern, two specifically mentioned their previous experience in community leadership roles.

Safety concerns or bullying was realized by five of the eight respondents. Of the three who were worried about it prior to entering, all three commented on experiencing issues. Bullying or harassment was experienced from the public, media, and staff. Two respondents elaborated with specific examples. One commented that even though no real threat was made, that a known alt-right movement group member knew where she lived and that made her nervous. Another relayed that she received explicit physical harm threats from the public who also spread rumours. When the media became involved, a lack of fact checking led to mistruths propagating.

Analysis
Eight respondents are not a statistically relevant sample; however, these stories yield insights into real life experiences of people in this area and contribute to the overall understanding of barriers in rural communities. This survey highlights the existence of alt-right movements in the region, which can lead to increased sense of vulnerability when those individuals know where you live. While race and orientation questions were not asked, using intersectionality we know those questions of safety and vulnerability would be heightened.

Aside from one respondent who indicated she did no campaigning, all respondents spent time and money on their campaigns, often with minimal supports. For women with family obligations or employers who do not support their efforts to run, this may create conflict or a tense situation as time and emotional energy are used. As rural local government wages generally require a person to have another source of income, when a person has childcare requirements on top of that, the combined resources (i.e., time and money) may result in a barrier too difficult to surmount.

Lastly, the women expressed a desire for change and serving their communities. This supports the best practice that asking women who are already leaders in their community (whether formally or informally) can help increase the number of women who run. However, diligence and a concentrated effort to approach women who represent all aspects of the community – age, race, orientation, diverse abilities – is required. Relying solely on who is the Chair of a Board will only continue to perpetuate those who are already in positions of power instead of bringing together new voices from underrepresented demographics.

LGBTQ+ Communities: Local and Political Contexts
Two methods of data collection occurred for understanding LGBTQ+ issues and concerns. As with women, these are not intended to be a statistical sample. However, in the void that is LGBTQ+ in politics and, specifically, rural politics, this research provides a substantial contribution to that available body of work.

The first involved a survey sent out to the local community, defined as the Lower Columbia Region plus Castlegar. It was distributed via the Trail Pride, the City of Rossland, and the researcher's personal networks. A total of 18 people responded, however, one was omitted as a false respondent for voicing their concerns that the "agenda is sick".

The second was a targeted outreach to LGBTQ+ people in politics for interviews. A total of ten people were interviewed, 8 of which have been or are directly involved in politics. The eight people represented local, provincial, and federal politics and were either staff, elected officials, or had run in an election as a publicly out individual. The remaining two were targeted to ensure proper representation to the transgendered community as well as the local community.

A key takeaway that was heard from all interviewees and seen throughout survey respondents was the need for municipalities to demonstrate leadership. For the interviewees in rural areas and from the public responses of the survey from the LGBTQ+ communities in the region, the message was that the City has the power to make their community safe, welcoming, and inclusive: *"City has to take an extraordinary role leadership role and go far beyond community expectation"*.

Survey Summary

Seventeen legitimate responses were received for the community-based survey. This survey was intended to provide a high-level overview of themes related to representation in local government from the LGBTQ+ communities in the Lower Columbia and Castlegar region. The survey asked questions related to context and issues experienced by LGBTQ+ individuals that may prevent them from running as well as the role of local government.

Of the respondents, 82% (14) have lived in the area for over five years. The other three were distributed equally between three to five years, one to three years, and less than one year. For relationship status, 70% (12) indicated they were in a form of long-term committed or married relationship. 23% (4) noted they were single and one defined themselves as in a new relationship. 88% (15) consider themselves publicly "out".

An open-ended response was provided for gender identification. Three people skipped the question but the remaining 14 provide a wide variety of identities. Appendix B provides the full list of how people identify themselves. The breadth of responses demonstrates the constraining nature of "male/female" and "homosexual/heterosexual" for many people as well as the wide variety of ways in which people view themselves.

When it comes to participation in LGBTQ+ events or organizations (e.g., Pride Parades), 35% (6) people indicated they were involved in some type of formal event or organization, such as Trail Pride. An additional 17% (3) were involved in informal activities, such as a private event. The remaining 47% (8) indicated they were not involved in any type of activities, events, or organizations. Of these, three people indicated they were either busy or not interested. Three indicated they were unfamiliar with any options to participate in. One person commented that there was no particular reason but reflected that their social life did not revolve around their sexuality. The final respondent mentioned fear as a driving force as they had "already been attacked by [Rossland residents] due to my sexual identity".

