

AN ANALYSIS OF CIVIL SOCIETY  
ORGANIZATIONS' EXPERIENCES with the

# Women's Voice and Leadership Program

A REPORT PREPARED BY

the **Women's Rights Policy Group** and  
the **Canadian Council for International Co-operation**

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# REPORT AT A GLANCE

**W**omen's Voice and Leadership (WVL) is a flagship initiative of Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (FIAP). It is an innovative and path-breaking program of Global Affairs Canada (GAC) that aims to get financing and support to women's rights organizations (WROs) via country- and region-specific WVL Programs, managed by civil society organizations. It currently spans 30 countries and regions and has committed \$174 million in contributions.

This document provides key insights from an analysis of the application process to implement WVL projects. The findings and recommendations are based on a survey and a workshop conducted by the Canadian Council for International Co-operation and the Women's Rights Policy Group.

## SUCCESSSES

### **The participating organizations highlighted:**

- The importance of WVL as a positive example of the implementation of the FIAP. They noted that WVL fills an important gap in the sector, dedicating resources to WRO institutional and capacity strengthening.
- Their support for WVL's goals of supporting local WROs and meeting their specific needs.
- An appreciation for GAC's willingness to engage in more feminist funding approaches, allowing WROs to identify their own priorities and approaches.
- The importance of WVL's focus on research, which allows the sector to build an evidence base on the effectiveness of WROs.
- The helpfulness of GAC staff throughout the application process, for those who submitted proposals.

## GAPS AND CHALLENGES

### **Organizations also noted that:**

- GAC's communication, transparency and consistency during the application process could have been stronger.
- The nature of consultations across country programs was uneven. There were some cases of good scoping practices to identify potential implementing partners. In other cases, the selection of implementing organizations could have been informed by more robust consultations with Canadian organizations, feminist funders and local WROs.
- Many organizations had to deal with midstream changes of funding requirements during the application process, and the proposal process required significantly more resources than past proposals to GAC.
- GAC contracting and partnership practices did not always reflect feminist principles. This is causing ongoing challenges in the implementation phase—especially around compliance.
- At times, Southern organizations were placed in direct competition with Canadian and international non-governmental organizations.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **For Global Affairs Canada:**

- Continue to invest in internal discussions, learning and capacity building on feminist approaches.
- Ensure that future programs in support of WROs (including program monitoring frameworks) are informed by consultations with feminist funds, activists, networks, and WROs in all their diversity, as well as Canadian organizations and their partners.
- Establish open, transparent and inclusive application processes that are accessible to a wide range of organizations, including women's organizations based in the global South as well as diverse Canadian non-governmental organizations.
- Work across GAC to ensure that feminist approaches and intent translate through from programming into contracting arrangements, and into the overall management of WVL until current projects end.

- Continue to fund WROs and work closely with civil society to learn from experiences and adjust future approaches.

### **For members of the Canadian Council for International Co-operation and the Women's Rights Policy Group:**

- Work with GAC to help ensure that feminist approaches and intent translate through from programming into contracting arrangements, by sharing feminist programming expertise and information about WRO realities.
- Continue to advance discussions on feminist approaches in concrete programs, to build a common understanding of the concepts and move beyond generalities.

# INTRODUCTION

In June 2017, the Government of Canada announced the Women’s Voice and Leadership Program (WVL) as a signature initiative of the *Feminist International Assistance Policy* (FIAP). The WVL Program was created to meet the needs of local women’s organizations working on women’s rights and gender equality in developing countries. This innovative and strategic program is a model worldwide. Its goals—helping women’s organizations strengthen their capacity and develop more sustainable sources of funding—are priorities that the women’s movement has been highlighting for some time. As of writing, the Government of Canada has [committed](#) \$174M for 32 projects in 30 countries or regions—a significant investment.

It is important to note that each WVL project is coordinated by a separate Global Affairs Canada (GAC) country or regional program. There were thus significant differences in how the implementing partner was selected. In some cases, there were open calls. In others, a single organization was invited to submit an application. In yet others, a short list of organizations were invited to submit applications.

