



Women's Program Evaluation Report (December 2025)



Women and Gender Equality Canada works to advance gender equality through an intersectional gendered lens. Working in partnership with key stakeholders, including civil society organizations, labour groups, the private sector, other orders of government, and First Nations, Inuit and Metis Peoples, the Department actively promotes the inclusion of all people in Canada's economic, social, and political life. The Department for Women and Gender Equality works to uphold its mandate to advance equality with respect to sex, sexual orientation, and gender identity or expression through the inclusion of people of all genders, including women, in Canada's economic, social and political life.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This evaluation assesses the relevance, coherence, effectiveness, efficiency, and sustainability of the Women’s Program delivered by Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) for the period from 2016–17 to 2021–22.

The evaluation draws on multiple lines of evidence, including document and data reviews, surveys, interviews, and focus groups, to provide a comprehensive overview of the Program’s achievements.

The Women’s Program funded 533 projects through calls for proposals (CFPs) and an additional 60 through continuous intake (CI). Program resources reached over 1.1 million people directly, supported by more than 1,800 tools distributed via social media and awareness campaigns.

Relevance: Through the provision of both project and capacity-building funds to women’s organizations at the local, regional, provincial/territorial and national level, the Women’s Program plays an essential and ongoing role in advancing gender equality in Canada. Its objectives and approach remain closely aligned with federal priorities, government policy frameworks, and the diverse, intersectional needs of women and gender-diverse individuals across the country.

The Women’s Program has demonstrated responsiveness through its focus on capacity-building and sustainability, despite some confusion among stakeholders about the distinct roles of different gender-based violence initiatives at Women and Gender Equality Canada.

Coherence: The Women’s Program has made strides in fostering coherence through partnerships and engagement efforts. The Program has contributed to advancing women’s leadership and

equality across Canada through actions such as joint funding agreements with provinces and territories, highlighting its efforts to provide aligned support. It has also leveraged the Forum of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women to foster collaboration. Jurisdictional scans and partnerships with organizations have further supported the understanding of needs and helped enhance the Program’s reach. Despite these efforts, engagement with other federal departments remained limited, indicating a need for strengthened collaboration to prevent duplication and improve the overall impact.

Effectiveness: The Women’s Program has made progress toward its short-, medium- and long-term outcomes and contributed to systemic change, mainly in policies and practices. Funded projects have built and strengthened networks, led to increased knowledge-sharing, and provided targeted supports and resources for diverse communities. Organizations report notable growth in their capacity to address gender equality, and evidence shows advancements in the adoption of more inclusive policies and practices.

Unintended positive outcomes reported by funding recipients, such as expanded reach, heightened organizational visibility, and new partnerships, further highlight the Program’s impact. However, the measurement of long-term systemic change remains a challenge, and performance data gaps limit deeper analysis.

Efficiency: The Program has offered appreciated flexibility and support, enabling organizations to adapt to evolving needs and contexts. Overall, funding recipients surveyed reported being very satisfied with the Program application. This level of satisfaction has

remained consistent over time, aligning with findings from the 2016 survey.

Sustainability: Sustained progress is evident through continued resource dissemination, ongoing partnerships, and strengthened organizational capacity. Nevertheless, a number of women's organizations, particularly smaller ones, have raised concerns that challenges such as job precarity, limited long-term funding, and difficulties in securing new financial resources may threaten the durability of results.

Conclusion: Overall, the Women's Program is seen as a critical driver of gender equality in Canada. While it has achieved meaningful progress and is valued by stakeholders, continued focus is needed on improving clarity about the distinct roles of the Program, enhancing data collection, and securing sustained funding to address systemic barriers.

Recommendations

Based on the program's context,¹ the Women's Program should continue to adapt its approach to ensure alignment with emerging priorities.

1. Support initiatives that will strengthen and enhance the long-term stability of the women's sector to address persistent barriers that impede women's economic security and leadership opportunities.
2. Clarify and streamline the various gender-based violence initiatives where appropriate to enhance stakeholders' understanding and maximize internal and external efficiencies.

3. Implement improved data collection and analysis strategies to better measure the impact of the Women's Program's initiatives.

¹ As of November 2025.

1. INTRODUCTION

This document presents the findings and recommendations from the evaluation of Women and Gender Equality Canada's Women's Program. As required under the Treasury Board Secretariat's 2016 *Policy on Results*, the evaluation aims to provide comprehensive and reliable evidence to support decision-making.

1.1 PROGRAM PROFILE

The Women's Program, established in 1973 in response to a recommendation of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women in Canada, has evolved to become a key driver of gender equality in Canada. Initially providing funding and technical support to women's organizations, it was integrated into Status of Women Canada (SWC) in 1995, later becoming the Department for Women and Gender Equality in 2018.

The purpose of the Program is to advance equality for women in Canada by working to address or remove systemic barriers to their progress and advancement. ***The ultimate outcome of the Women's Program is the full participation of women in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada.***

The Program has an annual grants and contributions funding base of approximately \$19 million (ongoing).² However, its funding

has grown significantly over the evaluation period. In Budget 2018, \$100 million was invested over five years to support the sustainability of women's organizations, followed by Budget 2019's \$160 million³ over five years for tackling systemic barriers to women's equality. More recently, Budget 2023 allocated \$160 million over three years to support women-serving organizations, though funding will return to \$19 million annually in April 2027.⁴

Focused on economic security and prosperity, leadership and decision-making roles, and ending gender-based violence,⁵ the Program funds local, regional, and national initiatives through grants and contributions. Funding applications were accepted through open or invitational calls for proposals and via continuous intake.

The Women's Program 2021–2023 logic model⁶ (Appendix 1) underscores activities such as stakeholder capacity-building, networking, advocacy, community engagement, and knowledge mobilization, with outcomes centered on establishing networks, applying knowledge, improving gender norms, and achieving women's full participation in various aspects of life.

² A-Base funding – Permanent and ongoing funding allocated to departments and agencies to conduct their program activities. This type of funding is typically accessed through parliamentary votes and is intended to ensure the continuity of essential government services. B-Base funding is temporary funding received by a department or agency for specific projects/initiatives that is managed through a special purpose allotment.

³ The majority of this funding was allocated through the 2021 Feminist Response and Recovery Fund (FRRF) calls for proposals, which is not within the scope of this evaluation.

⁴ As of August 2025.

⁵ Government of Canada. Funding programs for women and gender equality. <https://women-gender-equality.canada.ca/en/funding/funding-programs.html#Women's Program>

⁶ A program logic model lays out the Program's goals, activities, and results it expects to achieve, from immediate to ultimate changes.

1.2 EVALUATION APPROACH

The evaluation focuses on the period from 2016–17 to 2021–22 and includes projects from various calls for proposals dating back to 2013, which closed during the evaluation period. Data collection took place from August 2023 to March 2024. Detailed information on each line of evidence can be found in Appendix 3.

Five core issues have been identified: relevance, coherence, effectiveness/performance, efficiency, and sustainability. These five areas correspond to evaluation criteria and were assessed through nine evaluation questions.

The evaluation’s key questions, sub-questions, indicators, and data sources are summarized in the evaluation matrix in Appendix 2.

The evaluation used multiple lines of evidence:

- **Document and data review** of over 450 files, including administrative data.
- **Survey of funded organizations** covering 514 funding recipients (sample) with a 53.7% response rate, i.e., 276 respondents.⁷
- **Census population data** to provide broader demographic insights.
- **Focus groups**, including eight discussions with 23 representatives from funded organizations.
- **Key informant interviews** (42 interviews with 49 participants) with representatives from the Women’s Program, provincial and territorial governments, other federal departments, funded organizations, and experts.

⁷ While the total number of survey respondents is 276, the number of responses may vary by question due to skip patterns and non-responses.

Stakeholder Category	Number of Interviewees
WAGE officials	17 (13 interviews)
Funded organizations	21 (18 interviews)
Federal government officials	2
Provincial and Territorial government officials	4
External experts	5

Thematic analysis does not assign numeric or proportional values to the qualitative research findings (collected through interviews and focus groups). Instead, it uses the following qualifiers in summarizing the findings to represent the strength or frequency of the responses:

None (0 or no)	A few (<20%)	Some (20-40%)	Half (40-60%)	Many (60-80%)	Most (80-99%)	All (100%)
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Limitations and mitigation

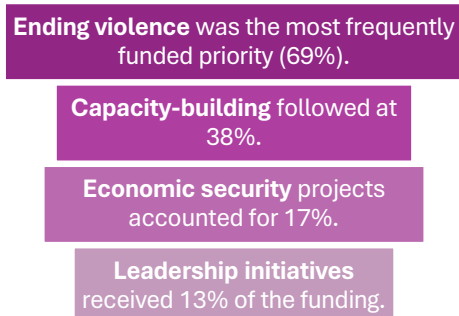
- Retention policies prevented access to ineligible/unfunded applicant data, limiting analysis of outcomes without program funding.
- To address low focus group participation, the project criteria were broadened beyond “closed” projects—acknowledging that some participants might not be able to speak to outcomes—and key informant interviews were offered as an alternative.
- The report acknowledges incomplete administrative data resulting from varying reporting templates and provides guidance for careful interpretation.

