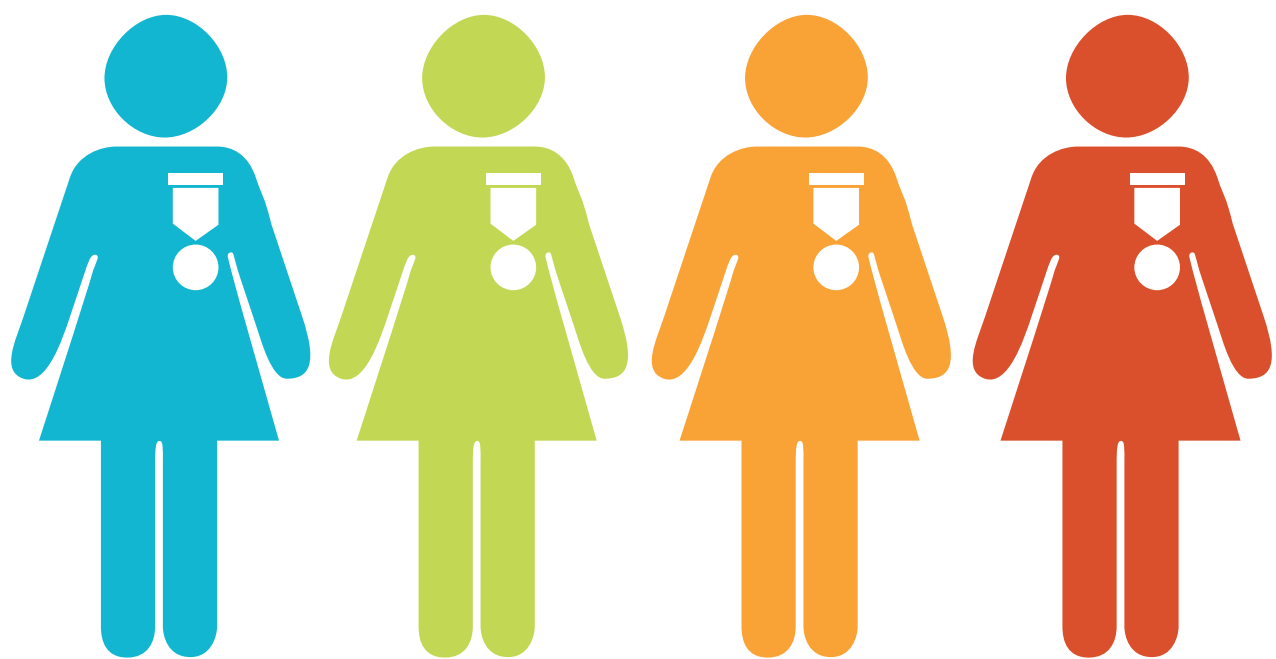


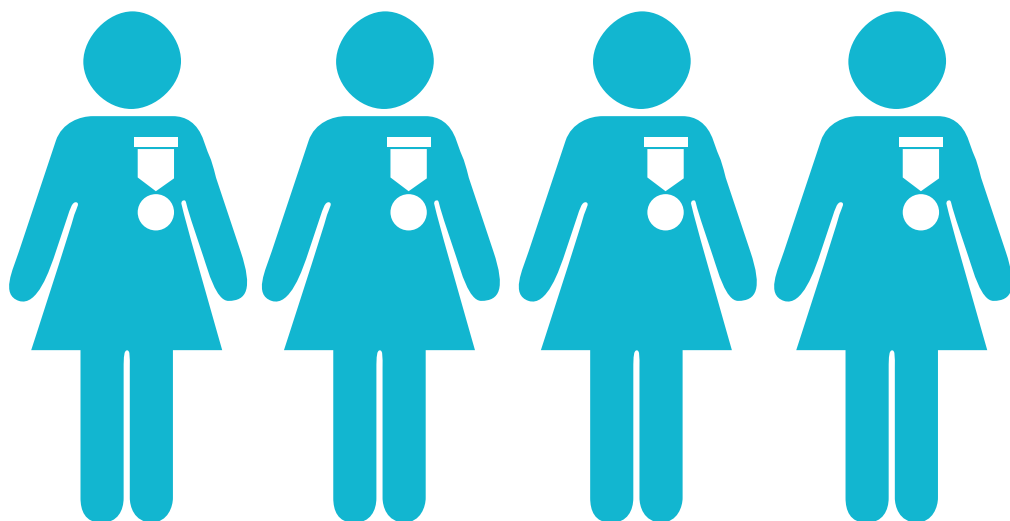
# ADVANCING WOMEN

Women & the Order of Australia



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## **Advancing Women: Women and the Order of Australia**

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Advancing Women: Women and Australian Honours

Published: January 2011

# Foreword

Together, Our Community and Women's Leadership Institute Australia are working to challenge and change women's role in society by pushing for systems changes and helping to empower women at all levels to take their place in all parts of Australian society.

