



Women & Working in Climbing

A Change Our Game Workforce Development Strategy

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Executive Summary

Sport Climbing Victoria (SCV) identified a series of barriers faced by women pursuing professional technical roles in climbing through a series of consultations at commercial climbing facilities, a public forum, and with engagement from an international expert.

SCV is committed to addressing these issues through three key recommended actions which will facilitate the development of a more equitable workforce. SCV believes that a more diverse workforce will contribute to the development of climbing in Victoria with significant benefits over time.




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Issue Theme	Summary of Evidence
Recruitment	Despite numerous qualified and interested women interested in entering the workforce, there are few women currently in full-time technical roles in climbing facilities around Victoria.
Training	Pathways to gain requisite skills in order to become successful in technical roles is not clear and career progression opportunities are not known by women currently in technical roles or interested in technical roles.
Retention	Numerous workplace cultural factors discourage women from engaging in opportunities to demonstrate skills and knowledge. Additionally typically poor remuneration detracts from women being motivated to remain in technical roles.
Recognition	Women in technical roles are under-represented in media and promotional materials. Mentors are not adequately identified in order to facilitate and nurture new female talent in technical roles.





Recommended Actions	Addresses	Key Metrics
1.Improve Visibility of Women in Technical Roles	Recruitment, Retention and Recognition	Tracking and increasing the specific percentage of Social Media posts and promotional material that feature women performing technical roles
2. Establish a Women's Committee within Sport Climbing Victoria	Recruitment, Training and Recognition	Establishment of Women's Committee and number of members on committee
3. Host events which promote women in technical roles & leadership positions	Recruitment, Training Retention and Recognition	Number of events which feature women as speakers and presenters







Introduction & Background

SCV recognises the value in nurturing a diverse professional workforce and facilitating an increased opportunity for women to demonstrate professional skills in technical roles such as coaching and routesetting.

In late 2018, SCV with the support of the 'Change or Game' workforce development program through the Office for Women in Sport in Victoria, has undertaken the development of a Women & Working in Climbing Strategy to promote increased female participation in technical roles.

An international expert, Ellie Howard, was engaged to review the current state of women working in the climbing industry in Victoria and to provide suggested actions to address issues. Ellie Howard is currently one of the Austrian national team coaches and brings a breadth of experience from coaching across Europe within some of the most developed climbing communities around the world. While in Victoria, Ellie conducted six site visits at commercial climbing facilities and facilitated a public forum where data was collected through a survey. Insights from these site visits and consultations were compiled and analysed for theme aggregation to inform issue themes and recommended actions to address issues.



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The Current State of Women working in Climbing:

Recruitment

Women face an increased number of barriers to entry when pursuing a career in a technical role within the climbing industry. This issue creates a smaller female workforce in the climbing industry at the entry level, which creates downstream recruitment problems when looking for female candidates to fill leadership or mentoring roles. Recruitment as an issue was identified through the following pieces of evidence collected:

- 56% of survey participants had considered a career within the climbing industry, yet only 36% are engaged in paid work in the industry.
- Of the 5 climbing walls visited in Melbourne, only 1 had female staff in a full-time technical role, other females in technical roles were casual or part-time in those technical roles only.
- Consultation with key industry stakeholders confirmed that the majority of recruitment occurred through word of mouth without an open application process which many females felt favoured male candidates.
- During open forum discussion it was noted that women are less likely to put themselves forward for a role if they lack enough detail to suggest they are likely to be successful in the recruitment process.



The Current State of Women working in Climbing:

Training

Women are unsure how to obtain training and education for either routesetting or coaching roles within the climbing industry. This crucial first step of figuring out what needs to be learned and where to learn is an issue in getting women to consider enrolling in training pathways so that they obtain the necessary credentials to be considered for technical roles. Evidence for this issue is:

- In the question "I know how and where to get training and education to work as a climbing coach or routesetter," 68% of respondents disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.
- In the question "I understand the skills and training required to be a climbing coach", 40% agreed with the statement, no respondents strongly agreed with the statement.
- In the question "I understand the skills and training required to be a routesetter", 28% agreed or strongly agreed with the statement.
- During consultations, stakeholders frequently said that were unaware of the career opportunities as a climbing coach and were unsure how to progress along a career pathway.

I know how and where to get training and education to work as a climbing coach or routesetter

I understand the skills and training required to be a climbing coach.

I understand the skills and training required to be a routesetter





The Current State of Women Working in Climbing:

Retention

Three key issues emerged related to retaining female participation in technical climbing workforce roles: First, there is an emphasis on physical strength and sporting capability, rather than a technical expertise, which limits opportunities for women to gain experience in technical roles; second, long, unsociable working hours and limited job stability and low pay relative to the employee's skills are the norm within the climbing industry. Finally, there is evidence of subtle but repeated behaviours associated with a culture of ingrained gender bias in the climbing environment. These three issues were observed through:

- Open forum discussion demonstrated that there are limited opportunities for work experience in what are perceived to be male dominated roles within the industry.
- Gaining experience has been reported to be intimidating and counterproductive largely due to a cultural emphasis on climbing ability and physical strength as a measure of credibility.
- The expectation that you must "do your time" in order to gain credibility alongside a lack of flexible working arrangements leads to an environment that is not conducive to family life.
- During consultation many females who have previously been in technical roles felt the compensation did not match effort, expressed with the quote: "I no longer have the time to volunteer and can get better paid work in other industries."
- Consultation at climbing facilities demonstrated a lack of willingness to adapt or change workplace protocols to enable female participation or engagement with a task.
- Female employees often lacked the ability (whether through not being heard at their place of employment or the inability to speak up) to successfully challenge the existing perceptions and to make their voices heard claiming: "I need a louder voice"



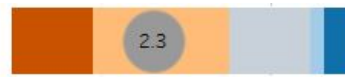
The Current State of Women working in Climbing:

Recognition

There is a scarcity of visible female role models in the climbing workforce. This lack of visibility reflects the viewpoint of women who are operating within the industry feel undervalued in comparison to their male counterparts.

