

Status of Women Canada

**Women's Program Evaluation Report
and Management Response**

August 2006

CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY

The summative evaluation of the Women's Program was completed in October 2005 when the previous terms and conditions were still in effect. It should, therefore, be noted that the evaluation report refers to the key Program elements such as mandate, objectives and outcomes as they existed prior to the renewal of the Women's Program in September 2006.

The Women's Program (WP) is a grants and contributions program that was founded in 1973 in response to a recommendation of the Royal Commission on the Status of Women. Originally administered by the former Department of the Secretary of State, the WP has been housed within Status of Women Canada (SWC) since 1995. Its mandate is "to support action by women's organizations and other partners seeking to advance equality for women by addressing women's economic, social, political and legal situation," thus contributing to SWC's overall goal of promoting gender equality and the full participation of women in the economic, social, cultural, and political life of Canada.

The WP provides both funding and technical assistance to women's groups and other equality-seeking organizations. Its annual grant and contribution budget is approximately \$11 million, which included, from 2000 to 2005, approximately \$2 million annually from the federal government's Agenda for Gender Equality.

In order to fulfill Treasury Board Secretariat requirements for federal grants and contributions programs, SWC engaged PRA Inc. to conduct a summative evaluation of the WP. Its purpose is to examine the design and delivery, impact, cost-effectiveness/alternatives, and relevance of the WP. As this evaluation is being undertaken in the context of a federal government-wide Expenditure Review exercise, it is also designed to address questions of public accountability and alignment with the priorities of Canadians.

To enhance the reliability and validity of the findings, multiple data sources were used wherever possible to respond to the evaluation questions. Data collection methods included:

- ▶ a review of program documents and administrative data
- ▶ a review of program files (45 files)
- ▶ a survey of applicants (215 respondents)
- ▶ key informant interviews (41 interviews)
- ▶ Case studies (7 case studies).

The main conclusions of the evaluation along with the Management Response are presented below. Both documents were approved by Status of Women Canada Audit and Evaluation Committee on July 24, 2006.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND MANAGEMENT RESPONSE

1. Design and delivery of the program

Overall, stakeholders perceive the design and delivery of the WP to have several important strengths. These include the Program's flexibility, which enables it to accommodate a diverse range of groups, strategies and issues; its social development approach, which is designed to support long-term social change by supporting the capacity of women's organizations to participate more fully in Canadian society; its decentralized structure and presence in communities; and its unique focus on women's equality.

The structure of the WP, consisting of technical assistance and financial assistance components, is seen as basically sound. Program staff and managers and applicants likewise observed that the proposal development process can be demanding, and more so since the introduction of the outcome-based approach.

Successful implementation of the outcome-based approach is currently hampered by a number of significant obstacles. Perhaps most importantly, neither applicants nor all program staff have fully grasped and embraced the outcome-based approach. There is also continuing uncertainty about the appropriateness of the outcome-based approach to social development work among both applicants and program staff. Secondly, although the WP collects a great deal of outcome information via the standardized forms it introduced in 2003-2004, it lacks any strategy for analysing and reporting on these data, and moreover lacks a program database, accessible to regional staff. Some program staff and key informants cautioned against over-reliance on a reporting solution based on the standard forms and a program database. These stakeholders recommended that the WP implement a diversified performance measurement strategy consisting of both the planned "quantitative" methods and objective qualitative methods. A reporting strategy is currently under development, but progress toward a program database has reportedly stalled due to a lack of financial resources, technical capacity, and management commitment.

Recommendation **1. Mechanisms for greater program management accountability relative to the implementation of the outcome-based approach are necessary.**

- **Management's contribution to the successful implementation of the outcome-based approach could be measured in terms of the availability, quality, and timeliness of appropriate documentation (hard copy and/or web-based) and training activities on this approach for program staff, applicants, and potential applicants across Canada.**
- **Management should be accountable for clarity and consistency in funding recommendations and reporting. In particular, Program Managers should ensure that proposals are not recommended until they clearly articulate an initiative's activities, objectives and expected**

outcomes. A standard protocol should be established for changing activities, objectives and expected outcomes during the duration of an initiative. They should also ensure that an initiative's final report is not accepted until it includes the required information concerning outcomes achieved.