2. FINDINGS

Distribution of funding in support of Program objectives and prioritized population reach

- **Funding and approvals:** 533 projects funded through calls for proposals, plus 60 via continuous intake.
- **Resource reach:** 3,418 resources developed, reaching over 1.1 million people directly and an additional 1,800+ tools distributed through social media and awareness campaigns.
- **Prioritized populations:** Highest funding proportion and focus on Indigenous women and women in northern, remote, or rural areas.

The Women’s Program has funded a total of 533 projects through calls for proposal, with at least 60 additional projects supported through continuous intake. The following trends were noted among the funded projects:



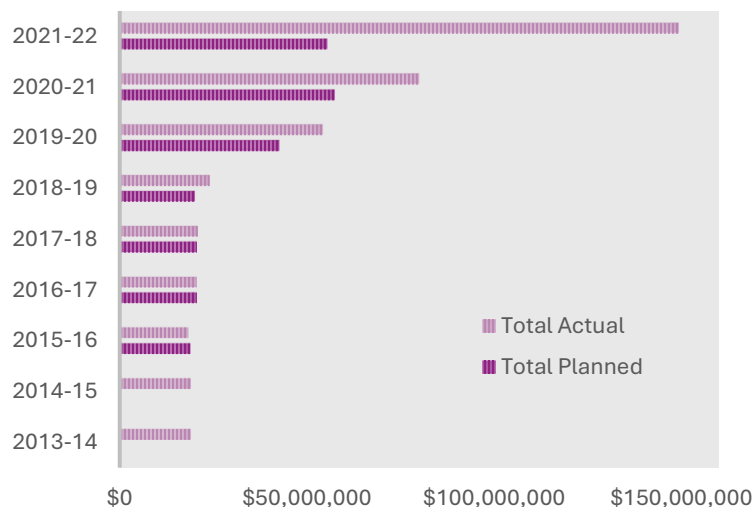
Overall, 1,874 applications were received and 533 were approved, for an overall approval rate of 28%. Application approval rates varied across funding priorities, ranging from 14% to 50% and reflecting differences in demand and funding availability.

- Total applications received: 1,874
- Total applications approved: 533
- Overall approval rate: 28%

Financial analysis shows a substantial increase in the Women’s Program’s grants and contributions budget (B-Base versus A-Base funding) from 2019–20 to 2021–22 (see Graph 1). Spending patterns varied over the years: in some instances, planned spending exceeded actual expenditures, while in others, actual spending surpassed planned amounts.⁸ Qualitative data suggests that Women and Gender Equality Canada and the Women’s Program managed funding appropriately; however, no formal risk management documents were provided.

⁸ Program documentation highlights inconsistencies in reporting across funding mechanisms, particularly regarding the number of projects funded and those included in the evaluation period.

Graph 1: Planned and Actual Women’s Program Spending⁹



Despite these investments, insufficient performance data is available to determine the number of beneficiaries served by funded projects. However, administrative data provides insight into how resources were distributed across prioritized groups and demonstrates that the Women’s Program has successfully supported organizations addressing diverse gender equality objectives.

During the period under study, the Program activities reached a broad audience. A total of 3,418 resources were developed, engaging over 1.1 million people directly. Social media and awareness campaigns further extended this reach, distributing more than 1,800

⁹The difference between actual and planned spending for 2021–22 is attributed to additional funding from Budget 2021 to support organizations working to address gender-based violence in support of Canada’s COVID-19 pandemic response as well as to the timing of project payment schedules. The total planned spending was not available for 2013–14 and 2014–15.

communication tools. The intended audiences were diverse, including women, community members, employers/business owners, legislators, and media representatives.

While these figures reflect the Program’s broad outreach, demographic data on beneficiaries—particularly by identity factor—is not systematically tracked at the individual level. This limitation restricts the ability to conduct detailed analysis on the demographic distribution of those engaged.

Among projects that identified a specific priority group beyond women in general,¹⁰ Indigenous women and women in northern, remote, or rural areas were most frequently prioritized and received the highest proportion of funding. Other commonly prioritized groups included non-status, refugee, and immigrant women, racialized women, and youth, often in the context of gender-based violence initiatives. Some projects targeted multiple groups, so totals may overlap. The table below summarizes the five population groups most commonly prioritized across funded projects:

Population Groups	# of Projects	% of Funding
Indigenous women	151	28%
Women in northern, remote, or rural areas	91	12%
Non-status, refugee, or immigrant women	81	7%
Racialized women	64	8%
Youth (often in the context of GBV initiatives)	75	10%

¹⁰Nearly half of the projects (41% of total funding) did not specify a particular prioritized (target) group, a trend that was more pronounced under the leadership pillar and less common under the gender-based violence pillar.

2.1 RELEVANCE

- *The Women’s Program plays an essential role in advancing women’s equality in Canada.*
- *The Program is generally well aligned with stakeholders’ needs, federal policies and priorities, and the thematic areas of the Gender Results Framework, particularly in relation to economic security and prosperity, leadership and decision-making, and gender-based violence.*
- *Stakeholders highly valued the Program’s flexibility, intersectional approach, and capacity-building support. However, they emphasized the need for longer-term sustained funding to effectively address systemic barriers.*
- *The launch of various gender-based violence initiatives and new funding streams under both the Gender-based Violence Program and Women’s Program created confusion. There was a lack of clarity regarding the specific roles of different gender-based violence-related initiatives within Women and Gender Equality Canada.*

Is the Women’s Program aligned with federal policies and priorities?

The need for the Women’s Program is evident in the persistence of systemic barriers that limit women’s full participation in Canadian society. Despite progress in recent decades, major gaps and systemic barriers persist for women, girls, and 2SLGBTQI+ people. These gaps and barriers are found in areas such as the impacts of poverty,

inequalities in economic participation and leadership, the unequal burden of care, and pay inequity.¹¹

Evidence from program documentation and interviews confirms that the Women’s Program aligns with federal policies and priorities, particularly on gender equality. The review highlights Women and Gender Equality Canada’s evolving role, from policy coordination to leading gender equality efforts across the federal government. In 2019, the Federal Gender Results Framework (GRF)^{12,13} identified six key areas for advancing gender equality. The Women’s Program directly aligns with three of them: economic participation and prosperity, leadership and democratic participation, and gender-based violence.

During the evaluation period, other key federal priorities included advancing intersectionality through Gender-based Analysis Plus (GBA Plus), the Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Calls to Action, the Privy Council Office’s Call to Action on Anti-racism, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion and the Government of Canada’s commitment to accessibility and the rights of persons with disabilities.¹⁴ These priorities promote a more inclusive lens and, to varying degrees, align well with key elements of the Women’s Program and the specific focuses of its calls for proposals.

In December 2018, [new legislation](#) transformed the agency name from Status of Women Canada to Women and Gender Equality Canada, Canada’s first stand-alone federal department dedicated to

¹¹ [Women and Gender Equality Canada’s 2023-24 Departmental results report - Canada.ca](#)

¹² In 2019, several federal government priorities related to gender equality efforts were identified in the development and implementation of the Gender Results Framework.

¹³ Women and Gender Equality Canada. (2018). Gender Results Framework. Accessed: [Gender Results Framework - Canada.ca](#)

¹⁴ <https://www.canada.ca/en/employment-social-development/programs/accessible-canada.html>

advancing gender equality. This transition came with a broadened mandate and new programming, as well as new, time-limited funding under the Equality for Sex, Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression Program (2019), and time-limited and ongoing funding under the Gender-based Violence Program (2017).

The launch of various gender-based violence initiatives—such as the Federal Strategy to Prevent and End Gender-based Violence, the National Action Plan to End Gender-based Violence, the Gender-based Violence Program,¹⁵ and new funding streams under both the Gender-based Violence Program and Women’s Program—created confusion for organization representatives and experts. There is a lack of clarity regarding the specific roles of different gender-based violence-related initiatives within Women and Gender Equality Canada. In particular, the distinction between the Women’s Program’s gender-based violence priority area and the department’s Gender-based Violence Program is not always well understood. Participants from most key informant groups indicated that they were unable to easily distinguish whether their funding originated from Women and Gender Equality Canada’s gender-based violence initiative. Representatives from Women and Gender Equality Canada also noted multiple instances of uncertainty regarding where to direct potential applicants for gender-based violence initiatives, given the number of programs offered by Women and Gender Equality.

The review of program documentation (2013–2019) also underscores a shift in the Women’s Program toward building organizational capacity and ensuring the sustainability of outcomes. The 2019–2021 program logic model introduced the Capacity-building Fund, as well as outreach, and recipient support, with a focus on expanding access

to resources, knowledge, and partnerships to drive *systemic change* for women’s equality. As most of the capacity-building projects—originally funded from 2019–20 to 2022–23—were extended into 2023–24, specific results are not yet available. Early outcomes from these projects are explored in later sections.

Is the Women’s Program responsive to the needs of its stakeholders?

Findings from all lines of evidence confirm that the Women’s Program’s priorities—gender-based violence, economic security and prosperity, as well as leadership and decision-making—are well aligned with stakeholders’ needs. The program’s flexible and intersectional approach allows it to respond to the diverse challenges faced by different communities, ensuring its continued relevance in advancing gender equality.