In May 2019, the Canadian Council for International Co-operation (CCIC) and the Women’s Rights Policy Group (WRPG) collected feedback, through an online survey, on the experiences of organizations as they applied to implement the WVL Programs in specific countries or regions. This report analyzes the responses to that survey and was finalized following a validation meeting with CCIC and WRPG members on May 8, 2020. In addition, some members sent in written comments for consideration.

## DATA SOURCES

- » Bilingual online survey
- » Validation workshop
- » Written input from groups unable to attend validation workshop

The findings highlight many successes to date, but also gaps between the feminist intentions of the program and the work in practice. Survey respondents noted opportunities to strengthen the application and consultation processes. They also provided insights on what went well with the application process, and how the WVL Program provides an opportunity for the sector to advance the goals of the FIAP. While this report mostly focusses on the application process, it is clear that some of the challenges experienced during the application phase have bled into the implementation phase. We hope to do more research, in the future, to generate detailed learnings about the implementation of WVL.

CCIC and the WRPG believed it was important to capture these experiences and lessons learned since WVL is a flagship program of the FIAP. The program, and the FIAP more generally, have valuable goals that civil society strongly supports. To ensure that WVL reaches its full potential, and in the spirit of a feminist approach, organizations deemed it useful to identify areas which might benefit from reflection and dialogue with GAC. Lessons learned can help inform future calls for proposals, as well as decisions made about existing WVL projects over the next four years.

# METHODOLOGY

The findings and recommendations in this report are based on a survey conducted between May 13 and June 12, 2019. The survey was available in French and English and included 43 questions about the WVL Program, including the application process, the resources required to submit proposals, the level of guidance and support received from GAC, organizations' experience with the contribution agreement (negotiation, post-submission adjustments, etc.), and more. The survey asked open-ended questions to provide the opportunity for respondents to share their specific challenges and insights from the WVL Program. The survey questions are available in Annex 1.

The survey was distributed to CCIC's member contact list and the WRPG mailing list. It was also shared internationally in an attempt to include non-Canadian organizations in the reflections on this new initiative, particularly those who had submitted proposals or working in WVL countries. The researchers encouraged organizations to consult internally and to submit one response on behalf of the entire organization. Individual results of surveys were treated as confidential, and only a select few staff members of CCIC had access to the non-anonymized survey data.

The survey responses may be skewed towards the experiences of large organizations as they made up the majority of respondents. A total of 27 organizations responded to the survey, of which only 14 completed the entire survey. The reason for the high number of respondents who started the survey but did not complete it is unclear. It might reflect a concern on the part of the respondents over their anonymity, or it could be a result of respondents thinking that the rest of the questions did not apply to them (for instance, if they did not submit WVL proposals). However, given the richness of the qualitative comments, both CCIC and WRPG agreed that it was still methodologically sound to report aggregate results and general trends.

The experiences of the larger organizations do not necessarily accurately reflect the experiences of smaller and medium-sized organizations. To address this gap, small and medium-sized organizations, in particular, were encouraged to participate in the May 8, 2020 validation session, in order to test and validate the report's observations.

# FINDINGS

## **The WVL Program is a welcome opportunity to support women's rights organizations (WROs).**

Respondents indicated the WVL Program is a strategic opportunity. It stands out in comparison to other GAC programs and efforts by other international donors, given its explicit focus on supporting WROs. Overall, respondents were enthusiastic about the initiative. They believe that the WVL Program demonstrates GAC's commitment to implementing the FIAP, including finding new ways to support WROs and movements. The idea of pairing up of Canadian organizations with smaller local WROs, for the purposes of supporting local capacity-building and sharing risk, was welcomed by some. Others would have preferred to see more emphasis on identifying Southern, women-led organizations as the primary implementing partners.

## **WVL fills an important gap in the sector.**

Women's rights actors are grossly underfunded, yet they do crucial work, and are one of the best investments for achieving gender equality and sustainable peace. WVL is one of the few programs worldwide that supports organizations to create sustainable organizational change and strengthen their institutional structures and practices. In this sense, it will certainly contribute to strengthening women's and feminist movements worldwide.