- Management should also be accountable for sharing information regarding best practices in the implementation of the outcome-based approach across the regional and local offices of the WP.**

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- Women's Program (WP) is a decentralized program, so management accountability is shared. Regional directors and the chief of national program delivery are accountable for the direct delivery of the program. The chief of program analysis is responsible for program analysis, reporting and results activities. The chief of program and regional coordination services is responsible for due diligence, grants and contributions administration, and budget management.
- The WP Funding Guidelines and the Program Procedures manual are presently the key instruments used to facilitate the uniformity of processes, and the consistency of interpretation of program guidelines and other requirements.
- Processes currently in place to monitor adherence include: a risk-based approach, using a front-end checklist completed at the point of origin for all files; a pre-audit, which the Program and Regional Coordination Services carries out; and a post-audit, which the Program Analysis and Development carries out.
- In response to the evaluation findings, a protocol for changes to files will be developed and incorporated into the procedures manual. In addition, the checklist will be revised to include managers' sign-off on the presence of clearly articulated activities, objectives and expected outcomes for all files. A management protocol will be developed, including managers' sign-off, ensuring due diligence for all closed files and accuracy of results for data that groups provided. The pre- and post-audit processes will be used to identify gaps for follow-up and improvement.
- Accountability for results-based management of Women's Program will be incorporated into the performance agreements of all WP managers, including the Director General and monitored accordingly. Mechanisms for the exchange of best practices, information-sharing and training will be developed, including the use of management meetings.

Completion Date: by September 2006

- Recommendation** 2. **The WP should provide training in the outcome-based approach and efficient proposal development to funding applicants and program staff and managers.**
- **Training should focus on ensuring an adequate understanding of the outcome-based approach, including its key concepts, definitions, and requirements, in order to realize potential efficiencies in the proposal development process.**
 - **It should also specifically address the purpose and proper use of the standard forms. It should emphasize the importance of consistency in reporting.**

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- In responding to this recommendation, the WP will build on the foundation laid over the last three years. Given resource limitations, the 2003 training strategy developed for the implementation of the new Results-based Management and Accountability Framework (RMAF) focused on building the skills of program staff and managers so that they can pass on their knowledge to funding recipients.
- In 2002-2003, the WP staff and management participated in a three-day national training in Ottawa. Federal departments and non-governmental organizations made presentations on results-based program delivery, providing perspectives from both government and recipients of funding. In response to staff requests for additional training to meet specific needs, regional workshops were held in 2003-2004. These workshops were designed to assist with the challenges associated with the new outcome-based approach to program delivery. To complement the hands-on training, self-directed learning tools were developed to provide staff with ongoing access to relevant and practical information.
- A training strategy will be developed and implemented in keeping with any changes to the Women's Program and requirements related to performance measurement. The focus of the training will be on building on existing levels of understanding of the outcome-based approach, including key concepts, definitions, applications and requirements, as well as how to use the standard forms for data collection, analysis and reporting on outcomes.
- A survey of staff and managers will be carried out to determine needs. An evaluation will be undertaken two months after the completion of all the training sessions. This training will be incorporated into staff learning plans and will take into account the Status of Women Canada (SWC) Learning Plan, as well as its Program Activity Architecture, to ensure a link between the results of the WP and of SWC. Status of Women Canada will continue to liaise with potential partners, such as other departments and agencies, to build on already-existing best practises.

- The training needs of groups will be assessed through a survey and interviews with a sample of Program client groups. This will determine the capacity-building strategy and resources required to implement the recommendation. Once again, Status of Women Canada will explore strategies and tools developed elsewhere for examples of best practises.