- 64% of survey participants disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement “Female role models are highly visible in the climbing industry”
- Forum participants gave evidence of male clients who often acted dismissively when given assistance or instruction by a female member of staff and of male colleagues who undermine their female counterparts by dismissing their opinions and skillset.
- Consultation demonstrated a lack of willingness to adapt or change workplace protocols to enable female participation or engagement with a task.
- Female employees often lacked the ability to successfully challenge the existing perceptions and to make their voices heard. “I need a louder voice”

Female role models are highly visible in the climbing industry



Answer

- Strongly Disagree
- Disagree
- Neither
- Agree
- Strongly Agree





International Observations

The issues of women in technical roles is an international challenge and opportunity for Sport Climbing, as the sport grows in popularity and visibility around the world. Some recent observations illustrate international developments in relation to women in technical roles.

- 2018 marked the certification of the first and only female International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) certified route setter Katja Vidmar from Slovenia.
- Female coaches are increasingly being recognised for their leadership in developing coaching programs. Robyn Erbesfield-Raboutou was recently profiled for developing the most successful youth coaching program in the United States.

Women role models in technical roles are only now emerging internationally which can be leveraged to inspire local women to reach senior technical roles in Victoria.



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Recommended Actions

1. Improve **visibility** of women in the technical roles of coaching and routesetting by creating and publishing marketing material which feature female coaches and routesetters. Also, activate media partners and stakeholders to encourage them to do the same. Aim for 50% of all promotional material to **feature women (in both technical and sporting roles.)** This action addresses issues identified in recruitment, retention, and recognition.

2. Develop a **network** of currently active women routesetters and coaches, and formalise the network within the structure of Sport Climbing Victoria as a new **Women's Committee**. Empower the network to advise and advocate on policies which will promote women in technical roles as well as serving as a place where women can develop leadership skills to serve in decision making roles within Sport Climbing Victoria. This action addresses issues identified in training, retention, and recognition.

3. Through a newly established Women's Committee, commit to hosting regular forums, workshops and **conferences for women** working or who want to work in the climbing industry as well as ensuring other Sport Climbing Victoria events feature 50% representation from **female speakers and presenters**. This action addresses issues identified in recruitment, training, retention, and recognition.



Recommended Action 1:

Improve Visibility of Women in Technical Roles

Women climbers already identify with aspirations to pursue technical professional roles in climbing. SCV can assist with increasing the visibility of women to engage in these technical positions by using our social media channels to promote and celebrate women who are currently active in technical roles locally, nationally and internationally. Celebrating and recognising women in coaching and routesetting roles will communicate that these roles are open to everyone and that diversity is valued. SCV will act to increase the proportion of women portrayed in technical roles through all publishing channels to address recruitment, retention and recognition issues.

Timeline: Sport Climbing Victoria board to draft media policy regarding females in promotional material and adopt within 3 months.

Key Metric: Proportion of total social media posts and key promotional material which feature females.



Recommended Action 2:


Establish a Women's Committee within Sport Climbing Victoria

In order to better support women currently working in technical climbing roles in Victoria, a committee should be established to focus on advancing the interests of professional women in the climbing industry. Through the implementation of the recommended actions in this strategy, feedback can be provided on progress of addressing the identified issues.

Additionally, an SCV women's committee can bring attention to new emerging issues not yet visible to SCV as well as provide an opportunity to develop leadership skills in the administration of the sport and within SCV, providing a pathway to broader leadership roles both at the state level and nationally.

Timeline: Identify a potential committee chair within 6 months and assist the chair to establish the committee with additional members.

Key Metric: Number of members engaged in the SCV Women's Committee



Recommended Action 3:

Host events which promote women in technical roles & leadership positions

Hosting regular events featuring female role models and leaders within technical roles can engage and inspire a new generation to enter technical professional roles within the climbing industry. Furthermore, hosting events which bring internationally recognised female role models would enable local workforce development opportunities and demonstrate the benefits of a diverse workforce to the general membership. This in turn will demonstrate to the entire workforce the leadership potential of women in technical roles abroad and highlight the value of women's contributions to the sport.

Timeline: Ongoing with objective for the Women's Committee to run first event within 12 months.

Key Metric: Number of events hosted which feature female speaker and presenters and are specifically aimed at training or recruiting women for technical roles in the climbing industry.





Conclusions

Sport Climbing Victoria demonstrates its commitment to women thriving in the climbing industry workforce in various ways. Not every challenge facing women in the climbing industry can be tackled by Sport Climbing Victoria alone, however, given the current growth in our sport. We at SCV can make decisions now that help drive lasting change in female participation in the climbing workforce.

The suggested actions outlined in this report, we hope, will lay the foundation not just for women in technical roles, but also to build momentum for women in sport generally and for women to continue to develop the skills and expertise to realise leadership positions in our community.



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Appendix A

Women in Climbing Public Forum Survey Results