We want to help open the doors to areas previously off-limits (while ensuring that those areas in which women have traditionally worked are accorded appropriate value).

Much work is required to ensure women are fairly represented in leadership positions in all parts of Australian society. While it is true that women are already demonstrating leadership in many areas, often their contribution is less valued or more opaque.

Since the Australian honours system was introduced in 1975, a great number of deserving Australians have been recognised and rewarded, yet women remain under-represented in the number of nominations, flowing through to the number of people receiving honours.

Public awards such as those conferred through the Australian Honours system can assist in bringing about the cultural, unconscious bias shift that is required to achieve due recognition and leadership equality. The awards recognise extraordinary contribution, not executive title or remuneration. The ranks of awardees ought to include an equal number of women *today*.

Our honours system has been uniquely designed to ensure that any member of the community can nominate an Australian citizen for an award. We encourage every person who reads this guide to nominate one (or more!) great women for an Australian Honour.

## **Carol Schwartz AM**

Chair

Women's Leadership Institute Australia

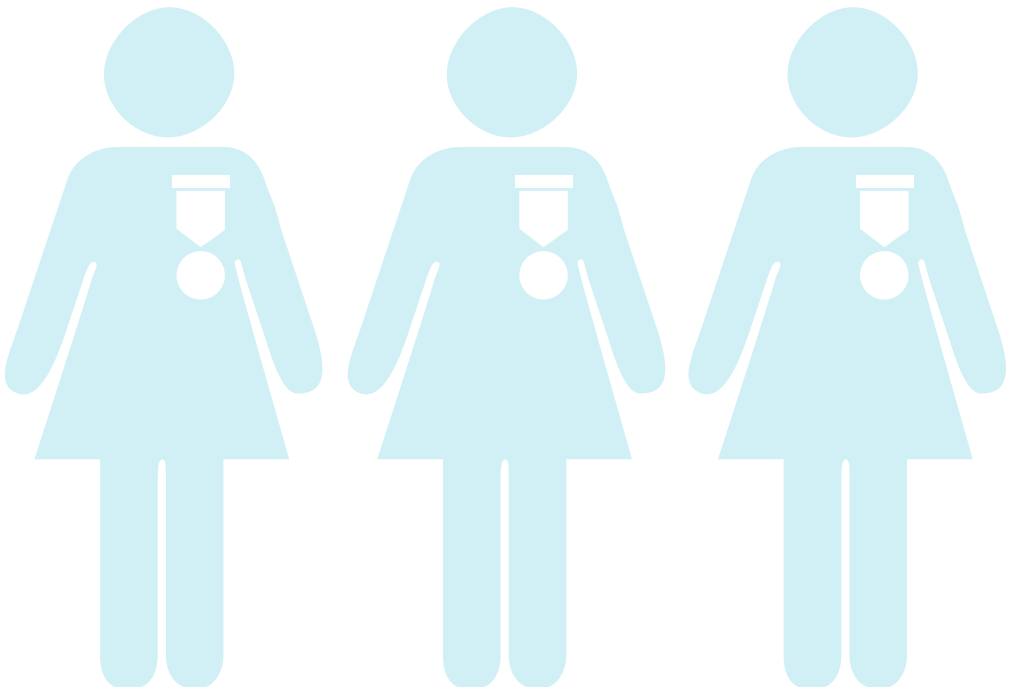
## **Denis Moriarty**

Group Managing Director

Our Community

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# 1. Australian Awards

Australia is lucky. We have a lot of generous people who are out there every day helping their communities in a million different ways – sustaining the environment, serving on not-for-profit boards, giving disadvantaged groups a helping hand, or pushing the envelope professionally.

They're not in it for the money, or the honour and glory. They're putting in the time because they've seen that there's a job that needs to be done and they've stepped up to do it.

They might get a little bit of thanks. Most of the time that's enough for them.

As a community we couldn't keep going without people like this. We all know that, though we're not always very good at showing it.

Every now and again the community does take time out to say 'thank you' properly. That's what the Australian honours system is all about.