Completion Date: by June 2007

The file review component of this evaluation was limited in the extent to which it could meet its second objective, that is, to examine the extent to which the outcome-based approach to reporting was being implemented and to identify any emerging issues that might benefit from further investigation or ongoing monitoring. This was due to the small number of "closed files" available for review from the 2003-2004 fiscal year, and was a consequence of the short period between the implementation of the outcome-based approach and this evaluation.

Recommendation 3.

The WP should repeat such a file review as part of a regular evaluation cycle, as per Treasury Board guidelines, because it would undoubtedly prove much more informative in term of the implementation successes and challenges related to the outcome-based approach and the extent to which it is understood by applicants and program staff.

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- As noted in the evaluators' report, the small number of "closed" files available to them limited their ability to comment on the outcome-based approach to reporting because the evaluation took place only one year after the new RMAF and related data collection instruments were put in place. To address this data gap, the program has compiled a statistical profile of all files closed in fiscal years 2003-04, 2004-05 and 2005-06, based on a number of factors, including Program objectives and funding areas.
- In addition, Catalyst Research and Communications is conducting an external review of all closed files dealing with Aboriginal women and violence during the aforementioned period. The review will provide the Women's Program with an assessment of results. It will also identify issues related to outcome identification, documentation and analysis, file management issues, impact measurement approaches and others. The objective of this evaluation is to supplement the findings of the summative evaluation, particularly concerning the Program outcomes.
- The Program will build on the recommendations flowing from this exercise and from the evaluation. This will help in developing a number of ongoing evaluation mechanisms, such as file reviews, aimed at the systematic generation of information on program performance, as well as on implementation and delivery issues, including the extent to which staff and funding recipients understand the outcome-based approach.

- This will lay the groundwork for the next external evaluation of the WP, to be carried out in the 2009-2010 fiscal year. This timeline is in keeping with the TBS requirement for program evaluation on a five-year cycle and in preparation for the renewal of the WP Terms and Conditions by September 2011.

Completion Date: In Process

Recommendation 4

The WP should develop a strategy for reporting on program impact. Consideration should be given to a diversified performance measurement strategy that focuses not only on summarizing effectively the information collected on the standard forms, but also additional objective qualitative methods to illuminate outcomes achieved.

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- SWC recognizes the importance of documenting its contribution to advancing equality for women across the country, as well the ongoing need to improve its ability to report to Canadians on results.
- In spite of its limited resources, the WP has been working to put in place a performance measurement strategy. For example, with the introduction of initiative-based funding in 1998 and the new RMAF in 2003, the application form was revised and new outcome-based reporting forms were introduced for the use of groups and staff. Funding recipients are required to provide clear action plans, identify expected results with measurable indicators, provide evaluation plans and meet reporting requirements. Reports that groups submit are expected to provide results information, which is used for program-level analysis of outcomes achieved through the WP.
- As noted in the evaluation report, the Program faces several challenges, including the diversity and complexity of issues and strategies that make it difficult to capture outcome information, the lack of a data base, and the need for more training of staff and groups. The evaluation also noted that there are indicators of progress, as groups noted by pointing out that the emphasis on results is pushing them to be more strategic in their funding proposals. The ability of groups to implement results-based initiatives, therefore, is crucial for WP as it continues to build its capacity to achieve and report on Program outcome.
- An enhanced reporting strategy that will include methodologies to collect qualitative and quantitative data will be developed and implemented, in keeping with the WP renewal. An internal mechanism will be established for overseeing the implementation of the strategy, as well as the overall processes in developing and testing tools for annual performance reporting.
- The Program will also develop mechanisms to seek input from groups and search for best practises in the measurement of outcomes from other federal and/or provincial programs.

Completion Date: by March 2007

Some stakeholders indicated that they required assistance to understand the information required on the various forms, and the evaluator did not find the forms useful because of inconsistencies in interpretation of the various requirements, be it by applicants, funded initiatives, or program staff. Stakeholders have also expressed a need for simplifying and making the application and reporting process more flexible.

Recommendation 5

Although they were introduced relatively recently, the WP could improve upon the standard forms at this stage, as well as address the forms specifically within the recommended training and in the documentation on the outcome-based approach. In order to enhance their value for performance measurement purposes, improvements to the standard forms should be made in consultation with evaluation experts and a representative sample of potential applicants.