Overall, results indicate a generally positive perception of the Program’s responsiveness among the external stakeholders consulted, with appreciation for its flexibility and ongoing support. At the same time, they emphasized the need for sustained support and strategic alignment to advance gender equality objectives across communities and sectors.

The introduction of capacity-building funding was viewed as a very positive step. Stakeholders in focus groups (out of 23) highlighted the Capacity-building Fund for effectively aligning with their strategic organizational needs. This funding was credited with providing crucial resources that enabled organizations to engage more strategically and address capacity and labour shortages, thereby enhancing project sustainability. Despite these positive aspects, concerns were

¹⁵ Trudeau, Justin. (2021). Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth Mandate Letter. Accessed: <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-women-and-gender-equality-and-youth-mandate-letter>

raised about the duration of funding periods. Stakeholders advocated for longer funding periods to better support project implementation, community engagement, and relationship building.

Mechanisms for assessing and responding to stakeholder needs:

The continuous refinement of the Women’s Program’s priorities through needs assessments and consultations has helped maintain alignment with emerging issues. To support this process, the Program used both formal and informal mechanisms, including jurisdictional environmental scans, to assess and respond to stakeholders’ needs effectively.

- The 2021–22 regional environmental scans identified gaps, highlighting the need for more flexible funding, enhanced childcare and housing support, and a streamlined application process.
- These analyses also underscored the unique challenges faced by Indigenous and trans communities, emphasizing the importance of tailored support and resources.

Evidence demonstrates that the Women’s Program was highly responsive to stakeholders’ needs, adjusting its funding mechanisms, criteria, and delivery models accordingly. This includes offering invitational calls for proposals with themes tailored to specific groups, along with flexible terms and conditions. This approach ensured the Program’s responsiveness and effectiveness in advancing gender equality across Canada.

- A key example of program adaptation is the reintroduction of funding eligibility for advocacy activities in 2016, following its removal in 2007. This shift reflects the Government of Canada’s renewed commitment to partnering with civil society by acknowledging advocacy’s vital role in shaping policy and driving reform in a democratic society. Alongside this change,

consultations and amendments made to foundational documents in 2017 removed restrictions on organizational activities, increased funding limits, and strengthened support for the long-term sustainability of gender equality initiatives.

- The 2018 Capacity-building Fund’s call for proposals marked a shift toward more adaptable/responsive funding approaches. Grounded in the needs of equality-seeking organizations, the fund aimed to increase capacity, support long-term sustainability, and promote strategic planning for systemic change.
- Additional amendments in 2020 demonstrated the Program’s adaptability, particularly in response to COVID-19.

Regional environmental scans provided a broad understanding of community needs but did not systematically quantify them by beneficiary groups. However, they consistently highlighted service gaps for Indigenous women and those living in rural and remote areas.

To address these gaps, several calls for proposals specifically prioritized Indigenous women during the study period, including *Empowering Indigenous Women for Stronger Communities (2016–17)*, *Addressing the Economic Security and Prosperity of Indigenous Women (2017–18)*, and the *Community Capacity-Building Fund for Indigenous Organizations (2018)*.

The Program has demonstrated responsiveness to the needs of underrepresented groups by tailoring its calls for proposals to address the specific challenges faced by target populations, using themes such as:

- increasing economic options for women; and
- enhancing economic prosperity for immigrant women.

As noted earlier, 28% of program funding was allocated to projects identifying Indigenous women as beneficiaries, while 12% supported women in northern, rural, and remote areas (including overlap between the two groups). The Women's Program has also demonstrated responsiveness to stakeholders' needs by adapting its eligibility criteria over time. Following consultations in 2017, significant changes were made, expanding applicant eligibility to include unions and educational institutions. Survey results show that the Program funds a diverse range of recipients, including:

- local-based organizations;
- provinces and/or territories ; and
- national organizations.

Departmental representatives highlighted ongoing efforts to improve accessibility, particularly for women with disabilities, racialized communities, and Indigenous Peoples. The active engagement of program officers along with the introduction of capacity-building funds has been critical in ensuring the program remains responsive to diverse needs.

- **Most of the 21 funded organization representatives interviewed** found the Women's Program's priorities relevant and interconnected, particularly in addressing violence against women and girls. The Program's flexibility allowed them to tailor projects to their needs, focusing on support for women from 2SLGBTQI+ communities, economic empowerment for marginalized women, and women in leadership roles. The Program's intersectional and trauma-informed approaches enabled organizations to address complex, multi-faceted issues.
- **Provincial and territorial officials interviewed** (4) aligned the program's priorities with their mandates, particularly in the areas of gender-based violence and leadership. They highlighted the

importance of program funding in supporting leadership and capacity-building initiatives, especially in northern and remote regions. Collaboration with the Women's Program was perceived as impactful, illustrated by projects such as *Promoting Women in Leadership*, which advanced women's leadership and addressed gender parity. Some officials also highlighted alignment with additional priorities, such as engaging men and boys in violence prevention and addressing 2SLGBTQI+ issues, showing the Women's Program's alignment with broader governmental goals.

The need for prioritized supports for rural, Indigenous, and northern communities, where high costs and limited capacity pose significant barriers, was emphasized by provincial and territorial officials.

- **Expert interviewees** (5), while recognizing the broad relevance of the Women's Program's priority areas, suggested expanding to better reflect the needs of equity-deserving groups. They emphasized the importance of addressing systemic barriers, social determinants of health and mental health, and all forms of discrimination, including notably, racism, homophobia and transphobia. They called for stronger collaboration between organizations and improved measurement of these barriers, including through Gender-based Analysis Plus and disaggregated data. They also stressed the importance of a robust gender-based violence monitoring system and criticized the complexity of funding processes, advocating instead for streamlined support for advocacy organizations.
- **Focus group participants** praised the Women's Program's emphasis on systemic change and flexible funding. Many of the 23 representatives from funded organizations expressed the need for longer-term funding to achieve lasting systemic impact. While definitions of systemic change varied among stakeholders,

capacity-building efforts were perceived positively. The discussions underscored the importance of maintaining flexible funding strategies to address gender equality challenges across all levels.

- Interviews with **Women’s Program officials** (17) and **provincial/territorial representatives** (4) highlighted the Program’s strong commitment to stakeholder engagement and adaptability. Officials emphasized ongoing communication, consultations, and program flexibility in responding to emerging needs. They also noted alignment with broader government strategies, such as Canada’s Feminist International Assistance Policy and the Federal government’s Women’s Entrepreneurship Strategy.

2.2 COHERENCE

- *The Women’s Program has advanced coherence through partnerships and engagement.*
- *Jurisdictional e-scans and partnerships with organizations have been instrumental in identifying needs and contributing to enhancing the Program’s reach.*
- *Joint funding agreements with provinces and territories have supported aligned efforts to advance women’s leadership and equality.*
- *The Forum of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women has been successfully leveraged to strengthen collaboration across Canada.*

→ *Limited capacity for engagement with other federal departments was identified, suggesting more frequent collaboration to avoid project duplication and maximize the overall impact.*

To what extent does the Women’s Program complement, coordinate, and/or avoid duplication?

Women and Gender Equality Canada serves as a central coordinating body for gender equality, fulfilling the three key roles of *convenor*, *knowledge broker*, and *capacity builder*.

The Women’s Program has made significant strides in fostering coherence through partnerships and engagement efforts.

Recognizing the importance of collaboration, Women and Gender Equality Canada launched efforts under Budget 2019 to develop the Partnerships and Strategic Investment Strategy, aimed at enhancing partnerships within three sectors: federal, provincial and territorial, philanthropic, and private. Partnerships with federal partners focused on “*improved coordination and impact of federal actions to advance gender equality*,” while collaboration with provincial and territorial partners sought to “*facilitate funding access and maximize community impact by coordinating complementary activities*.”¹⁶

Some partnership opportunities identified were directly linked to the Women’s Program. For instance, plans were made to develop processes for engaging other government departments in the Women’s Program’s calls for proposals, followed by their involvement in the assessment process. Although these initiatives did not unfold as planned, Program documents demonstrate that, between 2018

¹⁶ Trudeau, Justin. (2021). Minister for Women and Gender Equality and Youth Mandate Letter. Accessed: <https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/mandate-letters/2021/12/16/minister-women-and-gender-equality-and-youth-mandate-letter>.

and 2020, the department engaged in key partnerships with the three sectors, marking an important step toward “*building a more sustainable and higher impact approach.*”¹⁷

In fact, driven by the desire for a coordinated policy approach and a recognition that achieving gender equality is a shared responsibility, Women and Gender Equality Canada increased its strategic engagement efforts. This included strengthening relationships and launching targeted partnership initiatives with other federal departments and provincial and territorial jurisdictions.¹⁸

Engagement with provincial and territorial partners: Women and Gender Equality Canada maintains ongoing collaboration with provincial and territorial partners through the Forum of Federal-Provincial-Territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women, an intergovernmental body established in 1982 to share knowledge, foster collaboration, and advance gender equality.