The Australian honours system celebrates the outstanding achievements and contributions of extraordinary Australians in a diverse range of fields and areas of endeavour. It is about recognising those people in the community whose service and contributions have had the effect of making a significant difference to Australian life or, more broadly, to humanity at large.

The Australian honours system recognises the actions and achievements of people who go above and beyond what could be reasonably expected, and in doing so, encourages national aspirations and ideals of the highest community standards and values.

Recipients are people from all spheres of the community. Any individual, community organisation, professional body or similar group can nominate an Australian citizen for an award.

In the Australian honours system the Order of Australia is the pre-eminent means of recognising outstanding achievement and contribution by Australians. It rewards people who have made a significant difference to their community, their country or at an international level.

The Order of Australia has four levels:

- **Companion of the Order (AC)** – for eminent achievement and merit of the highest degree in service to Australia or to humanity at large;
- **Officer of the Order (AO)** – for distinguished service of a high degree to Australia or to humanity at large;
- **Member of the Order (AM)** – for service in a particular locality or field of activity or to a particular group; and
- **Medal of the Order (OAM)** – for service worthy of particular recognition.

The Order of Australia is unique, in that it was designed for the community to make nominations. The Australian honours system is free of patronage or political influence. Anyone can nominate an Australian citizen for an honour.

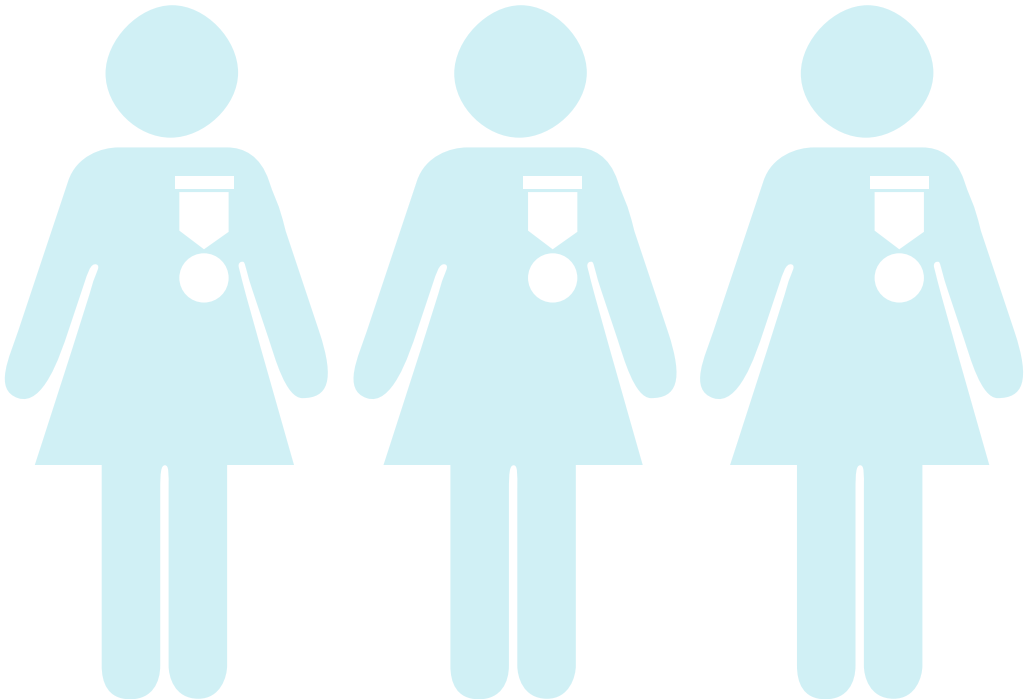
- [www.itsanhonour.gov.au/](http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/)

The awards recognise people who have demonstrated achievement at a high level; made a contribution over and above what might be reasonably expected through paid employment; and made a contribution to the community that stands out from others.

The kinds of people who do the selfless work on which our community so depends generally aren't the kinds of people who push themselves forward. That's why it's important that those of us who know and appreciate what they do make sure they get the recognition they deserve.

Any Australian citizen can be nominated for an award in the Order of Australia. Each and every one of us probably knows at least one person who would be suitable. We owe it to them, and to the community at large, to put their names forward.

The Prime Minister can also recommend foreign citizens, including permanent residents, for honorary appointments and awards in the Order of Australia. You should not be deterred from nominating someone deserving if they are not an Australian citizen. The Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat, which supports the Council for the Order of Australia, will redirect nominations for foreign citizens to the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet for appropriate action.