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- An internal staff working group developed the forms the Program uses at present. An external group of individuals from a cross-section of organizations also provided feedback on the forms. Since the forms were put into use, the WP has been gathering comments about them from staff and groups.
- Once decisions are made about the renewal of the Program, a comprehensive process will be developed to examine all existing tools to ensure they are adequate for outcome data collection, inputting and analysis. The review process will also ensure that the tools are complementary, and feed into the SWC planning cycles and reporting commitments. An Outcome Working Group will be established to facilitate the work associated with the review and/or development of tools. External stakeholders will also be consulted.

Completion Date: By March 2007

Given the inherent challenges of measuring social change and the need for the WP to collect more useful and relevant outcome information, the Program should focus on more objective qualitative data collection methods.

Recommendation 6

In order to complement self-reporting by the funded initiatives, the WP should invest in a process of external review of funded initiatives whereby a sample of initiatives would be selected each fiscal year for a review by external evaluators. Given the diversity of initiatives, the high-level indicators of each initiative's impact could be applied.

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- The WP recognizes that ongoing evaluation is important for monitoring progress, identifying gaps and making the necessary adjustments to achieve results. As previously noted, Catalyst Research and Communications is doing an external review of a sample of files. As part of the follow-up to Catalyst's recommendations, WP will explore options for future external reviews of selected initiatives on an ongoing basis.

Completion Date: by June 2007

Recommendation 7

The WP should develop and implement a program database, accessible to staff and managers in all regions, to manage basic aspects of their work and to permit data collection, analysis and reporting on outcomes.

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- The Women's Program is presently using two databases that have limitations in their ability to capture outcome data. The WP is committed to pursuing the work the Database Working Group has accomplished so far. It assessed the performance of the existing mechanism and came up with solutions to improve data collection, analysis and reporting on outcomes. The Working Group was established in November 2003. In July 2005, it completed a report with recommendations for the consideration of management. SWC will proceed immediately to reinstate the Working Group and to retain external expertise to develop the required database, ensuring that it is consistent with government-wide information management systems.

Completion Date: By June 2007

The evaluation took place in the context of the ongoing investigations of the new Standing Committee on the Status of Women, which in May 2005, recommended that the WP introduce a mix of program funding and project funding. The Committee's hearings confirmed stakeholder views expressed during this evaluation in that the termination of program funding and its corollary, the introduction of initiative funding, remains the most controversial of the 1998 changes to the WP.

The evaluation found that the termination of program funding continues to be perceived as detrimental by some organizations. On the other hand, initiative funding is believed to have increased equity of access to WP funding for organizations that were previously unable to access funding from the Program, and increased the visibility and capacity of these organizations. Survey results confirm that funding applicants are divided in their opinion of the impact of the change.

Neither 18-month nor multi-year funding, both of which were introduced in 1998, are nearly as controversial. Both are seen as positive developments. To a certain extent, stakeholders see 18-month and multi-year funding as compensating for the termination of program funding. However, some program staff and managers noted that multi-year funding is limited by its

eligibility criteria. Suggestions for improvement included making multi-year funding available to less experienced organizations and ensuring its availability across the country.

While there is clearly strong support within an element of the WP's constituency for restoring program funding, the larger constituency seems largely content with the existing funding mechanisms. Among program staff, there was little support for restoring program funding, although many acknowledged a need for longer-term funding.

Recommendation 8

The WP should consider extending multi-year funding beyond three years, consistently across Canada, to support initiatives with longer planning and implementation cycles. However, annual renewal of funding should be contingent on organizations fulfilling performance monitoring and reporting requirements.