The Forum provides federal, provincial, and territorial ministers with a collective and unique opportunity to lead and influence change on current and emerging issues related to women’s equality and the status of women in Canada.

Evidence found in Program documentation highlighted the fact that some provincial and territorial senior officials were engaged in the parameters of the Women’s Program’s 2018 Capacity-building Fund prior to its launch, providing¹⁹ feedback on the calls for proposals as part of the consultation process.²⁰

¹⁷ Women and Gender Equality Canada. (2020). Internal document. *Partnership briefing for ADM.*

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Women and Gender Equality Canada. (N.D.). Internal document. Women’s Program Capacity-Building Fund 2-Pager.

Partnerships between the Women’s Program and the provinces and territories were also illustrated through joint funding agreements to promote women in leadership through promotional campaigns and workshops, and to support women to be financially secure, free from violence, and fully able to participate in the economy and society, as follows:

- Women and Gender Equality Canada contributed \$3.5 million through agreements with Nova Scotia, Manitoba, Northwest Territories, Yukon, and Nunavut, resulting in a total investment of \$6 million across five projects.²¹

An example demonstrating the Women’s Program’s engagement of provinces and territories for the Capacity-building Fund is outlined below:

- In collaboration with the Government of Yukon, Women and Gender Equality Canada provided \$878,500 over three years to three Indigenous women’s organizations to support capacity-building-related activities, for a combined investment of \$1.6 million under the Capacity-building Fund.²²

Similar joint funding agreements were implemented with the governments of the Northwest Territories and Nunavut in 2019 for the empowerment of women and girls in the North:

- Under these agreements, Women and Gender Equality Canada contributed \$525,000 to the Northwest Territories and \$600,000

²⁰ Women and Gender Equality Canada. (2018). Internal document. FPT Access to Funding Task Team Feedback on Capacity-Building.

²¹ Women and Gender Equality Canada. (2022). Internal document. Strategic Partnerships Deck.

²² Women and Gender Equality Canada. (N.D.). Internal document. *FPT Emerging Issues Task Team Decisions To-Do List Milestones.*

to Nunavut to support public campaigns, new school curricula, and leadership skill-building initiatives.²³

Women and Gender Equality Canada jurisdictional e-scans provided robust evidence of coordinated efforts and initiatives between Women's Program-funded organizations and other sector actors. The e-scans were designed to achieve the following objectives:

- **Identify unfunded organizations** within Women and Gender Equality Canada's mandate to enable proactive outreach and engagement.
- **Map the distribution of organizations working to advance Women and Gender Equality Canada's mandate** to support stakeholder engagement, funding and research activities.
- **Determine priority issues** to inform strategic funding decisions that maximize community impact and advance gender equality at all levels.

The value of the jurisdictional e-scans was echoed by a number (17) of the Women and Gender Equality Canada key informants interviewed.

Engagement with Indigenous organizations: Program documentation also showed that the Indigenous Women's Circle was engaged in shaping the parameters of the 2018 Capacity-building Fund's call for proposals.²⁴ As part of this consultation process, Status

of Women Canada provided a response to the feedback and questions posed by Indigenous Women's Circle members.²⁵

Engagement with the private sector: In 2019, Women and Gender Equality Canada partnered with the Bank of Montreal to support organizations funded under the Women's Program Capacity-building Fund. Through this partnership, funding recipients were offered free webinars developed by subject matter experts in three key areas identified from the calls for proposals' applications: partnership development, strategic planning and financial health.²⁶ According to program documentation, this partnership was established in alignment with the Bank of Montreal's underlying work strategy focusing on women's economic empowerment, promoting itself as a "leader in the field of support and advocacy for women business owners."²⁷ These sessions aimed not only to "provide additional capacity-building opportunities to women's organizations" but also to "give organizations the opportunity to network and connect with other organizations."²⁸

Partnership development with federal departments: While the program documentation mentions some coordination with federal departments and agencies, it provides limited supporting evidence. However, some examples of coordination include partnering with Employment and Social Development Canada to fund projects advancing gender equality and collaborating with Global Affairs

²³ Women and Gender Equality Canada (2019). Governments of Canada, Northwest Territories, and Nunavut announce joint funding to advance gender equality [News release]. Accessed: <https://www.canada.ca/en/women-gender-equality/news/2019/08/governments-of-canada-northwest-territories-and-nunavut-announce-joint-funding-to-advance-gender-equality.html>

²⁴ Women and Gender Equality Canada. (N.D.). Internal document. Women's Program Capacity-Building Fund 2-Pager for consultation.

²⁵ Women and Gender Equality Canada. (2018). Internal document. Women's Program Capacity-Building Fund Call for Proposals IWC Feedback and SWC Response.

²⁶ Women and Gender Equality Canada. (N.D.). Internal document. BMO Survey Results.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Women and Gender Equality Canada. (N.D.). Internal document. BMO Briefing Note.

Canada to establish the Equality Fund for women's organizations in developing countries.

Despite these successes, among the (17) Women and Gender Equality Canada key informants interviewed, limited capacity to engage with other federal departments was reported. They suggested that more frequent collaboration with other federal funding sources would help prevent project duplication and maximize the overall impact.

2.3 EFFECTIVENESS

- *The Women's Program has made progress toward its short-, medium- and long-term outcomes and contributed to systemic change, particularly through shifts in policies and practices. However, stronger data collection mechanisms and clearly defined long-term goals are needed to better assess the impact.*
- **Collaboration and networks:** *Projects built partnerships that improved reach, impact, and sustainability.*
- **Stakeholder coordination:** *Most funding recipients reported strong coordination, including joint advocacy efforts, shared implementation of activities, and active knowledge-sharing.*
- **Resources and capacity:** *Funded projects developed outreach tools and enhanced organizational capacity, particularly in addressing gender-based violence through the support of the Capacity-building Fund.*
- **Knowledge use:** *Audiences are applying knowledge to address gender equality barriers, although the extent of its impact varies across regions.*
- **Unintended benefits:** *Positive effects for funded organizations included greater reach, visibility, and lasting networks.*

To what extent has the Women's Program achieved or is likely to achieve its intended results?

Short-term outcomes: The Program has made strong progress in achieving its short-term outcomes by fostering collaboration and expanding access to programs, resources, and support to address barriers to women's equality. These findings are based on program performance measurement data, including survey responses from funding recipients and program reports.

Collaboration and networks: Program-funded projects have successfully established partnerships and collaborations, strengthening networks that enhance the reach, impact, and sustainability of efforts to advance women's equality.

According to the survey data, a large majority of the funding recipients surveyed (250) reported working with other stakeholders, with 73% indicating a high degree of coordination with other stakeholders through networks and partnerships and 16% reported some degree of coordination. Only a small fraction (4%) reported minimal coordination. Even capacity-building projects, which tend to be more internally focused, demonstrated collaboration, with 61% engaging with external partners.

Systemic change projects, focusing on leadership, economic security and prosperity, and gender-based violence reported particularly high levels of coordination, with 90% or more of the funding recipients surveyed indicating significant engagement with stakeholders. Collaboration was particularly prominent in projects with a broader scope or scale, such as national initiatives (96%), which inherently require coordination across multiple stakeholders.

Higher levels of collaboration were also observed in:

- larger projects with funding exceeding \$450,000 (85%);

- systemic change projects funded through open calls for proposals (88%); and
- projects funded through continuous intake (93%).

The most common forms of coordination indicated by funding recipients surveyed (251) included joint implementation of activities (65%), knowledge sharing (55%), and joint advocacy efforts (46%). Many recipients also described involving partners in advisory roles, expert consultations, committee participation, and shared learning opportunities.

The benefits of these partnerships were substantial. Nearly all of the funding recipients surveyed (250) identified advantages, with the most frequently cited being:

- improved knowledge sharing (85%);
- increased project awareness (72%); and
- enhanced project credibility (63%).

More than two-thirds of funding recipients surveyed reported that stakeholder collaboration enabled them to achieve results that would not have been possible on their own. Coordination also led to stronger advocacy strategies, greater project reach to new populations, and reduced duplication. It also facilitated the sharing of resources, access to additional financial and in-kind contributions, and enhanced long-term sustainability through shared commitments to address gender-related barriers.

Resources, supports, and outreach: Beyond strengthening networks, program-funded projects also played a role in developing and disseminating resources and support mechanisms. Among the funding recipients surveyed (276), 75% reported that their projects

focused on creating materials to build organizational capacity. This is followed by awareness and outreach activities (e.g., engagement of women, communities, stakeholders in needs assessment) reported by 67% of organizations. Additionally, 63% developed resources,²⁹ and 57% provided supports.³⁰

According to the funding recipients surveyed, project resources and supports encompassed a wide range of products, including training modules, workshops, and reports (e.g., new data, needs or gap assessment, and culturally appropriate information). Other examples include podcasts, webinars, presentations, toolkits, campaigns, and policy and evaluation frameworks. These outputs were disseminated through various channels to reach diverse target audiences.

