

CURRENT FUNDING AREAS OF THE WOMEN'S PROGRAM OF THE
SECRETARY OF STATE

- AN OVERVIEW -

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A. INTRODUCTION

Through the Women's Program of the Department of the Secretary of State, the Government provides financial assistance to groups and organizations working to improve the economic, social and legal situation of women, whether in the home, the workplace, the community or the world at large. Activities such as conferences, workshops, public forums, skills development and advocacy raise awareness about women's issues and lead to the development of appropriate solutions.

The Women's Program provides two types of funding - operational and project.

B. OPERATIONAL FUNDING

Operational funding is given to women's organizations nationally and regionally in order to achieve the following:

- a) Develop the capability and expertise of women's organizations to advise governments, the private sector and the public on major public policy issues. The current debates on child care and pay equity are excellent examples of the need for women's organizations to have a detailed understanding of complex technical issues. Operational funding enables organizations to develop these necessary skills and expertise.
- b) Maintain the organizational infrastructure of key national and regional groups. Stable operational funding enables organizations to undertake long-term planning, maintain continuity and ensure that the skills and knowledge within the organizations are developed and built upon. As well, established organizations are better able to use the volunteer and community support essential both to the effectiveness of the organization and to encouraging the participation of women in organizations.
- c) Maintain national and provincial networks of women's organizations providing information and assistance on women's concerns in their communities. The existence of such networks is essential to sharing information and expertise between regions of the country. Provincial and territorial governments are increasingly involved with

women's issues. Federal-Provincial coordination is encouraged through forums such as the First Minister's Conferences and regular meetings of federal, provincial and territorial Ministers Responsible for the Status of Women. It is important, therefore, to support regional and national linkages to encourage coordinated efforts by women's organizations.

These networks are also essential to ensuring that national organizations continue to be representative and can speak effectively to the federal government on behalf of local groups.

Consideration of operational funding is given only to organizations with proven achievements in promoting the full and equal participation of women in all aspects of Canadian society. An assessment is made of the past accomplishments of an organization and whether it is able to plan and successfully implement activities. As well, any organization applying for operational funding must have a solid and representative membership with democratic decision-making structures, serve a need within the community, work in concert with other women's groups and have established a sound financial management system.

C. PROJECT FUNDING

The majority of the Women's Program's grants are given to activities which improve the situation of women at the community level. Project funding supports community initiatives to encourage all institutions (universities, churches, professional associations, and unions) to integrate women's concerns into their decision-making structures, policies and programs.

The amounts of these grants are generally small and therefore a wide range and variety of organizations and projects can be supported. This kind of funding provides the flexibility to respond to emerging issues identified by women's organizations.

In recent years the Secretary of State has given priority preference to projects which address the major areas of: economic equality, social justice and participation and access. Additional information on these themes, as well as examples of projects which have been funded in previous years are set out below.

1) Economic Equality

Ensuring that women are economically secure and benefit equally from their contribution to Canadian society remains a fundamental goal for women's organizations.

Although 64% of women aged 20-64 are in the labour force, they continue to be clustered in low income occupations earning, on average, two-thirds of what men earn. The majority of people living below the poverty line are now women. Despite improvements, women occupy a small fraction of the senior positions in both the private and public sectors. Women still experience difficulty in obtaining financing for business endeavours, even though they have a higher success rate in small business than men.

Improving the support systems available to women who work outside the home is critical, not only to the economic well-being of individual women, but to families and the country as a whole. Many Canadian families currently avoid poverty through the secondary or primary earning capacity of women, a trend which is expected to continue as the economy undergoes structural change and some traditionally male jobs become obsolete. Increasing women's earning capacity and access to economic opportunities are essential elements in building a strong national economy.

Assisting women's organizations to improve economic opportunities for women will continue to be an important activity for the Women's Program. Without economic equality, it will be difficult for women to contribute fully to the growth and development of the country. Within this sector, priority will be given to funding the following activities:

- a) Employment equity: equitable participation in the labour force by women is essential to improving their economic situation. However, many women - particularly young women and those re-entering the labour force after raising their family - find limited opportunities. As well, many women have difficulty moving out of the traditional occupations for women.

Activities funded to promote equitable employment practices could include, for example, production of a booklet on the impact of information technologies on employment opportunities for women. Or research on could be done on provisions which enable women to retain seniority and benefits while on maternity leave could be funded.

- b) Education and training: access for women to appropriate educational and training opportunities is for many women the first step in gaining economic security. Activities supported in this area may include an assessment of the training and educational needs for immigrant women or a conference to identify training options for young women trying to enter the labour force.
- c) Child care: the lack of affordable and accessible, quality child care is a major obstacle to the fuller participation of women in economic activities. Funding by the Women's Program will enable organizations to research and advise all levels of government and the private sector on appropriate child care services in their communities. For example, public meetings could be held to identify the childcare needs of rural women or resource material developed on working with the private sector on workplace daycare facilities.
- d) Pensions: inadequate information on pension options and benefits contribute to the financial difficulties of many elderly women in Canada. This situation is particularly acute for homemakers and part-time workers. Further information is needed to enable women to make sound financial decisions about the future and to develop more equitable pension plans. For example, a brief on pensions for part-time workers could be presented to all levels of government, or a resource booklet on pension issues for widows could be published and distributed.
- e) Women in Business: despite the high success rate for women starting small businesses there is still a need to ensure that credit-granting practices and policies of financial institutions are applied fairly and equitably and do not unjustly limit the entrepre-

neurial activities of women. For example, support could be given to a women's organization to distribute information on innovative loans policies to assist women beginning a business, or to undertake research on the tax status of women working in businesses owned with their husbands.