SWC's Management Response – Partially Accepted

- The WP implemented several changes to the Program in 1998, including the replacement of program and project funding by initiative funding, funding for initiatives up to 18 months and multi-year funding for initiatives for up to three years.
- Multi-year funding was introduced in direct response to the positive feedback to the option obtained through the 1996 consultation process. The WP currently provides this type of support for strategies aimed at public policy and institutional change initiatives requiring longer-term strategies to achieve results.
- Evaluation respondents viewed multi-year funding and 18-month initiatives as positive, since they offer greater flexibility, require less paper work, allow for the implementation of more complex and substantial initiatives, and give more time to achieve results.
- The third report of the Standing Committee on the Status of Women (FEWO) also calls upon the WP to provide funding immediately to women's and other equality-seeking organizations for a minimum period of three years.
- The question of multi-year funding will be taken into consideration in the context of the renewal of the WP terms and conditions.

Completion Date: Ongoing

2. Impact of the program

Although this evaluation was intended to be a summative evaluation focusing on outcomes achieved by the WP, it was limited in its ability to discern the overall impact of the Program due to the limitations of the available administrative data and the relative infancy of the outcome-based approach. As a result, evaluation findings pertaining to program impact are based primarily on anecdotal information.

There is widespread, though not unanimous, agreement among stakeholders that the WP has helped to advance women's equality in Canada. However, it is considerably more difficult to pinpoint the extent to which the WP has achieved each of its four objectives – promoting institutional change, influencing public policy, increasing public understanding of action on women's equality issues, and building capacity among women's organizations. While key informants were able to give specific examples of changes related to each objective, they also pointed out that until implementation of the outcome-based approach in 2003-2004, the Program made no systematic attempt to determine its overall impact. Many also observed that it is virtually impossible to isolate the net contribution of the WP due to the equally significant role of external factors, primarily the political climate, in influencing social change.

The evaluation also sought to determine whether the WP has achieved its objectives under the federal government's Agenda for Gender Equality (AGE) initiative. Administrative data show that AGE funds have enabled the WP to realize some success by a total of 122 new groups and 123 files involving new and emerging issues. However, in interviews, many program staff and managers noted that the purpose of AGE was not explicitly identified when the initiative was introduced and that, therefore, any successes were more by accident than by design. The additional funds simply made it possible to invest more money overall.

The evaluation found some ambivalence among program staff and managers regarding the WP's contribution toward achieving SWC's strategic objectives. While most believe that the Program has contributed to a more equitable public policy and a broader range of informed stakeholders, they were divided on the matter of its contribution to departmental effectiveness. These key informants reported that the WP and the rest of SWC work in isolation from one another and do not communicate or collaborate effectively. In short, the WP is not well integrated into the agency, communications with other directorates within the agency are poor, and the WP lacks influence on departmental decision-making. There is a widespread perception that the poor relationship stems from a fundamental philosophical difference regarding the best way to achieve women's equality. The WP uses a social development approach, but this is not, nor reportedly has ever been, the approach taken by SWC. Key informants emphasized the need for improved communications and collaboration among all of the directorates within SWC.

Recommendation 9

SWC and the WP should work toward greater integration of the WP, and developing more collaborative relationships between the WP and other SWC directorates to ensure that each is benefiting from the work and expertise of the others. For example, considering the wealth of information it collects and its frequent contact with women's groups and other

equality-seeking organizations, the WP should be directly involved in policy development and implementation. Collaborative relationships between SWC directorates, including the WP, should be based on a continuous exchange of information.

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- Given Status of Women Canada's small size and broad mandate, SWC recognizes the importance of ensuring effective communication and collaboration among all directorates. When the WP was transferred to SWC in 1995 as part of the restructuring of the government's machinery related to women's equality, the goal was to create an entity that brings together policy, outreach, research and support to groups under one coherent structure. In the context of its Modern Management Action Plan, the SWC has identified, as a priority, issues related to internal communication and organizational functioning.
- SWC is conducting a governance review, looking at its place within the broader government context, as well as its internal structure and functioning. The results of this review, which is expected to be completed in summer 2006, will assist SWC in responding to issues related to the integration of the WP within Status of Women Canada.
- The WP will enhance its knowledge development and sharing activities, thereby increasing information-sharing among SWC Directorates, and the integration of WP input into SWC planning and reporting exercises.