Program performance data indicate a high degree of reach of resources and supports, both through direct engagement and/or social media or awareness campaigns. During the period under study, 3,418 resources were developed and over 1.1 million people were reached through direct engagement. Consistent with survey responses, intended audiences were reported to be varied, including diverse women, community members, employers/business owners, legislators, and media. Reach through social media and/or awareness campaigns was even broader, with over 1,800 communication tools distributed to diverse audiences.

Capacity-building: For these projects, the impact extended beyond immediate resource development. Among organizations that received funding through the Capacity-building Fund, 72% reported that their projects significantly improved their ability to address gender equality issues in a sustainable way. Many described how the Program contributed to strengthening decision-making, increasing

²⁹ Development of resources, e.g., development of tools that can be posted or distributed to support communities.

³⁰ Development of supports, e.g., development of supporting relationships, linkages, programming to advance gender.

credibility, and even helping some organizations navigate existential challenges.

The outcomes included the development of internal policies, strategic planning documents, feminist management training, rebranding efforts, and research initiatives to better understand client needs. Some organizations have also improved their financial sustainability by enhancing donor platforms and hiring specialized staff, such as fund development or human resources professionals.

Through strategic collaboration, resource development, and capacity-building, the Program has laid the groundwork for sustained progress in advancing women's equality. The evidence, as captured in performance measurement data, indicates that the Program is not only achieving its intended short-term outcomes but also positioning organizations for long-term impact.

Medium-term outcomes: Program performance data show progress toward the medium-term outcome of ensuring that target audiences are using and applying knowledge in their policy and program work to address barriers to women's equality.

However, fully quantifying this outcome remains challenging due to the unique nature of individual policy and program projects. Evidence from regular performance measurement, public reporting, and the evaluation survey suggests varying degrees of success in generating knowledge and resources that are being used or applied by others.

Geographic differences: Prince Edward Island, Quebec, New Brunswick, Saskatchewan, and Nova Scotia reported the highest rates of knowledge application, with approximately half of the funded projects successfully applying knowledge to their policy or program work.

The survey data reveals that projects with high complexity, i.e., those involving multiple components, are more likely to have a significant impact.

Long-term outcomes: Regarding the long-term outcomes of fostering more inclusive policies and practices to address barriers to women's equality, a majority of the funding recipients surveyed (276) achieved this outcome, either to a large extent (28%) or to a moderate extent (29%). For some projects, the impact on policies and practices has remained "local", such as introducing a new service, practice, or policy within the organization or its direct partners (e.g., a local school or sister organization).

In contrast, other projects have pursued systemic change with broader applicability and dissemination, while acknowledging that systemic change also occurs within smaller geographic regions.

Examples of systemic impacts include:

- expanding reach or implementation by changing policy or practices across organizations, sectors, or regions;
- securing additional resources for spin-off projects that build on or extend the foundational project;
- establishing new networks, collaborations, or entities to sustain or advance the work initiated by the project; and
- promoting and implementing policy or practice change options for organizations, sectors, or regions.

"The project helped mobilize politicians and convey important legal messages from community and institutional stakeholders to decision-makers. We can now see that the proposed changes are being implemented (e.g., training judges and lawyers on issues related to sexual violence)."
Surveyed funding recipient

Open-ended survey responses further indicate that funding recipients report significant progress in making their policies and practices more inclusive. Examples include incorporating client voices into program design, reframing work within the context of reconciliation, adopting more inclusive board and staff recruitment policies, rebranding organizations to reflect broader experiences, and diversifying resources and supports to ensure inclusive access (e.g., multilingual and trauma-informed resources).

Unintended outcomes: Six in ten (165) of the 276 funding recipients surveyed reported experiencing unintended outcomes from their projects, with nearly all being positive.

Positive unintended outcomes identified include:

- **Greater project reach (33%):** Some organizations surpassed their initial targets, engaging more participants or expanding to new communities beyond what was originally planned.
- **Increased organizational visibility (30%):** Media attention, networking opportunities, and heightened stakeholder interest in the project have enhanced the organization's reputation and public profile.
- **Lasting networks and partnerships (29%):** Relationships formed during the project continued beyond its formal end, fostering ongoing collaboration and knowledge-sharing.

For Capacity-building Fund projects, respondents highlighted the unexpectedly strong impact of internal capacity-building on their organization's overall effectiveness. Strengthened infrastructure and operational improvements allowed leadership to focus more strategically on achieving their mission.

These unintended outcomes demonstrate the broader and lasting impacts of funded projects, particularly in strengthening

organizations, expanding outreach, and fostering long-term collaborations.

However, while the survey of funding recipients offered the best opportunity to examine differential impacts among beneficiary groups, no statistically significant differences were detected for key outcome indicators. More than four in ten projects had no specific target group other than women in general, and the numbers of projects targeting some groups (e.g., women with disabilities, 2SLGBTQI+) were too small for meaningful analysis. The Program has also faced challenges in collecting disaggregated performance data to examine this question further.

Facilitators and barriers to project success

Women and Gender Equality Canada regularly conducts project analyses to identify what contributes to their success. Through the evaluation survey, key informant interviews, and focus groups, funding recipients highlighted both facilitators and barriers to achieving their intended outcomes.

Facilitators of success: Surveyed recipients attributed their success primarily to internal organizational strengths, such as established networks, dedicated leadership, and enhanced capacities developed through the project. Additional success factors identified in Women and Gender Equality Canada's internal analyses and evaluation feedback include:

- **Stakeholder engagement and partnerships:** Collaboration with corporate partners, community organizations, and research institutions expanded project reach, piloted new initiatives, and enhanced advocacy.
- **Leveraging expertise:** Support from HR and evaluation specialists, expert advisory committees, and university researchers strengthened project implementation. Consultations with women with lived experience were particularly impactful.
- **Addressing community-identified needs:** Projects responding to service gaps or emerging issues benefited from alignment with government priorities or media attention.
- **Effective knowledge dissemination:** Clear and targeted dissemination strategies ensured that project learnings and solutions were shared with relevant stakeholders, enhancing their reach and impact.
- **Inclusive and flexible delivery methods:** Innovative models, online resources, and peer support networks helped projects adapt to diverse needs.

- **Early sustainability planning:** Well-defined strategies increased the likelihood of long-term impact beyond project funding.

This combination of internal capacity, strategic partnerships, and adaptability contributed to project success across different contexts.

Barriers to project success: Unsurprisingly, the COVID-19 pandemic was the most frequently cited barrier to project success, as reported by 59% of funding recipients surveyed (208) and confirmed in qualitative research. Key challenges included staff redeployment, illness, event cancellations, disrupted partnerships, and increased client demand.

Women and Gender Equality Canada's internal analyses and evaluation data also identified additional barriers:

- **Human resource challenges:** Staff and board member turnover, limited internal capacity, or difficulty securing appropriate external expertise.
- **Insufficient funding and/or time:** Constraint to fully implementing system-level actions.
- **Project complexity:** Often linked to institutional resistance to change.
- **Time-intensive partnerships:** Especially in building trust and working with Indigenous communities.
- **Participant engagement difficulties:** Due to geographic barriers, lack of resources or childcare.
- **Strategic misalignment:** Unclear or underdeveloped strategies, that are not reflective of identified needs, or the absence of long-term planning.

Challenges specific to the Capacity-building Fund: Stakeholders highlighted the lack of alternative funding sources to support capacity-building efforts that are essential to advancing gender equality, particularly in critical areas such as governance and administration.

To what extent is the Women’s Program contributing to the removal of barriers to systemic change?

The Women’s Program has made progress toward its short- and medium-term outcomes and continues to address systemic barriers to gender equality, but challenges remain. Census data reveal persistent gendered norms, including limited freedom among some respondents to express their gender as they wish. Findings from a Statistics Canada survey³¹ confirm this perception: 72% of women agreed or strongly agreed that significant obstacles make it harder for them to get ahead compared to men, versus 55% of men. In other words, women were more likely to perceive barriers to gender equality, likely reflecting their lived experiences.

Measuring the Program’s impact and its contribution to removing systemic barriers remains difficult, underscoring the need for improved data collection and clearer long-term objectives. While there are frequent calls for stronger strategic orientations and better data (e.g., Gender-based Analysis Plus analysis and disaggregated information), it is important to recognize that assessing impact is inherently complex.

Part of the way forward lies in building on the Program’s early successes in capacity-building, which stakeholders have widely valued, while maintaining its focus on driving systemic change.

Administrative data highlighted that funded projects across all provinces and territories have contributed to achieving systemic change to varying degrees, primarily through the development of

resources.³² However, the findings reveal regional disparities. Projects reported the highest rates of systemic change in New Brunswick (39%), Nova Scotia (33%), Nunavut (29%), Alberta (26%), Ontario (25%), and Prince Edward Island (25%). Conversely, the lowest rates were observed in Quebec (8%), Yukon (9%), and the Northwest Territories (9%).

Among projects that achieved systemic change, the most targeted areas were policies and practices (54%), followed by networks and collaborations (21%), resource flows (11%), norms and attitudes (8%), power dynamics (3%), and norms and narratives (3%).