When it comes to feelings of safety and available supports in the region, 47% (8) indicated they feel safe and comfortable. The remaining nine provided ideas for how to improve safety through a variety of supports. The suggestions largely fell into the three broad themes of visibility (such as flags, signage, and events), safe spaces for gathering (including businesses identifying as safe spaces), and training for local government officials and staff. Respondents also commented on experiences of receiving slurs or other forms of harassment while in public.

Lastly, the role of government and key messages to Mayor and Council received a variety of suggestions. The desire for leadership, training, and safe spaces consistently came through. Throughout the survey, elements of listening to the communities were also brought forward. This was seen in the expressions of appreciation for conducting this survey and having the ability to provide input but also in the opposite: that people have felt ignored or invisible. To honour these voices, Appendix C provides the responses to these questions.

Interview Summary

Ten people were interviewed to understand specific barriers and gain insights on running for political office. Of that, two people were identified to provide additional understandings for the transgendered community as well as the local region. While efforts were made to speak with rural individuals or people who had spent a significant time in rural areas, the scope required being flexible and was dependent on who was willing to speak. Seven of the ten are rurally located; two live in the Lower Mainland; and one lives in Victoria but spent a substantial amount of time in rural B.C.

When asked how they identify, the following is a breakdown of gender and orientation as provided:

Table 1: Gender and orientation of interviewees

Gender	Male	Female	Non-binary or Gender-fluid	Two-Spirit	*Trans*
	3	4	2	1	2
Orientation	Gay	Lesbian	Bisexual	Not-disclosed	
	3	3	2	2	

In contrast to the public survey, respondents identified largely within an "easy to present table". The question was asked as an open-ended response and often generated conversation about the need to label and classify themselves.

One series of questions sought to understand how LGBTQ+ rights and issues have evolved and how far there is to go by envisioning a chapter book. The purpose was to understand the perception, as a LGBTQ+ person, of where LGBTQ+ people fit into society and, specifically, in politics. Table 2 provides a breakdown of responses, by order of how far we are in a chapter book.

Table 2: If LGBTQ+ and politics was a chapter book

Location in Book	Current Chapter Name	Final Chapter Name
Introduction	n/a	Turtle Island and a Two-Spirit Place
Early	We're Not as Strange as You Think We Are	We Live in an Equitable Society
Beginning	The Big Ask is Happening	TBC (there is no end)
Beginning	n/a	When Even the Rainbow is Not Enough
Beginning	Getting Started	Love
¼ way	We're Still F*****	Metamorphosis
Halfway	Turning Pages	For the Next Generation
Halfway	To Adapt or to Transform?	It's Never Over
Near End	On the Cusp	The New Normal

The takeaway from these questions is that LGBTQ+ people are not treated as equal members of society. Aside from one respondent, most indicated there is still a significant way to go. Related to this insight, four interviewees highlighted the delay of LGBTQ+ people in politics in rural versus urban centres, estimating the Kootenays is between ten to twenty years behind Vancouver and noting the first publicly out lesbian Vancouver councillor was elected in 2002. Additional comments further indicate that the issues and rights of transgendered people are similarly delayed and speaks to the differences that people experience and the danger of homogenizing all LGBTQ+ people into "one" group.

The remaining questions involved understanding the local culture and context of their community and workplace towards LGBTQ+ communities, the role a municipality should have in advancing LGBTQ+ rights, key areas that the municipality can have an impact on, and the general perception of barriers that continue to persist. The questions were developed and intended to generate insights on peoples' experiences in politics with a goal of identifying key areas of concern as well as where a municipality could focus their efforts. Comments were grouped by similar themes and the following themes emerged (in no order):

- Safety concerns
- Importance of visibility
- Rural realities
- Coming out stories
- Autonomy and self worth
- Employment, money, and health
- Municipality's role
- Outside the municipality – individuals, schools, organizations
- Media's role
- Supports to run
- Hope for the future and youth

When considering the five core barriers that were identified, the comments can be reorganized and viewed as either a barrier or as a solution to that barrier.
The five barriers identified were:
1. Safety
2. Structure, opportunity, & confidence
3. Job flexibility & resource constraints
4. Lack of stability (Social issues)
5. Voter perception & bias

This information was merged with the best practices and considered from a rural lens to develop the recommendations. Table 3 is a sample of comments from interviewees to demonstrate the development of final recommendations.