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**“We applaud the focus on WROs and feel GAC has demonstrated strong leadership in this regard. The framing of women's voice and leadership allowed contextual nuances to still come through in the proposal process. For example, in some contexts, the focus is on VAWG [violence against women and girls] faced by Indigenous women specifically.”**

### **WVL illustrates a willingness to engage in more feminist funding approaches.**

The WVL Program was one of the first department-wide programs to mandate responsive flexible funding to Southern civil society in its program design, allowing for more creativity and context specificity than most government-funded programs. This allows organizations to define their approaches and priorities, and shows respect for partners, who understand their contexts better than we do. Several organizations felt that they were able to ground their proposal in local realities that reflected the needs of women and WROs in partner countries

### **WVL is a rare opportunity to build the evidence and best practice for supporting WROs.**

Organizations were grateful for WVL's focus on research. Currently, quantitative evidence on the impacts of WROs is limited since adequate investments are not being made to understand their roles. Building the evidence base for supporting these organizations, by funding research and systematically monitoring and evaluating the work that they do, is therefore crucial.

### **Organizations that received support during the proposal stage appreciated GAC's guidance.**

The majority of survey respondents stated that they received useful guidance from GAC during the proposal stage. For example, one organization said that its relationship with the local mission was very positive, and that staff had an opportunity to meet the mission and receive detailed feedback when their proposal was unsuccessful.

### **Communication during the application process could have been stronger.**

Several respondents noted that GAC made midstream changes in the application process. Organizations noted that criteria and frameworks evolved throughout the application process, including a new budget template and new indicators. According to survey respondents, these changes were not sufficiently explained and were presented without warning. It was difficult for many participants to understand why these changes were made. Clear communication with Canadian and international partners would have minimized the impacts of changes on the application process.

### **WVL country programs could have been better informed by consultations with Canadian organizations, feminist funders, and local WROs.**

Participants commented on how GAC's scanning and mapping process of the WRO landscape was incomplete in some countries. There is no doubt that mapping the WRO landscape in so many different countries is a formidable challenge, given the dynamic and sometimes informal world of WROs and feminist movements. Some mapping processes were very strong, but others seemed rushed and incomplete, leading some to doubt that GAC had a full understanding of the range of local WROs and their identified priorities in those contexts. In some cases, GAC did not consult women's funds (members of [Prospera](#), the international network of women's funds) in advance of the call for proposals, despite their niche as feminist funders and familiarity with the national and regional landscape of WROs. Half of survey respondents indicated they felt their organization or local partners were not meaningfully consulted. Participants stressed the importance of having an inclusive process, one that is not heavily bureaucratic or top-down, as these are antithetical to a feminist approach which values inclusiveness and participation.



**A lack of information about WVL projects—both within the Canadian international development sector and in many project countries—left many organizations frustrated.**

There were concerns regarding the lack of transparency and communication from GAC at both the country and headquarters levels. Respondents would have appreciated access to information about the structure of each WVL Program as it was being developed, about what consultations informed the program’s design, and about the invitation criteria (when applications were by invitation only). Criteria and application of feminist principles seemed to vary greatly between countries. Since official information from GAC was not available, it circulated within the sector by word of mouth, largely through organizations who had privileged access—either through the strength of their advocacy relationships or because they had been invited to apply. Having GAC-funded women’s rights programming in a WVL country did not automatically lead to more information or deeper engagement with the program’s design. The majority of respondents said that they would have liked to have been invited to apply to implement WVL Programs in specific countries but were not.

This scattered and incomplete information-sharing is a contrast to other GAC processes, such as open calls organized by Partnerships and Innovation Branch. In these cases, all the required information is available on the GAC website and all organizations (large and small, based inside and outside Canada) have access to the same information.