- **All lines of evidence** emphasized the Program’s critical contribution to the women’s movement in Canada. It remains one of the few consistent sources of funding for women’s organizations, particularly those with limited access to alternative support. At the same time, stakeholders emphasized the need for a more clearly articulated vision and a comprehensive, long-term strategy to tackle systemic challenges within the movement. While the Program provides essential support, it cannot achieve systemic transformation on its own. Broader, coordinated strategies, paired with sustained funding, are required to ensure organizational stability, strengthen effectiveness, and secure lasting progress toward gender equality.
- **Focus group participants** (23) emphasized the Capacity-building Fund’s role in strengthening organizational stability beyond project funding. Documentation confirms the Fund’s objective of equipping organizations to advance gender equality effectively. Its contributions have been particularly notable in the area of

³¹ Statistics Canada, Survey of Safety in Public and Private Spaces. [Perceptions related to gender-based violence, gender equality, and gender expression](#)

³² Administrative data presents information only for projects that provided related data. A review of administrative data noted that approximately 50% of projects are missing this reported data, so this should be considered when interpreting the results.

gender-based violence, where advocacy efforts and strategic partnerships have been instrumental.

- **Experts consulted** (5) stressed the Program’s importance in advancing gender equality and expressed concerns about the sustainability of women’s organizations without continued support. Funding has enabled organizations to secure additional resources and develop new initiatives. However, systemic barriers persist, and experts emphasized the need for a long-term strategy and multi-level collaboration to address gender equality issues in a comprehensive and sustainable way.

2.4 EFFICIENCY

- *The Program has offered appreciated flexibility and support, enabling organizations to adapt to evolving needs and context.*
- *Overall, funding recipients surveyed reported being very satisfied with the Program application process. This level of satisfaction has remained consistent over time, aligning with findings from the 2016 survey.*
- *While stakeholders’ perceptions were generally positive, they suggested improvements including streamlining the application process, giving more time for submissions, speeding up funding decisions, and revising financial reporting requirements.*

Has the Women’s Program been managed and delivered efficiently?

The Program has taken significant steps to improve its design and delivery, demonstrating a strong commitment to efficient and responsive management. Key improvements, such as simplifying

concepts, clarifying eligibility criteria, and introducing capacity-building financing, have been recognized as key facilitators that support funded initiatives and increase flexibility. Improvements in accessibility, including the use of plain language and expanded eligibility for diverse organizations, have also been viewed as beneficial. Efforts to streamline communication and introduce greater flexibility in funding agreements have helped reduce barriers and strengthen the overall effectiveness of the Program.

Overall, 74%³³ of funding recipients surveyed reported being very satisfied with the application process under the Program. This level of satisfaction remains consistent over time, aligning with the 2016 survey results, in which 70% of respondents indicated satisfaction with the application process.

Most survey respondents (81%) reported being very satisfied with the level of funding received, and more than two-thirds expressed strong satisfaction with the clarity of the application and program requirements as well as the guidance provided by program staff. Similarly, focus group participants from the Capacity-building Fund and continuous intake projects highlighted high levels of satisfaction with both the application process and staff support.

Despite positive perceptions of the Program, the assessment of its efficiency, particularly in management and delivery, reveals areas for improvement. While stakeholders generally viewed the Program as responsive to community needs, several challenges were consistently identified across all lines of evidence. These included:

- complexity of the application process;
- delays in funding decisions;
- burdensome financial reporting requirements;

³³ When those who responded “Don’t know or prefer not to say” are removed.

- high turnover among program officers, affecting continuity and the level of support provided; and
- increased competition for limited funding.

These delivery-related concerns were echoed in the survey results. Notably, one in four respondents suggested that the application process be streamlined and simplified, particularly to better support small organizations. Among the 276 survey respondents, 38% identified financial reporting as a challenge, and several noted that staff turnover had negatively impacted the support they received. In addition, concerns were raised about the rigidity of project timelines.

Delivery timeliness and project timeframes³⁴: While the Program has made efforts to improve the efficiency of funding distribution, timeliness remains a persistent challenge. Although anticipated timelines were included in all calls for proposals, no official service standards were in place for the scope of this evaluation.

Survey findings offer a mixed picture:

- 57% of survey respondents were satisfied with the amount of time available and the level of effort required to prepare a proposal.
- Sixty-one percent expressed satisfaction with the timeliness of funding decisions.
- However, 18% indicated a need for faster funding decisions and 16% called for extended project timeframes and greater consultation in setting priorities regarding calls for proposals.

³⁴ *Delivery timeliness and project timeframes* refer to the efficiency and adequacy of funding distribution and project durations. They capture how quickly funding decisions are made, whether timelines align with project scope and capacity, and the extent to which recipients can achieve expected outcomes within the allotted time.

These findings suggest that while many recipients are satisfied, important timing and scope-related constraints remain, particularly for national and higher-value projects, and for organizations with limited capacity.

Funding recipients from open calls for proposals focusing on systemic change reported lower satisfaction with the timeliness of funding decision communication, compared to recipients under the Capacity-building Fund and continuous intake streams.

While funded Indigenous organizations generally expressed satisfaction with the Program, they reported slightly lower satisfaction with the amount of funding awarded compared to non-Indigenous organizations. Additionally, organizations serving Indigenous clients were also less likely to be satisfied with the timeliness of funding decisions.

Findings from the survey, interviews, and focus groups revealed mixed opinions on the adequacy of project timeframes. Overall, 72% of survey respondents felt that their project duration was sufficient to achieve the agreed-upon outcomes. However, this perception was less positive among larger projects, particularly those over \$450,000, with only 64% rating the timeframe as appropriate. National-level projects were also more likely to report that the available funding was insufficient in relation to the scope of their activities.

→ **Provincial and territorial officials** interviewed (4) provided insights into the regional impact of funding timeframes. Some

viewed the Women’s Program’s current funding periods as appropriate, citing the stability brought by recently introduced four-year funding agreements. However, delays in funding disbursement hindered timely project implementation, especially for smaller organizations. These delays also contributed to staff shortages, which were identified as a critical challenge.

Key challenges were identified through focus groups with 23 funded organization representatives:

- **Reporting requirements and strict deadlines**, particularly for smaller organizations: While the Program offered flexibility through extensions, concerns were raised about underfunding and the added burden of frequent reporting.
- **Systemic change vs. project duration**: Although longer-term funding (three to five years) was appreciated, stakeholders emphasized the need for even more extended commitments to support sustainable systemic change.
- **Rising costs**: Significant increases in costs since initial funding allocations made it more challenging to achieve project objectives, adding financial strain.

Opportunities for improvement were noted: Participants highlighted areas for enhancement, including:

- simplifying the applications;
- accelerating funding decisions;
- extending project timelines; and
- enhancing consultations to better refine priorities.

Overall, stakeholders underscored the need for ongoing dialogue with the department and enhanced communication with funded organizations to ensure a better alignment and understanding of

program requirements. They advocated for more flexible funding mechanisms, longer-term financial support, and adjustments to reporting requirements. They emphasized the importance of funding structures that account for inflation and unpredictable costs that can impact project success.

2.5 SUSTAINABILITY

- *Most funded projects showed some level of sustainability, primarily through the ongoing dissemination of resources and knowledge. Skill development, application of new knowledge, and partnerships were also key factors in sustaining impact.*
- *Securing additional funding after project completion remained a challenge, particularly for smaller organizations.*
- *Although the Program supports capacity-building and offers relatively long-term funding agreements, its project-based nature led to concerns about job insecurity, staff turnover, and the sustainability of funded initiatives.*
- *The Program has contributed positively to gender equality efforts in Canada, but some stakeholders pointed to challenges in maintaining momentum and achieving systemic change without sustained investment.*

To what extent will the impacts of the Women’s Program be, or are likely to be, sustained?