Table 3 Sample of recommendations development

Interviewee comment	Barrier	Best practice solution
Freedom trucker rally, flags everyone, F*** Trudeau. Do we have to get so violent about it?	Safety	Public statements condemning actions

So unsafe, especially for trans people [who] face high rates of insult and interrogation in bathrooms	Safety	Install gender neutral bathrooms in all municipal or municipally-funded buildings
You're going to need someone to unload and listen to you	Structure, opportunity, & confidence	Equity-focused (safe space) candidate workshop
[There area] secret parties – you have to know somebody. There's a password to the gay community	Structure, opportunity, & confidence	Support safe spaces and events
Culture of organization, it's [discrimination] either tolerated or it's not. If it's tolerated a little bit, it's tolerated a lot.	Job flexibility & resource constraints	Update codes of conduct, HR policies, and discipline policies to include gender and sexual orientation
Anytime you are changing a bylaw, voting on something….it needs to be analysed through that [GBA+] lens	Job flexibility & resource constraints	GBA+ training for all staff
Would I buy a house here [Kootenay town]? I don't know who I'll be next to. Do I want to buy a home if I end up between two homophobes?	Lack of stability (Social issues)	Support housing developments that are explicitly LGBTQ+ safe and/or ensure housing partnerships are explicitly LGBTQ+ safe
Not just access but awareness. You may be a rural doctor's "first"	Lack of stability (Social issues)	Advocate for LGBTQ+ health resources, access, training
Most oppression takes place from parents and violence from parents	Voter perception & bias	Show up to public events as official representation
To be a visibly queer candidate is really rough. It's so hard; really scary.	Voter perception & bias	Issue statements on various celebratory days, events, and months

Part V: Recommendations

This section focuses on areas that rural local governments can address. The recommendations are based on the best practices in literature, input received from community engagement and interviews, and considered with a rural lens. The actions may require additional resources or reallocating resources that exist, but all are within the scope and jurisdiction of a local, rural government.

The FCM developed a guide to address gender parity in local government, called *Run, Win, and Lead: Toward Parity in Municipal Politics*.[16] The vision for this framework is to have women of all identities, ages and backgrounds *Run* for municipal office; *Win* their campaigns; and *Lead* on issues of importance for their constituents. While the purpose is to address gender, many of the barriers women face are similarly faced by gay, bi, and trans men as well as people who are non-binary and Two-Spirit. Through the work that FCM has done, 4 pillars of intervention were identified:
1) Improved Access to Information
2) Enhanced Inclusion

3) Increased Support
4) Improved Governance and Structures

The pillars are described and include an example of what Rossland is doing along with an opportunity to improve. The recommendations chart that follows is not exhaustive nor static: there are unlimited opportunities to improve on relationships, structures, policies, training, and inclusive decision-making and many are confined by time, money, or creativity. The intention is not to complete this list, shelve it, and assume that all has been accomplished. Equity and society are dynamic and, to quote an interviewee's "final chapter" response: "It's Never Over".

Improved access to information
This pillar relates to addressing gaps in knowledge for and to candidates, collecting data (particularly disaggregated data), and disseminating and sharing information with organizations and municipalities to increase Indigenous and equity-seeking groups. For rural areas, this takes the form of collaborating with partners to collect and share data, best practices, and resources on a regional scope. For equity, this means looking at the barriers, such as childcare, transportation, or safety, and determining solutions to mitigate those barriers.

An example the City of Rossland is doing to improve knowledge and awareness of the job and opportunities are the workshops for interested candidates. The City of Rossland, alongside regional partners, are assisting in improving information through candidate workshops. One is a regional workshop, being hosted in Castlegar, for interested candidates. A second one is an informal networking session with councillors at a local pub for interested candidates.