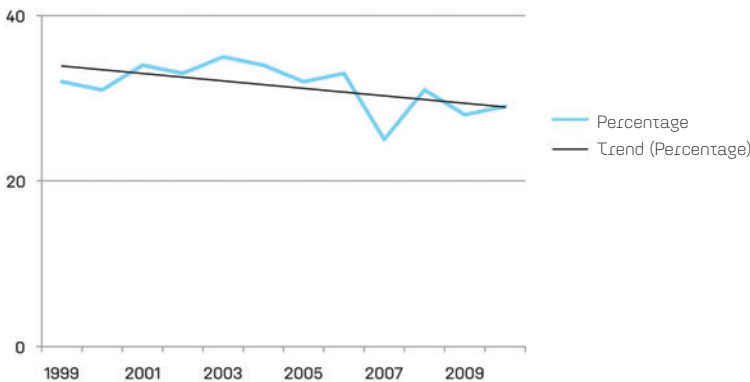


## 2. Women & Australian Honours

There is a largely unrecognised problem in the distribution of awards in Australia.

Fewer women – many fewer women – than men are nominated, and that means that fewer women than men get the awards.

### ORDER OF AUSTRALIA: % WOMEN



Things aren't getting better, either. In fact, the trend line is going down. It's time we changed that.

Of course, this is not a problem confined to the Australian honours system. Women are starting behind the pack virtually everywhere else in Australian society.

However, this is one of the few places where it is relatively easy to redress the balance as there are already many Australian women who have made extraordinary contributions. All we need to do is ensure a larger number of these women are nominated.

Australian honours represent the things that we, as a community, believe to be deserving of recognition – believe, in fact, to be honourable. We honour people who deserve it. There's no reason why women should not make up half the honours lists.

**If you know a woman who's doing work that you admire, put her forward for an award. Australia will thank you.**

Other groups are also under-represented, of course. People from non-English-speaking backgrounds, people with disabilities, unconventional people. Feel free to nominate a representative of any of these groups (and if they're also a woman, all the better).

# 3. Australian Awards & you

Anybody can nominate an Australian citizen for an award in the Order of Australia. More to the point, you can. You yourself personally, or as a representative of a group, can nominate somebody who deserves it.

## Who should you nominate?

- Who are the people you look up to?
- Who are the people without whom things would come tumbling down?
- Who are the people who drive the causes you support?
- Who are the people who have really made a difference?

Your nominee's contribution doesn't have to be nationwide, or world-shaking, or expensive. Big change in a small arena is as good as a small change in a big arena, or it should be.

Every day's obituaries feature women who have done a lot for their country, who have pushed the boundaries of the possible, who have been the first to reach and hold positions of influence. All of them could have had an award. Very few of them were nominated. And now it's too late.

The trouble is that the women who deserve awards – women who work without reward to change the world for the better – are not the kinds of people who seek accolades for their efforts.

Your prospective nominee may be one of them.

## Nominations are Confidential

It's good to be modest, but it's also important for people to have a realistic appreciation of what they're worth to the world. Don't take someone's reluctance to put their hand up as a sign they wouldn't appreciate receiving a public award.

Not many people turn down an award when it's offered, not after all the work that's been put in to it and all the people who have come out in support. Generally, as one would expect, it's a lovely and unexpected gift.

Remember too that it's not just about your nominee. Among other things, an award provides recognition and thanks for the work she's doing *and the people she's doing it with*. Everybody who gets an award represents all those who stand behind them. Nobody does it on their own.

You don't have to ask your nominee's permission – you're not supposed to, in fact (it's a confidential process).

## 4. What are your chances of success?

Approximately one Australian in 5 million has a Nobel prize (0.00002%), one Australian in 100,000 holds an Olympic medal (0.001%) and one Australian in 10,000 has won a million dollars in a lottery (0.01%).

One Australian in 1000 is a member of the Order of Australia (0.1%). They're not bad odds!

The odds look even better when you realise that while each year about 10 million Australians play sports, and about 10 million play the lottery, only about 1200 Australians nominate someone for the Order of Australia.

Your chances of getting from your nomination to an award are currently about 52%.

*Just over half of all people who are nominated get an award.*

In fact, women who are nominated generally do even better than men – since 1975, a total of 56.5% of nominations for women have been successful, compared with 50.3% for men.

An Australian award isn't a gambling token, of course, and comparing them with lottery tickets isn't really appropriate except to emphasise that we're not talking about an impossible dream here. Actually, the effort-benefit ratio is fantastic. If you lay out your nomination properly, it's really quite achievable – and well worth putting a bit of effort into.