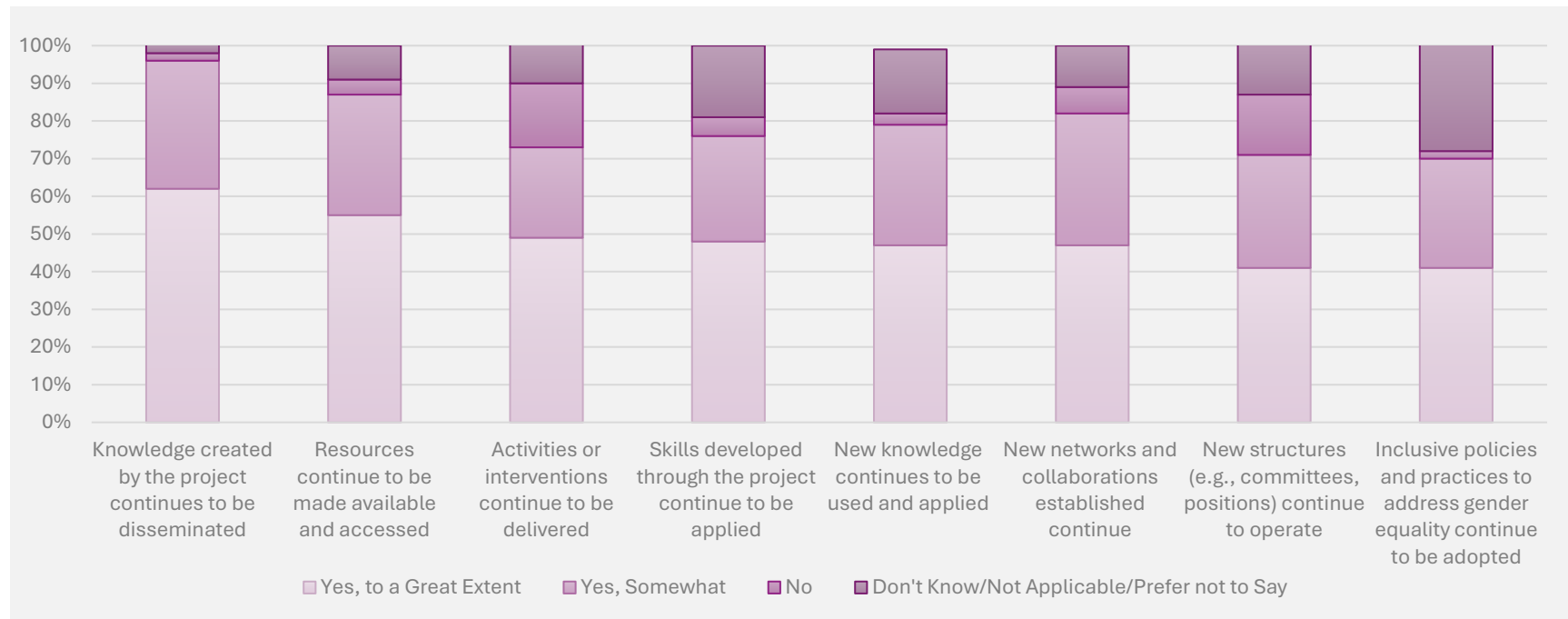
Completed project funding recipients were surveyed about the ongoing sustainability of their projects’ activities and impacts. Most reported that their project achieved certain dimensions of sustainability to some extent (see Graph 2). The most common way sustainability was maintained was through ongoing dissemination or access to knowledge and resources created by the projects, cited as

occurring at least somewhat for over 90% of completed projects (Graph 2).

However, this form of sustainability was largely passive, often limited to posting or sharing materials upon request. Interview feedback highlighted that these materials can quickly become outdated or underutilized without active management and promotion.

Other significant sustainability factors included the continued impact of skill development, application of new knowledge, and partnerships established or strengthened during the project. These collaborations were identified as essential for enhancing outcomes and sustaining impact. However, engagement with participants through direct project activities was more likely to end after project completion.

Graph 2: Dimensions of Sustainability and Extent as Reported by Survey Respondents



Funding and financial sustainability: Following project completion, 57% of funding recipients surveyed did not secure additional funding. Another 15% relied solely on existing internal resources and one in three organizations (31%) received funding from an external source to continue their project. Among those who secured external funding, the most common sources were:

- federal government funding, including from Women and Gender Equality Canada itself (52%);
- non-profit organizations such as United Way, foundations, and community groups (40%); and
- provincial and territorial funding (29%).

Projects that successfully obtained further funding were more likely to have:

- leveraged funding during their initial project;
- had a higher overall project value; and
- been led by Indigenous organizations.

According to survey respondents, organizations with strong pre-existing capacities, such as staff expertise and networks, or those that built capacities through their projects (e.g., hiring new staff), had better chances of continuing their work. Smaller organizations with limited revenue-generating potential or a narrower audience faced greater difficulties in securing ongoing funding.

These challenges persist despite respondents acknowledging that funding from the Women’s Program is highly flexible, supports organizational capacity-building, and is relatively rare in offering longer-term funding agreements, more than 70% of which span three years or longer.

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO SUCCESS	N=238
Organization expertise/capacity/reputation	40%
Long-term/level/flexibility of funding	27%
Engagement of the right partners/relationships with partners	26%
Training received/external expertise/advisory council	17%
Need for the project/community interest/women’s involvement in the project	14%
WAGE support/guidance/professionalism	13%
Successfully pivoting to online delivery (COVID-19)	5%
Incorporation of lived experience/women-driven/feminist lens	4%

Challenges and opportunities: Several of the 32 key informants noted that funding from the Women’s Program has made notable contributions to advancing gender equality in Canada, including policy advancements in childcare, gender-based violence, pay equity, and board diversity.

Despite these achievements, and as mentioned previously, stakeholders emphasized that long-term change requires sustainable, longer-term funding. While the Program has taken steps to improve funding responsiveness, many stakeholders, including experts and funded organizations, recommended exploring longer-term funding models. Program representatives acknowledged this need but pointed to structural barriers that limit the ability to provide such funding.

Among the 49 respondents, including Women and Gender Equality Canada and Women’s Program representatives, some identified opportunities to support sustainability and address systemic impact

in the long run by building networks and fostering collaboration among funded organizations and addressing knowledge gaps across jurisdictions and sectors.

3. CONCLUSION

The evaluation concludes that the Women’s Program remains highly relevant, responding effectively to persistent and emerging needs in advancing gender equality in Canada. The Program closely aligns with federal priorities and key policy frameworks. While some stakeholders expressed confusion about the distinct roles of various gender-based violence-related initiatives within Women and Gender Equality Canada, the Women’s Program has demonstrated responsiveness through its focus on capacity-building and sustainability.

The Program has demonstrated coherence through strategic partnerships and collaboration, notably with provinces and territories, and through engagement with both sector actors and Indigenous organizations.

In terms of effectiveness, the Program has made substantial progress toward short-, medium-, and long-term outcomes by fostering strong networks, supporting resource development, and enhancing organizational capacity. Evidence suggests that the Program is contributing to more inclusive policies and practices and, to some extent, to systemic change, particularly through its focus on collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and advocacy. However, measuring long-term systemic impacts and collecting disaggregated performance data remain challenging.

The Program demonstrates efficiency and adaptability, with stakeholders reporting satisfaction with program flexibility and its

funding processes and supports. However, administrative complexity, reporting burdens, and constraints linked to funding cycles continue to pose barriers, especially for smaller organizations.

Sustainability of the results is most evident through the ongoing use of developed resources, strengthened partnerships, and improved organizational capacity. Yet, job precarity, high staff turnover, and challenges in securing post-project funding threaten long-term impact, particularly for smaller organizations.

Overall, the Women’s Program is seen as a critical driver of gender equality in Canada. While it has achieved meaningful progress and is valued by stakeholders, continued focus is needed on clarifying the distinct roles of the Program enhancing data collection, and securing sustained funding to address systemic barriers.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the Program's context,³⁵ the Women's Program should continue to adapt its approach to ensure alignment with emerging priorities.

1. Support initiatives that will strengthen and enhance the long-term stability of the women's sector to address persistent barriers that impede women's economic security and leadership opportunities.
2. Clarify and streamline the various gender-based violence initiatives where appropriate to enhance stakeholders' understanding and maximize internal and external efficiencies.
3. Implement improved data collection and analysis strategies to better measure the impact of the Women's Program's initiatives.

³⁵ As of November 2025.

APPENDIX 1: WOMEN'S PROGRAM LOGIC MODEL

Impact	That has an impact on Canadians	Women are full participants in the economic, social, and democratic life of Canada	
Long-Term Outcomes	That result in a change of state	LT 1 Policies and practices to address barriers to women's equality are inclusive	LT 2 Women are well represented in leadership roles and at all levels of decision-making
Medium-Term Outcomes	That result in a change in attitudes and practices	MT 1 Intended audiences use/apply knowledge in their policy and program work to address barriers to women's equality	MT 2 Gender norms and attitudes are improved
Short-Term Outcomes	That result in a change in knowledge, skills and/or abilities	ST1 Networks and collaborations to increase the reach, impact, and sustainability of women's equality efforts are established	ST2 Intended audiences have access to programs, resources and supports to address barriers to women's equality
Outputs	That lead to products or services	O1 Programs, resources, supports, partnerships	
Activities	Actions	Stakeholder capacity and skill building, networking and collaboration, advocacy, community engagement and knowledge mobilization	

APPENDIX 2: EVALUATION MATRIX

Focus Area	Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Lines of Evidence				
			Document Review	Survey	Interviews	Focus Groups	Secondary Data ³⁶
Relevance	Is the Women’s Program aligned with federal policies and priorities?	Extent of alignment with WAGE mandate, priorities, and expected results	✓		✓		
		Extent of alignment with Government of Canada policies and priorities ³⁷	✓		✓		
	Is the Women’s Program responsive to the needs of its stakeholders?	Evidence of relevance of Women’s Program priority areas ³⁸ to stakeholders’ needs	✓	✓	✓		
		Evidence of responsiveness to stakeholder needs by funding mechanism, funding criteria, and delivery model ³⁹	✓	✓	✓		
		Evidence of responsiveness to stakeholder needs by eligible recipient type ⁴⁰	✓	✓		✓	
		Evidence of responsiveness to the needs of target population groups, including under-represented groups	✓				✓
		Evidence of barriers or facilitators that affected responsiveness	✓	✓	✓		
		Perceptions of program responsiveness among external stakeholders		✓	✓	✓	
		Evidence of adaptations made by funded organizations during the COVID-19 pandemic (excluded from the scope)	✓	✓	✓	✓	
	Is there an ongoing need for the Women’s Program to advance the participation and equality of women in Canada?	Evidence of ongoing need for the Women’s Program in Canada	✓				✓
		Perceptions of ongoing need among program stakeholders		✓	✓	✓	
		Extent to which non-funded applicants were able to obtain funding, impact on proposed project (contact information on non-funded applicants was not available)		✓			



³⁶ Secondary data refers to information originally collected by someone else—not for the current evaluation—but which is later accessed and analyzed to inform evaluation questions.