To improve upon these workshops and attract women, Two-Spirit, and members of the LGBTQ+ communities, conducting a GBA+ yields that attendance requires transportation (particularly for Castlegar), that childcare is available for those who have children, and that those in attendance feel safe enough to ask questions in a broader audience. An option to mitigate a portion of these concerns would be to host a safe space workshop for equity-seeking individuals with options for transportation to the workshop.

Enhanced Inclusion
Enhanced inclusions address the broader social challenges and systemic issues that exist. This includes, but is not limited to, discrimination and harassment related to gender, race, age, orientation, and economic status, both in-person and online. For municipalities, this pillar becomes a focus on uncovering where misogyny, racism, homophobia, and transphobia exist and taking advocacy on and public leadership steps to address it. This may take the form of press statements and signing on to charters, coalitions, or other requests to senior governments that address prejudice and bias in the community, province, and country. In rural governments, these public statements become integral to shaping how the community is perceived by newcomers and residents alike: these statements send a message to residents and those who identify as equity-seeking that all are welcomed and contribute to developing inclusion. Note that welcoming and inclusivity are different (See: Governance and Structure).

An example for Rossland is the raising of the Pride flag. This sends a clear message that City Hall is open, welcome, and a safe space for members of the LGBTQ+ communities to enter, particularly if being harassed or threatened. This action can be improved by updating the flag to the newer inclusive one while simultaneously implementing training and updating policies (See: Governance and Structure) to ensure greater awareness and understanding.

Increased support

Supports are related to the actions, mechanisms, and processes that assist equity-seeking individuals to overcome the barriers or balance out the additional challenges that exist. For example, in a larger municipality there may be supports available for networking and mentorship or a partnership can be developed with the local transgendered advocacy group to develop supports for trans candidates and councillors. In a rural community, where funds are less and specific groups may not exist due to population density, this may take the form of developing stronger relationships and partnerships with regional organizations, governments, and school districts and increasing the formality to ensure sustainability and continuation of informal networks.

For example, in Rossland, the mayor is part of an informal network of female mayors in the province. With only two female elected officials in Rossland, creating a Rossland-specific "women in politics" organization or network would not be feasible, effective, or sustainable. A larger body, such as the Association for Kootenay Boundary Local Government (AKBLG), may be better suited to develop a network opportunity that reaches out to interested female candidates and advocates for organizations, such as Equal Voice, to develop a regional chapter or host workshops.

Increased support also relates to broader social and systemic conditions that exist, such as homelessness, health access, and personal safety. People without safe, secure, and stable living conditions will be unlikely to consider entering politics. The role of the local government in this context is two-fold. First, the City can take direct action by ensuring inclusive practices that support safe spaces are held by all partners and their associated programs or services. This may be the partner has stated policies and practices in place or it may be an agreement to a code of conduct the City has developed. Secondly, by embracing advocacy efforts to address systemic issues to senior levels of government, City can sign coalitions, charters, and work with regional networks to seek change.

For systemic issues, the in-progress Mid Town Housing project is filling a crucial gap in the community for accessible housing. As a project partner, the City of Rossland has a responsibility to ensure that the partners can provide a safe space for applicants and residents: in short, to reassure that a person will not be turned away due to gender expression or orientation. This can be done through a Code of Conduct or a Partnership Expectations Agreement that outlines the conduct and/or expectations of partners.

Improved Governance and Structures

This pillar focuses on the structures and policies that exist (or don't exist) that limit equity-seeking people from serving their community. There is also an emphasis on relationships with stakeholders to improve policies, structures, and overall decision-making that occurs. For municipalities, this pillar demands an internal review on those structures and policies that create barriers for people, such as uninformed policies that perpetuate or create issues of inequitable access to services. Informed and inclusive decision-making is the goal. As noted in Enhanced Inclusion, rural governments are key leaders in the community. They are also often a major employer in the community.

The value for rural municipalities to undertake meaningful reflection of their structures and policies means they can ensure that the responsibility of equity concerns is distributed amongst everyone instead of reliant on a single staff person, which is often a resource that many rural governments do not have. Rural municipalities have the power and ability to ensure inclusive community building for years to come.