*It's within your reach.*

Each year, the Council for the Order of Australia recommends up to 30 Companions of the Order of Australia (AC), 125 Officers of the Order of Australia (AO) and 300 Members of the Order of Australia (AM). There is no quota for Medals of the Order of Australia (OAM) but around 500 are awarded each year.

# 5. Nominating someone for an Australian Award

How does it work, then?

In general, the process involves going to the Australian honours website – [www.itsanhonour.gov.au](http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au) – downloading a form, filling it out, attaching the names of some referees, and sending it off in the mail (no online nominations as yet) to Canberra.

There are a few rules, however, and a few other things you should be aware of to give your nomination the best possible chance at success.

## **No posthumous nominations**

The Order of Australia is a "living society of honour". Appointments lapse with the death of the recipient. This is why nominations are not accepted for persons who are deceased. However, the Council does not reject nominations for people who die between being nominated and their nomination being considered. If successful, the award is made with effect from the date of the nomination, so that there was a period in which the person was a member of the Order.

## **Keep it confidential**

Don't tell anyone who doesn't have to contribute, and make sure the people you do tell know that they should keep this information confidential. You don't want anyone being embarrassed, at any stage.

If you need information that only the nominee has, you'll just have to be cunning and find it out some other way.

The bottom line is that the worst thing that can possibly happen when you make a nomination is that 19 worthy people (the Council) will think well of your nominee but not quite well enough, and it will go no further than that. There's not much of a downside, really.

## **Who to call**

If you have any queries, you can contact the Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat by phoning (02) 6283 3604, emailing [honours@gg.gov.au](mailto:honours@gg.gov.au), or online at [www.itsanhonour.gov.au/contact/index.cfm](http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/contact/index.cfm)

## 6. Building your case

You have to be able to make your case. It's rather like a sales pitch. You have to be able to show why the Council considering the nomination should be as excited as you are by the story of what the nominee has done for Australia.

Your enthusiasm has to be infectious, your admiration has to be explained, and your conclusion has to follow indisputably from what's gone before.

You need to be able to link together the different sections of the application strategically so that it all hangs together and all the pieces contribute to a single impression.

**Begin with a brief one-sentence statement that sums up the message.**

*Laura Thelfall is the founder and director of Textbooks for Cancer, and has worked tirelessly for decades to make sure that children with cancer have the educational support they need if they are not to fall behind in class.*

**Include a very brief biography – highlights only.**

*Laura Thelfall was born in Yea in 1945. She graduated in economics from the University of Sydney, and has worked as an economist in the banking sector. She founded Textbooks for Cancer in 1985 when her young daughter developed a brain tumour and had to spend long stretches in hospital, adversely affecting her marks. Since then she has developed the organisation into a well-respected, award-winning, national association providing hundreds of textbooks to dozens of children across Australia each year.*

**Say how the person had made a difference in the world.**

*Textbooks for Cancer has relieved the anxieties of hundreds of children in critical and stressful times, and has allowed them to achieve their full potential despite facing some of life's toughest challenges at such an early age.*

The form gives you only a page to describe the "activities undertaken by the person you are nominating for an award", but you can attach more pages if you have to. You can also attach materials – but don't overload your nomination. Bear in mind that everything has to be copied 19 times, plus one for the files.

They don't say it in on the form (they used to), but more recent contributions to Australian society are better than cold cases. Don't sit on a nomination too long.

Make your points as briefly as possible, and try to make every single line and every single word reinforce the particular things the Council is looking for; namely:

Has the nominee

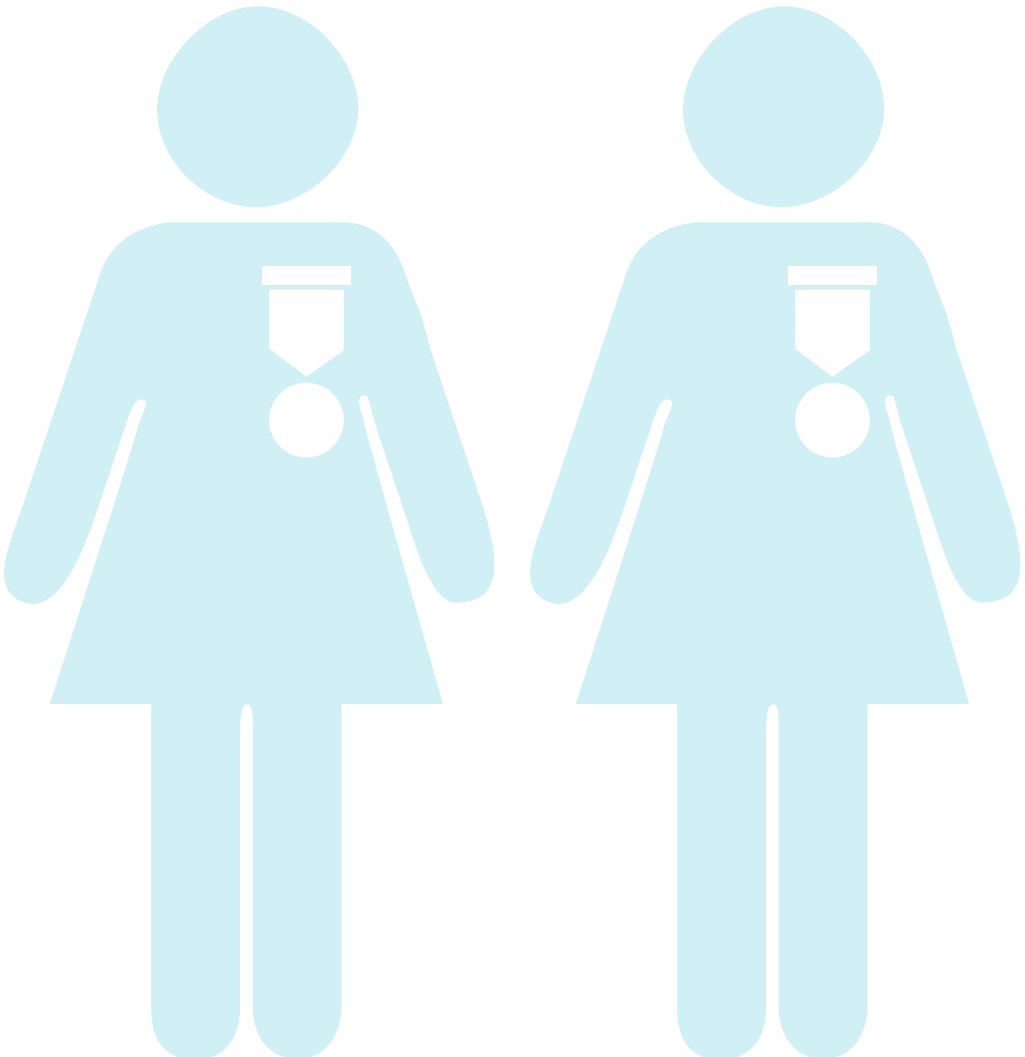
- **demonstrated achievement at a high level?** Here's where the facts come in – numbers of clients, scale of finances, measurable success of the work. Mention prior awards, previous publications, media recognition, and public support, but don't mistake them for the punch line. What they want to know is how she has changed the world for the better. Think big – but make it personal.

- **made a contribution over and above what might be reasonably expected through paid employment?** A judge who's very good at judging doesn't get an award; that's what they're paid for. Similarly, you might know a terrific school canteen coordinator, but that doesn't qualify them for an award either. It's what they do above expectation that counts.
- **made a contribution to the community that stands out from others?** You don't just have to show that your nominee is good, and you don't want to get caught up in trying to show that she's better than someone else; what you need to do is show where she's different, innovative, *distinctive*.

Take some time to read through the extended citations for some past successful nominations. This will give you a practical idea of the sorts of things that have been recognised in the past.

You can find these at:

[www.gg.gov.au/content.php/category/id/19/title/honours-lists](http://www.gg.gov.au/content.php/category/id/19/title/honours-lists).



# 7. Telling the story

Try not to just stack one fact on top of another. You want to convince the Council, and the way to do that is to tell a story. A simple narrative can be very powerful.

**Your story might be structured along these lines:**

- There was a problem... *a serious problem...*
- That nobody else could fix... *though they tried...*
- Then someone special stepped forward... *and was chosen...*
- And struggled bravely against great odds... *at the head of their field/band/fellowship/army/club...*
- Making many sacrifices... *and enduring many hardships...*
- Overcoming many difficulties... *and triumphing over monstrous foes...*
- To defeat the problem... *or at least diminish it or mitigate it or gain on it...*
- Returning to receive their reward... *and this is the bit that remains to be completed..*

That's the story of the Lord of the Rings, and Robin Hood, and the Odyssey, and the quest for the Holy Grail, and your local school's last lamington drive. It's universal, because it works. It has a shape that everybody can recognise.