³⁷ Including but not limited to: TBS Policy on Transfer Payments; Gender Results Framework; Quality of Life Framework; Sustainable Development Goals; Gender-based Analysis Plus; etc.

³⁸ Priority areas include: gender-based violence; economic security and prosperity; and leadership and decision-making.








³⁹ “Funding mechanisms” refers to calls for proposals, continuous intake, etc. “Delivery model” refers to direct funding, match funding, third party delivery, etc.

⁴⁰ “Eligible recipients” are defined by the Terms and Conditions of the Women’s Program. These include provincial and territorial governments; Canadian not-for-profit organizations; Indigenous governments; research institutes; education institutions; etc.






Focus Area	Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Lines of Evidence				
			Document Review	Survey	Interviews	Focus Groups	Secondary Data ³⁶
Coherence	To what extent does the Women's Program complement, coordinate and/or avoid duplication?	Existence of Government of Canada directives ⁴¹ requiring WAGE to coordinate with federal departments and agencies vis-à-vis the Women's Program	✓				
		Evidence of coordination with federal departments and agencies ⁴² 	✓		✓		
		Evidence of coordination between Women's Program and other WAGE funding programs	✓		✓		
		Evidence of coordination of efforts/initiatives between Women's Program and provincial or territorial governments 	✓		✓		
		Evidence of coordination of efforts/initiatives between funded organizations under the Women's Program and other sector actors	✓	✓	✓	✓	
Effectiveness	To what extent has the Women's Program achieved, or is likely to achieve, its intended results?	Evidence that resources, partnerships and networks have been developed (outputs)	✓	✓			✓
		Evidence that intended audiences have accessed programs, resources, and supports to address barriers to women's equality (ER2)	✓	✓			✓
		Evidence that organizational capacity to advance women's equality has increased (CBF ER1)	✓	✓			✓
		Evidence that networks and collaborations have been established to increase reach, impact, and sustainability of women's equality efforts (ER1)	✓	✓		✓	✓
		Evidence that intended audiences have used / applied knowledge in their policy and program work to address barriers to women's equality (ER3)	✓			✓	✓
		Evidence of improved gender norms and attitudes (ER4)	✓			✓	✓
		Evidence that policies and practices to address barriers to women's equality are inclusive (ER5)	✓			✓	✓
		Evidence that women are well represented in leadership roles and at all levels of decision making (ER6)	✓			✓	✓

⁴¹ I.e., mandate letters, policies, guidelines, etc.

⁴² I.e., Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada (ISED); Global Affairs Canada (GAC); Employment and Social Development Canada (ESDC); etc.

Focus Area	Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Lines of Evidence				
			Document Review	Survey	Interviews	Focus Groups	Secondary Data ³⁶
		Evidence of barriers or facilitators that influenced the achievement of results (i.e., COVID-19)	✓	✓		✓	✓
		Perceptions of appropriateness/adequacy of resource allocation as a barrier/facilitator in relation to expected results among program stakeholders 	✓	✓	✓	✓	
		Evidence of unintended outcomes, positive or negative, for any population group 		✓	✓	✓	
		Evidence of differential impacts among target population groups 	✓	✓		✓	
	To what extent is the Women's Program contributing to the removal of barriers to systemic change?	Evidence of Women's Program contributions to addressing or removing systemic barriers to the advancement of gender equality	✓		✓	✓	✓
		Evidence of Women's Program contributions to the women's movement writ large	✓		✓	✓	
	To what extent has the Women's Program reached target beneficiaries?	% of organizations that applied for funding but were not funded (by organization type) 	✓				
		# of organizations that received funding	✓				
		Total # of beneficiaries reached, disaggregated by identity factors 	✓				✓
		Evidence of barriers created, or perpetuated, for targeted beneficiaries 		✓	✓	✓	
		Evidence of adaptations made by Women's Program and/or funded initiatives to be more inclusive 		✓	✓	✓	
	Efficiency	Has the Women's Program been managed and delivered efficiently?	Extent to which program delivery was achieved within intended timeframe(s) (by delivery model)	✓			
Extent to which program results were achieved within intended timeframe(s) ⁴³ (by delivery model)			✓				
Perceptions of appropriateness of timeframe(s) among program stakeholders				✓	✓		

⁴³ Outputs and short-term outcomes only.

Focus Area	Evaluation Questions	Indicators	Lines of Evidence				
			Document Review	Survey	Interviews	Focus Groups	Secondary Data ³⁶
		Extent to which planned resources (human and financial) were fully utilized ⁴⁴ (by WAGE and by funded organizations, delivery model and target population) 	✓		✓		
		Evidence that resources were appropriately redirected if and when needs changed (by WAGE and by funded organizations)	✓		✓		
		Extent to which risks were effectively mitigated or managed by WAGE ⁴⁵	✓		✓		
		Evidence of factors promoting and/or limiting efficient delivery (by delivery model)	✓		✓		
		Extent to which the Women's Program allocated resources to target populations based on needs (by funding amount and by delivery model) 	✓		✓		
Sustainability	To what extent will impacts of the Women's Program be, or are likely to be, sustained?	Evidence of continuation of funding from other sources after project completion ⁴⁶		✓	✓		
		Evidence of continuation of activities / implementation after project completion	✓	✓	✓		
		Evidence of improved self-sufficiency of equality seeking organizations 		✓	✓		
		Perceptions of sustainability of achieved outcomes ⁴⁷ 		✓	✓	✓	✓
		Perceptions of contributions made by the Women's Program to sustainability of the women's movement, among program stakeholders 		✓		✓	
		Evidence of barriers and facilitators to the achievement or non-achievement of sustainability ⁴⁸	✓	✓	✓	✓	

⁴⁴ To determine "full utilization," an analysis of the extent of misallocation, underspending, and/or overspending of resources is required.

⁴⁵ Risks as identified in WAGE policy and/or program documents, such as Treasury Board submissions. For example, risks may include changes in program context; stakeholder engagement; internal departmental capacity; etc.

⁴⁶ When and where it is appropriate, i.e., when there is an expressed need for continued funding; where ongoing community needs are unlikely to be met without continued funding; etc.

⁴⁷ Outcomes may include but are not limited to knowledge, attitudes, capacity, behaviours, etc.

⁴⁸ For example: WAGE program policies, funding mechanisms, and/or Terms and Conditions; project length; enabling environment; etc.

APPENDIX 3: METHODOLOGY NOTES

The methodology details the qualitative and quantitative lines of evidence used to support the Women’s Program Evaluation, which included:

- a review of program documentation and administrative data;
- key informant interviews;
- focus group discussions;
- A survey of funded organizations; and
- Census data.

Review of program documentation and administrative data: Over 450 Women’s Program resources were analyzed and divided into 14 categories, such as policy, operations, funding, budgets, financial information, capacity-building, terms and conditions, performance measurement, evaluation, and regional/provincial-territorial data. Resources included documents, Excel files, and websites, with additional materials provided to support analysis and reporting.

Key informant interviews: The evaluation planned 35–50 interviews across five stakeholder groups: Women’s Program representatives, funded projects, provincial and territorial representatives, other government departments, and experts. In total, 49 stakeholders were interviewed in fall 2023 and early winter 2024.

Focus group discussions: Focus groups targeted three areas: capacity-building, Women’s Program priorities (leadership and decision-making, capacity-building, economic security and prosperity), and Indigenous/Three-Sisters. Thirteen groups of 6–8 individuals were planned, and eight groups were conducted in September 2023, with 1–7 participants each, for a total of 23 participants. Groups were

drawn from completed projects and expanded to include active projects. Participation was first come, first enrolled. Some organizations could not attend due to a concurrent Francophone conference and were offered participate via alternative methods, such as surveys or interviews; three converted to key informants.

Survey of funded organizations: Of 531 funding recipients, valid contact information was available for 514. The survey ran from October to November 2023, with 275 respondents, yielding a 53.7% response rate and a margin of error of $\pm 4.1\%$.

Incomplete or missing administrative data: An Excel file for outcome and indicator analysis contained multiple empty cells. Initial estimates suggested 20–25% of projects were missing key metrics, later adjusted to 10–15% when considering only closed projects. To address this, public reporting sources (e.g., Departmental Results Report, Departmental Plans) were consulted, though some metrics were inconsistent or non-replicable. Differences may be due to updated reporting templates and timing of project closure versus report submission, as validated with the department’s Impact unit.

Representativeness: Survey data were generally representative across multiple variables, with no significant differences across identity elements, though small sample sizes warrant caution. Focus groups were not intended to be representative, and all funded organizations had an equitable chance of participation, including other lines of evidence.