Rossland has been updating the language in their policies to be gender-neutral. This is an ongoing and dynamic process. Recently, this gender-neutral language spurred a councillor to note the gendered language existing in contract negotiations and they spoke up in a meeting. This is an example of leadership in practice. As gender, gender expression, and sexuality evolve, this process must similarly evolve and remain dynamic. However, in this example, these updates are reliant on a single person (e.g., a staff person; a councillor) identifying the issue, speaking up, and taking action. This creates a burden of responsibility on a single individual. To embed sustainability and reduce that burden, job descriptions can incorporate the need to have a social and equity inclusion lens. This distributes the responsibility and begins to build and create a work culture whereby everyone is able to review decisions, policies, processes, and programs with an equity lens.

Recommendations Chart

This chart provides recommendations for the City of Rossland to undertake. It is organized based on the above pillars with the associated barrier that it addresses. The barriers are represented by the following images:

 Safety

 Structure, opportunity, and confidence

 Job flexibility & resource constraints

 Lack of stability (Social Issues)

 Voter perception & bias

	🚧	🧠	📂	🏠✏️	☑️
Access to Information					
Host workshops for equity-seeking interested candidates	X	X			
Share information with other municipalities and government bodies (e.g., AKBLG, UBCM)				X	
Partner with organizations to collected disaggregated data (e.g., Selkirk College, LCIC)		X	X	X	
Enhance Inclusion	🚧	🧠	📂	🏠✏️	☑️
Issue annual statements on: ● Pride Month ● International Women's Day ● Trans Awareness Day ● Indigenous Peoples Day ● National Day for Truth and Reconciliation ● Black History Month ● Emancipation Day	X	X		X	X
Ensure City representation at community and regional events, including but not limited to: ● Pride Parade(s) ● Rainbow Crosswalk painting ● International Women's Day ● Trans Awareness Day ● Indigenous People's Day ● National Day for Truth and Reconciliation ● Black History Month ● Emancipation Day	X	X		X	X
Continue to support campaigns, statements, or input opportunities that advocate senior governments on inclusion policies and programs	X		X	X	X
Advocate for greater LGBTQ+ health access in local area	X			X	X
Increased Support	🚧	🧠	📂	🏠✏️	☑️
Partner with local schools to encourage civics engagement: ● Develop a youth committee ● Host a youth debate for elections ● Develop questions for candidates					
Continue to develop regional network for women in politics	X	X		X	
Develop regional network for LGBTQ+ communities in politics	X	X		X	
Continue to develop regional network for Indigenous and people of colour in politics	X	X		X	

Work with local LGBTQ+ champions and partners to identify new initiatives, such as: ● Update flag ● Pride Parade ● LGBTQ+ Film event ● Safe space sticker campaign ● Transportation to neighbouring events	X			X	
Improved Governance & Structures	🚧	🧠	📂	📝	☑
Staff requirement for GBA+ training	X			X	
Add GBA+ as agenda item to meetings					
Conduct GBA+ on all policies, programs, budgets, and operations	X			X	
Continue to provide staff & council anti-racism, LGBTQ+, decolonization training	X			X	
Continue to update HR policies to remove gendered language	X			X	
Continue to update all policies to include sex, gender, gender expression, and orientation as grounds for harassment/discrimination	X			X	
Review and update Step discipline to cover any breach with any code of conduct, respectful workplace, and anti-racism	X			X	
Review and refine/develop statement and code of conduct for all representatives of the City, including temporary employees, contractors, and volunteers (e.g., Sustainability Commission; Heritage Commission) must sign	X			X	
Develop policy all programs or partnerships to align with code of conduct to support inclusion (e.g., housing project)	X			X	
Continue to support regional and local work to address social barriers (e.g, childcare facilities, housing)		X	X	X	
Review and update council policy to allow virtual meetings when/where applicable			X		
Continue to promote and/or ensure Family-Friendly polices for staff and council at work (e.g, infants in council; highchairs; change tables)		X	X		
Build equity & inclusion responsibilities into all job descriptions	X		X	X	

Part VI: Limitations and Conclusions

This research was an exploratory project in a field where little data is available. It relied heavily on personal stories and memories, which came from snowball sampling and self-selection. While efforts were made to address and incorporate Two-Spirit considerations, ultimately, the available body of research is low. The benefit of this type of research is in the richness in details that occur. The downside is that this is not a statistically relevant sample and replicability in other areas may not be feasible. Nonetheless, a number of findings emerged, and this report will contribute to the fields of local politics, rural politics, gender, and LGBTQ+ representation.