Completion Date: by March 2007

3. Cost-effectiveness/alternatives

Key informants were unanimous that the WP is giving Canadians value for their tax dollar, observing that the WP encourages community-based organizations to work on issues that are important to Canadian society "on a shoestring," while relying heavily on volunteer contributions of time and effort. Available financial information presents a picture whereby a significant portion of the WP's limited budget goes toward administrative costs. This is likely due to the social development approach to the work of the WP. Thus, included in the administrative costs is the provision of technical assistance required for building capacity among women's groups and other equality-seeking organizations. The complexity of women's equality issues and the social change process, the fact that the WP deals with a number of marginalized organizations and/or new and emerging organizations, and the Program's decentralized delivery model can also contribute to increasing the costs associated with providing this form of assistance.

Recommendation 10

The WP should develop a procedure by which it would monitor the portion of administrative costs that are associated with provision of technical assistance and other duties, which may not be directly related to proposal development, assessment or recommendation, or even related to the WP. Depending on the time-tracking systems or other administrative reporting requirements already in place at the WP, it could take the form of a fairly simple biannual estimate of the portion of the workload among program staff and managers associated with technical assistance, or at the other end of the spectrum, take the form of detailed daily tracking of time spent on technical assistance versus other tasks.

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- SWC recognizes the importance of developing accurate information on the costs of the various functions that staff carries out. Information is currently being gathered on functions related to technical assistance, as a first step toward identifying concisely the related costs. Steps are also being taken to identify the costs of non-WP related functions within the Regional Operations budget.

Completion Date: by December 2006

As well, efficiencies could potentially be gained by improvements to the standard forms, by simplifying and/or shortening the proposal preparation process, through training, by providing staff with better access to technologies, and greater dissemination of information to women's groups and other equality-seeking organizations as well as the general public via the web and other appropriate means.

The findings also suggest a need for greater transparency and increased communication with organizations during and after the assessment process, particularly when it comes to proposals that are declined. Stakeholders' suggestions for improving the proposal development and approval process included the provision of more staff assistance and clarifying the information available in program documentation and on the WP's web site.

Recommendation 11

In the case of proposals that are declined, the WP should provide clear feedback to all applicants on precisely how their proposal does not meet the eligibility criteria for funding. The WP should provide the results of the proposal assessment process to the declined applicant and should always include information on how to appeal the decision.

SWC's Management Response – Status Quo

- The procedures currently in place are aimed at ensuring fair, objective and consistent assessment of all funding requests. Most (69 per cent) of the survey respondents agreed that they understand the criteria used to assess proposals for funding, while 61 per cent said they understand how funding requests are approved.
- In the event that funding requests are declined, the current processes require program staff to inform applicants about the rationale for the decision. Program staff and management will continue to ensure that applicants are duly informed about the process and outcome of the assessment of funding requests, and will continue to refer applicants to other appropriate funding sources, as required.

Completion Date: Done

Recommendation 12

Program staff and managers emphasized the need for access to appropriate and adequate technologies to improve the efficiency of program delivery. The WP should support increased efficiency and improved communications by enhancing, where necessary, the equipment, software and support available to program staff and managers, and providing additional access to technologies related to the demands of the program staff and managers' work (e.g. improved technical support at the regional level, cellular telephones and laptops for staff use while travelling, and redesigned electronic forms).

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- Given Status of Women Canada's small size, the effective use of technology and access to appropriate tools are important to the SWC's ability to implement its mandate. The SWC Corporate Services Directorate monitors the state of equipment on an ongoing basis and develops an annual plan for the replacement and updating of the various tools that staff use and/or require.
- In the 2005-06, priority was given to replacing computers in the regions and the regional Information Technology (IT) platform was updated. A working group has also been established to share information on a regular basis. In addition, IT staff makes site visits on an as-needed basis to better understand and address issues as they arise. The WP recognizes the need to continually improving the effective use of technology and access to appropriate tools, and will continue to work in collaboration with the Corporate Services Directorate in addressing this issue.

