



Maria Bailey TD, Senator Catherine Ardagh, and Liadh Ní Riada MEP speaking at Women for Election's 2015 summer school in Google. At the time of the summer school Maria & Catherine were Councillors, they were elected to Dáil Éireann and Seanad Éireann respectively in 2016.

# WOMEN FOR ELECTION

The Ireland Funds continue their support to INSPIRE, EQUIP and INFORM

Women for Election Alumna Lisa Chambers TD at EQUIP 2013. Lisa was elected a Councillor in 2014, and as TD for Mayo in 2016.





Women for Election Co-Founders  
Niamh Gallagher &  
Michelle O'Donnell Keating

**In 2011, just 15% of TDs elected at the general election in Ireland were women.** This dismal number—25—was the highest number of women we had ever seen to date in our Parliament's main chamber. Driven by the need to solve this problem we set up Women for Election to train, mentor and support women to get involved in politics and achieve our vision of an Ireland with balanced participation of women and men in political life.

Since then, we have trained over 800 women across Ireland and the European Union, including 50% of women elected at local government level in Ireland and 40% of the newly elected female Members of Dáil Éireann.

This work would not have been possible without The Ireland Funds' support.

In the run up to the 2016 General Election, with funding from The Ireland Funds Flagship Grants, Women for Election ran a series of training programs to develop the skills and resilience of female candidates. In September 2015 candidates from all over Ireland attended EQUIP, a 3-day, residential political boot camp. EQUIP put candidates through the paces of an election campaign, with modules covering fundraising, crisis management, public speaking, campaign strategy and much more. Participants benefitted from the expertise of top class national and international trainers, as well as learning from each other in

workshops and hearing from several leading female politicians including former Tánaistí Joan Burton TD and Mary Harney and former Minister Mary O'Rourke.

In addition to EQUIP, a series of Masterclasses provided female candidates the opportunity to hone their media skills ahead of the intensive demands of the three week campaign period. Candidates worked on developing their messages on key issues, building their confidence, and preparing themselves for participation in panel debates, with local radio producers and presenters sharing top tips for engaging local media. Alongside that, Women for Election ran a national advocacy campaign urging voters to play their part in addressing the historic gender imbalance in Irish political life. The #electwomen campaign was hugely successful, gaining significant media exposure for female candidates nationwide.

Prior to polling day there were signs that indicated this election might prove record breaking for gender equality in Irish politics. There were more female candidates than ever before: 163, vs. 86 in 2011, an increase from 15% to 30%, with 20 (vs. 4 in 2011) of the 40 constituencies fielding more than 30% female candidates, giving voters true choice on the ballot paper.

And indications were right—the results were a significant step forward for female

representation in Irish public life with 35 women elected as TDs, bringing female representation in Dáil Éireann to 22%.

**Of those 35 women elected, 19 are first time TDs and we are proud that 40% of the newly elected female TDs are Women for Election Alumnae. Overall, 26% of first preference votes were cast for women: that means more than half a million people – 530,000 – voted for a woman number one.**

We are celebrating these results. Progress has been made and should be welcomed. However, we have a long way to go. Now, Women for Election is focused on building the pipeline of women at community level who are ready and prepared to contest the local and European elections in 2019. Our project is a 20-year project, and we are just at the beginning. This year's general election demonstrates that our model works, that there is huge appetite for more women in public life—among voters, political parties and female candidates—and that Ireland is not exceptional: with the right structures and supports we can right this historical imbalance.

We could not have gotten here without The Ireland Funds, and we hope to work together to drive change in Irish politics for the good.

— Women for Election Co-Founders, Niamh Gallagher and Michelle O'Donnell Keating