The goal of this project was to identify local, community-based barriers to women, Two-Spirit, and the LGBTQ+ communities. As the research unfolded, an emphasis on overall equity and diversity was emphasized. Caution is required against homogenizing the experiences of all equity-seeking and Indigenous peoples. It is peoples' very identity factors that result in different experiences. However, approaching equity and diversity as a goal, particularly for rural communities who lack resources and have less population to create separate advocacy organizations, collaborating for a common objective while keeping space to recognize the differences is a viable option.

Ignoring systemic oppressions and examples of hate that exist in Rossland does not erase the issues from existing nor the instances from occurring. There is a need to acknowledge that discrimination and harassment exist in Rossland – this community is not immune to racism, misogyny, homophobia, transphobia, or other forms of hate. Acknowledgement and awareness are required by community members and government.

Members of the local and rural LGBTQ+ communities emphasized how safety has led to feelings of invisibility (at best) to outright verbal and physical attacks. Mental health is a concern and is exacerbated by a lack of overall health resources and LGBTQ+ specific awareness within rural communities' health care systems. The desire for Mayor, Council, and City Staff to show up to events demonstrates solidarity, listening, and visibility: people feel seen; people feel heard.

While broader systemic barriers exist for individuals seeking candidacy that are outside of the immediate scope of local government, there are many actions that local governments can take to ensure their workplace is a safe organization. For the City of Rossland, and many rural local governments, the high visibility staff and council have within the community, combined with being a major employer, means the power to be a true leader and influence positive change is great. What rural governments may lack in resources, such as number of staff, they have the strengths to make up for that in relationships, social capital, and being natural interdisciplinarians. By cultivating policies, processes, training, job descriptions, and decision-making that promote inclusion, rural local governments are poised to develop safe and inclusive workplace cultures that can permeate throughout the community.

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Appendix A
Rossland Library 2021-2022 Events and Programming Supporting Diversity & Inclusion

Women and Girls
- **Brave Canada** is an event for Teen Girls in the Kootenay Boundary. This event supports the empowerment and celebration of girls ages 12-18 in Rossland, Trail, Salmo, Fruitvale, Castlegar and Beaver Valley. The day was spent promoting gender specific literature and raising awareness about the Library being a safe, inclusive space for teens who identify as girls in our area and had great attendance as well as an opportunity to listen to issues specific to teen girls and their struggles with identity, inclusion, and self-esteem.

LGBTQ+
- Celebration of **Transgender Awareness Week** featured titles about gender, identity, and inclusivity, as well as promoting resources from ANKORS.
- For all of **Pride Month**, displays and social media posts were created to highlight support of Pride and the idea that all are welcome and love means love. The primary display was visible as soon as patrons entered the library with circulation of those titles around 80% and a need to regularly replenish display items.
- LGBTQ+ content is marked with LGBTQ+ stickers for ease of access.

Indigenous
- Promotion of and displays for **Indigenous Awareness Month** and **National Day of Truth and Reconciliation.**
- A permanent display of Indigenous content is at the front doors, sponsored by Bhubble.
- Participation in an Indigenous Book Club partnered with CBAL and the Trail & District Public Library.
- All staff were given the option to have an "Every Child Matters" t-shirt provided through purchases from the Rossland Museum and Discovery Centre, and territorial acknowledgments occur in Board and Staff meetings.
- Indigenous content has Turtle Island stickers.

Racialized and people of colour
- Creation of displays and social media posts for **Black History Month** that celebrate and promote Black content creators.
- Promotion of **Black Lives Matter** and updated materials on anti-racism and how to be an ally, including suggested book lists.
- Creation of displays and social media posts for **Asian American and Pacific Islander Heritage Month** that celebrate and promote materials and achievements.
- Monthly Book Club includes a rotation that features authors from a variety of backgrounds.
- Creation of displays and social media posts celebrating **various cultural events and celebrations** like Diwali, Yom Kippur, Lunar New Year, Holi, Dia De Los Muertos, Eid, etc.