The Council has to read more than a thousand sets of forms; give them a break: don't bore them, don't use jargon, don't use vague words, don't write in long, flowery sentences.

Make your words come to life. Write with enthusiasm (but don't lapse into hyperbole). Use lively adjectives (though not too many). Quote someone who's been helped.

Above all, show why the world is a better place because your nominee did what she did. Make sure the Council knows that it wasn't easy.

The more you can engage and impress the reader, the more chance you have of winning their assent.

# 8. Organising the process

**N**ominating someone for an award in the Order of Australia does not require a huge amount of work, but it does require some work.

You could do it all yourself, but it would be better to get a few people together so that you have people to bounce ideas off and who can check your work.

Set up an ad hoc committee. Hand out copies of the form. Swear everybody to secrecy.

Now you have to line up the tasks, discuss who's going to be best at each, and set the timelines.

- Everyone has to read the form.
- Everyone has to look over the online examples of other awards at [www.itsanhonour.gov.au/honours/honour\\_roll/index.cfm](http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/honours/honour_roll/index.cfm).
- Someone has to get the information together – names and dates and positions held.
- Someone has to chase up the referees.
- Someone has to do the writing.
- Someone has to oversee the bringing together of the pieces.
- Someone has to monitor the process.

Write a list saying who's got to do what by which date, and put in another row of dates to show when someone's going to check that they've been done.

Set a few meeting dates so that people can fill in their diary around them. Organise email lists.

When you have all the pieces, get someone who writes well to patch them together. Then rewrite and rearrange until it all hangs together and all contributes to the overall arguments. Circulate the drafts for comment.

Tweak the final draft, checking off each of the selection criteria against your nomination.

Proofread it all again. Get someone who's never seen it before to check it. Ask them if they're convinced.

Print a final copy (because you're printing on to a written form it's probably going to take several tries to get it right – allow time for false starts).

Get stamps and an envelope.

Send it off.

# 9. Lining up referees

As a general guide, each nominee requires about four referees – individuals who would be in a position to comment directly on the nominee's service or contribution to Australian life.

At one time you used to have to get your local member of parliament (MP) to sign off on the nomination, but that requirement has been dropped. There are now no compulsory inclusions, and you can pick any referee you think is suitable, though an MP is still a handy inclusion if they know your nominee.

Don't draw all your referees from the same group; don't have *all* MPs or *all* work colleagues or *all* clients, for example. Don't have references from only one side of politics either – try to draw from across the gender, social and political spectrums.

Aim to present the views of a cross-section of the community, each telling one piece of the story.

Referees have to be either

**WEIGHTY:**

Eminent, respected, recognised (perhaps with honours of their own), the kinds of people whose opinion members of the Council might defer to;

or

**SIGNIFICANT:**

The people best placed to judge the value of her work, the people who can vouch for the truth of the story, a memorable voice from the people who know at first hand how much good your nominee's work has done.

Ideally, of course, you'll have both types of people represented in the mix.

You're not absolutely bound to four referees, and if you think you have to include more to cover all aspects of the story then do it. But don't pad.

The form doesn't ask for referees' reports to be submitted with the nomination, because the Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat writes to the referees. You should still put in some preparation, however. Talk the nomination over with each of the referees. Share the basic story and let them know where their piece fits. If possible, have a look at an early draft of their submission. If they're at a loss, or look unsure, supply some dot points to get them started.

# 10. Who do we have to convince?

Decisions on who gets an award in the Order of Australia are made by an independent panel that can't be swayed by money, political influence, family considerations, or prejudice.

They never leak details of their discussions, they never talk to the media, and they are as absolutely impartial as it's possible to get.

The Council for the Order of Australia is an independent body that considers all nominations for appointments and awards in the General Division of the Order.

The Council makes recommendations for appointments and awards direct to the Governor-General.

...

The Council meets twice a year. There are 19 members including representatives of every state and territory, public office holders (ex-officio) and community representatives.

The community representatives on the Council are appointed by the Governor-General on the recommendation of the Prime Minister.

- [www.itsanhonour.gov.au/](http://www.itsanhonour.gov.au/)

As at January 2010 the Council includes 15 male members, which is not the cause of the gender disparity problem but is certainly an example of it. The names of the current members can be found at [www.directory.gov.au](http://www.directory.gov.au).

