



FUNDING FOR WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS

Feminist and women's organizations form a network across Canada and work in areas of particular concern to women. These organizations fulfill a variety of roles including advancing gender equality, acting as cultural and community spaces, providing important social, health, and community services, and giving women opportunities to participate in political life. By encouraging governments to be more responsive to the needs of citizens, they are an essential part of the democratic process and contribute to a more inclusive and just society.

Why does funding women's organizations matter?

Since the 1980s, both Conservative and Liberal federal governments have decreased the resources available to women's organizations.

Many women's organizations rely on government funding to operate, so the federal cuts have been very damaging.

Additionally, most governments have moved to a funding model which favours project funding over core funding. Core funding includes funding for administrative and operational costs (such as renting a workspace and paying an office manager) whereas project funding pays for particular services or activities (such as counselling or educational workshops). Project funding is less secure and, unlike core funding, it does not provide organizations with stability or flexibility. It also limits their freedom to choose which services and activities they want to provide. But some alternative funding models still persist. For example, in Québec, many women's groups still receive both core and project funding.

By favouring project funding, governments have increased their control over the types of community services offered, while making women's organizations more financially vulnerable and decreasing their capacity for civic engagement (activities that aim to improve conditions for others). Less funding has resulted in:

- fewer resources available for service provision;
- reduced wages and benefits for women's organization employees;
- increased competition amongst women's organizations for limited funding, undermining efforts towards community building; and,
- lowered capacity to participate in ongoing training, skills development, and community engagement to better understand and meet the needs of their communities.

Increased reporting requirements for project funding have in many cases taken community organizations away from community and social justice work and place limits on creativity and innovation. Project funding is often tied to the ability of feminist and women's organizations to be perceived as "effective". Effectiveness is measured through statistical evidence of organizational outcomes (e.g. the number of participants in a program) and increased reporting to funders. But tracking organizational outcomes takes time and money and the decline in core funding limits the financial and human resources needed to do this.

Feminist Organizations

Feminist organizations use a gender lens to understand how gender affects people's relationships in society and interactions with societal structures (e.g. workplaces, education and healthcare systems, laws and policies). They are committed to challenging oppression in society and creating greater social justice. They are diverse and represent organizations that identify with the "feminist" label, as well as those that do not.



Policy4Women

Public space, public engagement

What can governments do?

What has been done?

In 1970 the Royal Commission on the Status of Women acknowledged the important role that women's organizations play in social well-being and democracy. Afterwards, federal funding for women's organizations increased and government bodies dedicated to improving the status of women were created. These included Status of Women Canada (SWC), the Canadian Advisory Council on the Status of Women (CACSW), and the Women's Program (now part of SWC). Provinces and Territories followed the federal government's lead and created similar agencies and programs.

However, over the next few decades, government funding for women's organizations decreased significantly and the conditions of funding changed. In addition, influential decision-makers who held traditional ideas and values claimed women had already achieved equality and, therefore, feminist organizations no longer deserved public resources. These ideas harmed the broader feminist movement and made people question whether government organizations created to support women's equality were still necessary.

After years of funding cuts, SWC was further weakened when the Harper Conservative government cut \$5 million in funding to women's organizations, closed 12 of 16 regional offices, and removed the term "advancement of equality" from SWC's mission statement. Funding criteria also changed and organizations were no longer able to receive funding for advocacy or research.

Canadian Women's Foundation

www.canadianwomen.org/

Imagine Canada

www.imaginecanada.ca

Status of Women Canada

www.swc-cfc.gc.ca

Resources

What can be done?

The current Liberal government has reincorporated "works to advance equality for women" into SWC's mission statement and changed the rules for the Women's Program so women's organizations can once again receive funding for advocacy work.

Governments at all levels can further support the important work of feminist and women's organizations in our communities by:

- funding their research activities;
- offering a combination of project funding and core funding to help build capacity, provide stability, and foster innovation;
- minimizing reporting requirements and rethinking the way organizational impact and value is measured;
- inviting them to participate in policy making; and,
- recognizing their contributions to a healthy democracy.

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