Appendix B

People's Identification as provided in community survey

- Bisexual and gender fluid
- Gay man
- Male
- Male/gay
- Female, bisexual
- Male, gay
- Nonbinary acesexual polyamorous demoromantic
- Demi girl and bisexual
- Trans Demi boy (who uses neo pronouns) and is bi
- Bigender (male + female)
- Female, Queer
- She/her
- Transman, pansexual

Appendix C

Messages and Suggestions to Municipalities

The following two questions are presented here to allow these voices to be heard. Some editing has been done for clarity and not all seventeen respondents answered the questions.

What is the role of the municipality for LGBTQ+ rights?

To train their full time, part time, permanent, and temporary staff as well as contractors in equity and inclusion; to analyze policies and initiatives through a gender and sexual orientation lens; to publicly support queer constituents and their initiatives; to make resources available to the local queer community (grants, meeting spaces, etc)

Ensuring queer voices are prioritized for feedback (especially trans folks) through community engagement such as this. Ensure all municipal correspondence is gender neutral. Providing safe and accessible spaces - it might sound silly but it's often difficult to know what bar I can feel comfortable walking into and grabbing a beer, or which barber will be okay with someone like me coming in, safety and comfortability are big concerns. Being a rural community knowing if it is generally accepting of queer folks is something all of us must consider when preparing to move somewhere new whether for work, school or otherwise. It can often be a very hard move and with smaller communities knowing who and how to connect with other queer folks in the area is important - does the city support any Pride or queer community organized groups? Generally these types of groups can fall apart due to folks only wanting to organize around Pride or not having the funds or skills to do so, a community that helps them apply for grants and offers organizing support or skills training would be a good way to ensure there is a stable queer community presence.

Safety.

To facilitate and support events and safe spaces for the community.

Designing public inclusive places…More than a rainbow crosswalk.

Protect our youth that do not have a voice.

Supporting Pride/visibility (e.g., crosswalks, flags, funding to groups, declaring Pride month, etc.

Awareness, Understanding, Inclusion.

Protection and elevation.

Stop heteronormativity.

To not express negative opinions that make others feel as though they aren't wanted.

Creating safe spaces, monitoring safety of marginalized groups, penalties for hate speech/crimes, visible support of LGBTQ+ groups, queer representation in council.

Ensure all communication and documents are neutral and inclusive. Model the behaviour that supports all community members.

If you are in the elevator with the mayor, what would you like them to know about local LGBTQ+ rights or concerns?

Just because someone is nice, it doesn't mean they are inclusive.

It's often a very lonely place to be queer. There are few regional queer groups organizing and the nearest queer space is in Kelowna. Encouraging more queer specific investment at the local level can often have huge positive economical and social benefits for not only the local queer community but the municipality itself especially a resort/tourism based community. Think about it this way, a queer couple is often a 2 income household and a lot less likely to have kids. This means they can travel more every year in communities such as yours. There are a lot of queer folks who come here for the skiing and outdoor lifestyle that the Kootenay's provides but once here, there are no dedicated queer places for them to grab a bite or drink at. The town of Jasper has done a wonderful job at attracting more investment from queer businesses and outreach to queer tourists, I think a lot could be learned from them. Not only does this bring in more investment to the local economy but it also provides social spaces for the local community to gather and organize in.

I feel Lisa [City of Trail Mayor Lisa Pasin] is already very supportive of LGBTQS+ rights and is also aware of the challenges faced.

Why doesn't the city sponsor/advertise a safe place for all?

That we are everywhere, we vote, pay taxes, we live in and love our community.

What, tangibly, are you going to do to support the queer and trans community?

She knows [Mayor Pasin], is completely supportive and is actively involved in LGBTQ+ activities, such as Trail Pride and Trail Drag (held here once). RCMP in our local area are also very supportive, inclusive, and compassionate.

The casual homophobia and transphobia at local schools.

Queer spaces are just as valid as hetero spaces. There should be a pride presence at every event in Rossland and it shouldn't need to be hosted by the queer community. It's exhausting and we shouldn't have to constantly fight for representation.

That we are always going to be around and no matter what they try to do they can't make us die down.

There is nowhere to gather, congregate, or meet. There is nowhere to celebrate and no City run events like a Pride Parade. There aren't venues for drag nights or dancing or just having high tea with your queer friends. There is a lack of spaces, organizations, and events but not a lack of youth and adults willing to help create those spaces.

It's not a power struggle to retain benefits for any one group moving through the process. We are stronger and all benefit through greater diversity and inclusion.