# 11. What comes next?

After you've sent in your nomination, sit back and wait (they go through the nominations in date order, so it can take a while).

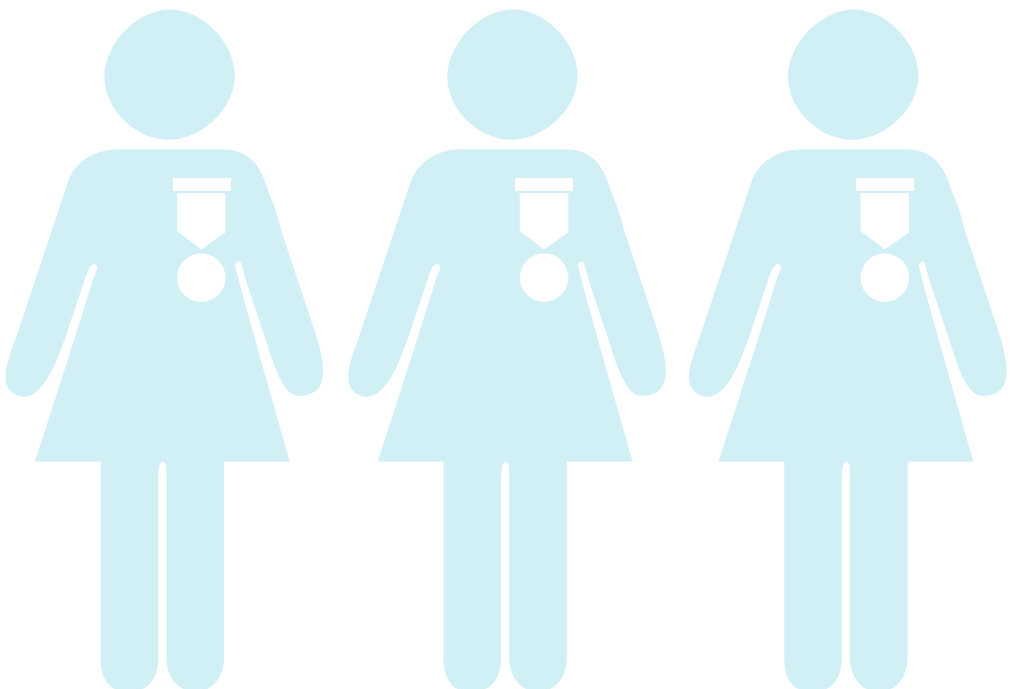
The Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat contacts the referees and get their considered opinions in writing. Sometimes they also seek additional references from people or organisations that work in the same sphere as your nominee. Other checks may also be made. The nominations are then submitted to the Council for consideration and recommendation.

The whole process takes between 18 months and two years – so the sooner you get started the better.

There are two honours lists announced each year – one on Australia Day (26 January) and one in June on the Queen's Birthday. As a nominator, you'll be informed of the outcome, yes or no, a week before whichever one of these the person's nomination was considered for. Successful nominees are of course informed before the big day; unsuccessful nominees should never know.

Award recipients are then entitled to use letters (post-nominals) after their name to indicate which award they received. For example, a Member of the Order of Australia uses the post-nominals "AM".

A few months after the award is announced, recipients are invited to attend an investiture ceremony. Here they are presented with their insignia by the Governor-General (in some cases) or the State Governor.



# 12. Using awards to further your cause

The kinds of people who receive awards in the Order of Australia (and the people who nominate them) are often the kinds of people who want to promote the causes and the organisations that they are passionate about. If your nominee is an award recipient, hooray! Here's what they can do with it:

- **Spread it around.** Use it to motivate the members of the organisation. "I owe it all to you," the award recipient might say; "It's really recognition of the wonderful work you're all doing" (and in a way it is, too) "and I would have been nowhere without you." It helps others to feel part-owners of the award.
- **Talk it up.** This is a really good chance for the recipient to promote their cause more widely. Put out a media release (embargoed until the award is announced - check with the Australian Honours and Awards Secretariat for protocols) and offer interviews and photo opportunities.
- **Build the 'brand'.** Having letters after your name does give a person extra credibility. Your nominee (and associated organisations) should feature the award as much as they can in their dealings with partners, bureaucrats, regulators, supporters, funders, donors, and the media. It can be added to background information on the organisation's website, letterhead, business cards, and funding submissions.
- **Pass it on.** Once successful, your nominee might be inspired to nominate other women for an award, or act as a referee for others (bringing to bear the associated prestige their own award can lend to the nomination).