2) Social Justice

Social justice and economic equality form the cornerstones of women's contribution to the development of Canadian society. A comprehensive legislative base guaranteeing equality for women is also fundamental to achieving social justice. With the entrenchment of the principle of equality in the Constitution, increased importance is placed on testing interpretations of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms and using the provisions as a non-litigious tool to effect positive change in institutional and individual attitudes and behaviour. Although it will take years for the impact of the Charter to become clear, the precedents that are being set through the Charter's early application will send a strong message to Canadian women and men about how the state views equality and how effective the legal system is in ensuring its achievement.

At a concrete level, social justice for women also necessitates the development of a safe society, free from discriminatory attitudes and violence. It is estimated, for example, that one in ten women are physically abused, while many more women are subjected to non-physical forms of harassment and discrimination. As well social justice requires that social and health services and other forms of social infrastructure meet the needs of women. Many women currently do not feel that they receive adequate treatment in dealing with their problems. The Women's Program will support activities in the following areas:

- a) Charter of Rights and Freedoms: activities are supported which foster a better understanding of the implications of the Charter and identify legal test cases to improve the status of women. Local workshops could be sponsored on the implications of the Charter or a review undertaken of provincial compliance with the statutes so that women's organizations may better assess the impact and formulate recommendations to governments.

- b) Legal Equality: awareness of women's legal rights and knowledge of the significance of proposed legislation, enables women to contribute effectively to the legislative process. Support could be provided, for example, to a group of immigrant women to assess the impact on services of changes to immigration laws, or a provincial conference held to examine the effect of revised family laws on women.
- c) Family Violence (battering and incest): wife battering affects women in all socio-economic groups and severely limits their ability to contribute as full members of the community. Long term strategies to increase public awareness about the issue, particularly in ethnic and rural communities and to improve activities by health and legal organizations to better meet the needs of battered women are essential. For example, a handbook could be prepared on compensation for injuries for battered women or a video on violence against women could be distributed in a number of languages to women's organizations and community institutions involved in the issue.
- d) Pornography: demeaning images of women in pornography continue to reinforce stereotypical attitudes. The identification of the linkage between pornography and violence against women has added an important dimension to this issue. Activities supported by Women's Program could encourage community awareness of the impact of pornography and facilitate an informed response to options. For example, briefs could be prepared on control of pornographic material or current research on violence and pornography summarized in a workshop format for discussion with community organizations.
- e) Sexual Assault: health and legal institutions such as hospitals and police forces need to develop appropriate and effective policies and programmes to assist women who have been assaulted. For example, training to sensitize local police forces could be undertaken by women's organizations or workshops held with immigrant and ethnic groups to identify solutions in their communities.

- f) Portrayal of Women in the Media: improving stereotypical images of women in the media will assist in further recognizing women's many achievements. A significant aspect could be working with advertising and media associations to increase sensitivity to the problem. For example, a 'roundtable' discussion with representatives from business and women's organizations could be held to examine images of women in advertising. Similarly, the relevant recommendations from the Task Force on Broadcasting Policy could be distributed to interested organizations to facilitate an informed response.

3) Access and Participation

Although women have made significant gains over the last decade, much remains to be done to ensure equal access to social and economic resources and participation in the decisions on how those resources are distributed. Immigrant women, for example, frequently do not have adequate access to services such as language training. Similarly, disabled women face many attitudinal and institutional barriers which prevent them from participating freely in employment, cultural activities and public debates. The Women's Program will fund projects to address the following:

- a) Equitable Access to Services: the need for improved services for women has been identified in areas such as health and social services. For example, low income women's organizations could document the needs of their membership for improved housing and explore alternative means, such as cooperatives, for meeting these needs. Similarly, a conference on improving health care for disabled women could be held to inform health care providers of cost-effective improvements or a consultation held with northern women on their social service and recreational needs.
- b) Participation in Decision-making: the integration of women's concerns into the policies of key institutions (eg. unions, sport governing agencies, education and business) will increase awareness of the issues and guarantee that their concerns are addressed. Activities supported by the Women's Program could include a

series of skill development workshops on decision-making processes in government or a conference held on strategies to increase the number of women running for political offices.

- c) Discriminatory Attitudes: activities that identify and improve attitudes, policies and programmes reflecting a bias against or a stereotypical view of women's skills, achievements and position in society will further the equality of women. For example, an exhibit on the contribution of farm women to maintaining family farms, or case studies of women in non-traditional occupations could be distributed to the media, employers and students.