



# FACTSHEET

## WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS' CAPACITY FOR ACTION

Women's organizations in Canada have few, if any, paid staff and limited time for advocacy to improve conditions for women. Women's organizations reported they could overcome some barriers by connecting with each other and working together, but they have limited resources and opportunities to do so. These are key findings from a survey and regional discussions with 95 women's organizations across Canada, conducted by the Canadian Research Institute for the Advancement of Women (CRIAW-ICREF, 2018).

### Methodology

100 diverse women's organizations were selected from a list of over 600 women's organizations, which was compiled by CRIAW the winter of 2018 from publicly available sources including other lists, the internet, social media searches and suggestions from CRIAW Board members across the country. The list was organized into a matrix identifying each organization by province or region, English and French, and main constituency and issue(s) in order to select a diverse sample of women's organizations across the country. In this fact sheet, we report on survey findings in French separately when there are distinct differences.

We invited the 100 organizations to fill out an on-line survey in English or French. Sixty-one organizations responded to the survey; 44 in English and 17 in French. The French respondents were mainly from Quebec but also included francophone women's organizations across the country. We also held five regional discussion groups in Vancouver, Regina, Toronto, Montreal and Halifax and met with 34 organizations.

### Organizational characteristics

Most of the women's organizations that responded to the survey do not have many paid staff. A staff of five or fewer were reported by almost all of those responding in French (93%) and almost half (49%) of those responding in English. Almost two-thirds (63%) of English organizations employed 10 or fewer staff. Regional discussions validated and

deepened survey findings as 68% of organizations reported having 10 or fewer staff, with 38% saying they have no paid staff.

Most participating women's organizations were engaged in a variety of activities. The top activities selected by the English women's organizations were education/information, advocacy, providing social services, leadership development and research. Education was also the top activity selected by French organizations. They also noted leadership development, providing social services and advocacy as key areas of engagement.

### Funding

Our survey shows how important government funding is to women's organizations. More than half of the respondents rely on some level or combined levels of government funding – provincial (28%), federal (17%) and municipal (14%), with similar results from French surveys. Other sources such as individual members and donors account for less than a quarter of funding sources and private sector funding even less.

Many of the women's organizations reported in the survey that their funding was not stable (56% of French responses and 46% of English responses). Over half of organizations relied on project funding, not core funding (63% of English results, 56% of French results).

Almost half of the regional discussion group participants described their funding as unstable or

that they did not receive any funding. Only a few organizations participating in the regional discussion groups reported they received some core funding for service provision.

### Advocacy: What women's organizations would like

Many of the women's organizations said they would like to do more advocacy work. They wanted:

- more staff or full-time advocates
- more funding
- more time
- to expand their ability to advocate on behalf of groups that are currently not served and on issues where no gender analysis exists
- to coordinate advocacy with other equality-seeking groups and opportunities to connect, educate and provide resources to women

The organizations reported the services women need were sometimes not available, that research and policy work went undone, and tools were not developed. They reported no time for a gender analysis of issues or outreach and input from surrounding communities because they did not have the capacity.

*"With only one employee, [the organization] struggles to meet the need regarding advocacy. A good chunk of the ED's time is spent reporting to funders, coordinating projects, and searching for new streams of funding. Unless advocacy is built into a project there's not always time to address it."*  
--Survey respondent

### Barriers to advocacy

Over three-quarters of women's organizations said they experience barriers to doing advocacy work (85% English, 80% of French respondents).

Funding problems accounted for almost half of the barriers identified by English respondents, in particular, inadequate financial support. Similarly, funding was identified as a barrier by French respondents, specifically a lack of core funding.

Many respondents called attention to the lack of human and financial resources, in particular the lack of a sufficient number of staff, that impeded their ability to do advocacy. Other barriers included being in a rural area, risking the relationship with funders or charitable status as well as a backlash and targeting for speaking up.

*"While we do have good relationships with our funders and other government partners, it is always difficult to speak out publicly about lack of funding from the government for fear of damaging these relationships."* —Survey respondent

### How do we communicate, coordinate and collaborate to overcome the barriers?

Regional discussion groups identified different ways women's organizations could overcome barriers through communication, coordination and/or collaboration but the overall picture is very similar: **Women's organizations reported that they could overcome more barriers by working together and connecting but had limited resources and opportunities to do so.**

### What does this mean?

Precarious organizational capacity, unstable funding for many women's organizations and insufficient resources (money, staff, time) to do advocacy work means that women's organizations do not receive the funding for the services that women need, they cannot do needed research and policy work or tool development, and they have no time for a gender analysis or to do outreach and provide input on the key issues impacting women's lives.

*"[Women's organizations] need more funding to be able to effectively make change through advocacy"*  
—Survey respondent

This research was conducted as a part of a needs assessment in our three-year Status of Women Canada funded project, "Building Capacity for Intersectional Advocacy on Women's Issues".



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