Completion Date: Ongoing

The most significant staff concerns had little to do with the efficiency of program delivery and more to do with its effectiveness. There is a general consensus among program staff and managers that effective delivery of the WP is hampered by problems related to program management. First, program staff and managers believe that the WP suffers from poor internal communications and information sharing among the regions and the national office. Secondly, there is a widespread perception that senior management within SWC does not truly understand, value and support the WP, and that as a result, the WP is not truly integrated into the agency.

Recommendation 13

The WP should take steps to improve internal communications by introducing mechanisms for timely communications among the regions and the national office.

- The WP could make better use of the existing SWC intranet to improve the dissemination of information.
- Meetings should be held as frequently as appropriate to disseminate information, and engage program staff and managers on current issues faced by the Program as well as issues of a more administrative nature. The WP should use available technologies, such as telephone or video-conferencing, to substitute for or further supplement the more costly in-person meetings with program officers and managers across the national, regional and local offices.

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- The WP currently uses a number of ways to facilitate communication between regional and national staff, such as weekly management conference calls, regular conference calls and staff meetings in the regions, and the national program delivery and bilateral and group meetings on specific issues and themes. SWC's intranet is also a means for staff to post and retrieve Program information. SWC recognizes that this is an area that needs ongoing improvement.

Completion Date: Ongoing

There is a general consensus among stakeholders that the WP does not duplicate any other programs to advance women's equality, primarily because very few other such programs exist. The WP is seen as unique in providing support for advocacy efforts, providing a high level of technical assistance, addressing a full range of equality issues, and focusing its mandate specifically on advancing women's equality.

Stakeholders had few suggestions for alternative delivery models. However, some suggested that the WP may wish to consider the use of contribution funding in certain circumstances, while others suggested community-based models. Of course, there was also considerable support for more sustained or longer-term funding.

The evaluation found little grounds for transferring the WP away from SWC. Stakeholders maintained that the Program should be retained within SWC since it is the only federal organization with a specific mandate to advance women's equality. However, stakeholders also emphasized the need for the WP and SWC to resolve their outstanding differences so that they may work effectively together. Many key informants pointed out that to be effective, the agency needs greater visibility and a stronger voice within the federal government.

4. *Relevance*

There is general agreement that the WP is still relevant to advancing women's equality in Canada, since, despite progress in some areas, this goal has not yet been achieved. However, some key informants also expressed concern that, for fear of controversy, the Program has become overly cautious in its funding decisions and therefore risks irrelevance. Fifty-eight percent of survey respondents believe that the Program responds well to new and emerging issues, while 51% agree that it responds well to new and emerging groups.

Recommendation 14

To be more transparent, the WP should disseminate reports on program impact to the WP's constituency and to the general public.

The evaluation found some disagreement among stakeholders regarding the WP's alignment with federal priorities and the strategic objectives of SWC. Some pointed out that the WP clearly aligns with federal priorities by addressing issues such as violence against Aboriginal women, childcare, trafficking in women, social capital, and democratic processes. However, others argued that the WP's mandate is to promote women's equality and that, quite often, this means supporting groups to challenge the status quo – that is, in terms of public policy and institutional decision-making. The crucial question, from their perspective, is the extent to which the federal government is aligned with the priorities of the WP and women's perspectives are integrated into federal policy – and not the reverse. Similarly, although some program staff and managers believe that the WP aligns well with SWC's strategic objectives, others said that the strategic objectives are vague and do not reflect the priorities of the grassroots women's movement

SWC's Management Response – Recommendation Accepted

- The WP will report its annual results in relation to the departmental priorities through existing reporting mechanisms such as the Departmental Performance Report.
- Other reporting commitments, identified in the Integrated RMAF-RBAF (Risk-based Audit Framework) and through the work of other SWC Directorates, the WP will provide information on its outcome to various stakeholders, including WP constituency.

- The implementation of the Integrated RMAF-RBAF will also facilitate the reporting commitments, including provision of knowledge products.

Completion Date: by June 2007