**Some respondents felt there was a bias towards larger and well-connected Canadian organizations.**

There were concerns regarding the “sole sourcing” of WVL implementation to larger Canadian organizations that had an existing women’s rights program, grant-making experience with local civil society organizations (not necessarily WROs), and

a demonstrated ability to manage large grants and ensure compliance. Some applicants secured an invitation to apply because they advocated for their inclusion. Smaller organizations voiced concerns that larger organizations had the insider track on funding, and noted that several larger organizations were invited to submit proposals to multiple WVL Programs.

While there are legitimate reasons for tapping existing relationships, doing so too much narrows opportunities for innovation, and runs counter to an inclusive feminist approach. A feminist approach considers power asymmetries within countries and across stakeholders. Risk aversion for working with new partners creates an insider/outsider process, with a divide not only between smaller and larger Canadian organizations, but also between Canadian and international WROs, since the former group is more likely to have established relationships with GAC.

**The proposal process and contractual negotiations required significant resources.**

Given WVL’s goals, many applicant organizations worked closely with local partners in a participatory proposal design process, but this came at a real cost. Some Canadian-based organizations reported having up to 10 staff involved in the creation of the proposal, and spending more than 226 non-billable hours writing the document. In addition to Canadian human resources, respondents noted there were additional costs incurred by local organizations, with some reporting the work of five to 10 staff and spending more than 75 non-billable hours contributing to the proposal.

Canadian-based organizations reported they spent more than \$10,000 in putting together the proposal, with some Canadian-based respondents indicating that they spent between \$80,000 and \$100,000 writing the proposal—a burdensome amount for even a large organization. Smaller Canadian organizations

and national non-governmental organizations in the global South, who have fewer resources to invest in proposal-writing, are disadvantaged in such scenarios, despite the quality of their programming on the ground.

The onerous nature of contractual negotiations (more back-and-forth than usual, midstream changes, requests for details in contribution agreements that would normally be saved for project implementation plans) meant that more non-billable/non-funded hours were spent on WVL than on other programs. A feminist approach would recognize the value of such labour by minimizing unpaid hours as much as possible, both for the Canadian organization and also for local partners. Lighter and shorter negotiations, with a swifter transition to the implementation period, would have relieved some of the time burden.

### **Respondents reported a lack of clarity, consistency, and flexibility within the application process.**

Some applicants reported positive experiences with regard to the guidance they received from GAC. Others, however, highlighted difficulties in preparing their proposal, such as:

- The definition of what constitutes a WRO was not always clear. This lack of consistent clarity excluded some organizations from participating in the proposals as local partners.
- The budget process was challenging, particularly the midstream change in template and the limitations imposed by the format. One respondent noted the budget was difficult to complete because GAC wanted to ensure 50% of the funding went to a partner organization. This meant that organizations had to cover the remaining costs using core funding, privileging larger international non-governmental organizations who have such funding available, and excluding other organizations.

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**“GAC Contracts/Finance people eventually came around, it was however, painfully slow. There is still a lack of understanding that GAC contracts are NOT feminist—they feel they are since they adjusted a couple of clauses.”**

- Another budget-related challenge raised was the division between program management and activity costs. Working with newer partners often requires close accompaniment, capacity building, and learning, but the budget constraints did not recognize these greater expenses in Canada. While the intent was to get more direct funding to WROs, it is likely that some potential implementing organizations had to self-select out due to lack of capacity, if they were not able to cover these expenses from outside the WVL budget.
- The Theory of Change instructions in the project application documentation were not always clear. More detailed information would have been useful.
- Overall, there seemed to be a lack of consistency in how GAC officers interpreted the requirements. Organizations applying for more than one WVL Program had to design drastically different programs and often received very different answers and guidelines from GAC staff in different country or regional programs.

### **Contracting obligations presented challenges in translating the feminist intention behind the WVL Program into practice.**

Survey participants noted that the program included burdensome compliance requirements, a lack of flexibility in negotiations regarding core issues such as audit requirements, and an aversion to “risky” relationships with smaller/grassroots organizations. Several participants noted that GAC’s program staff and GAC’s financial/contracting staff did not seem to be on the same page. Flexibility seemed to depend on sympathetic individuals—it was not an agreed-upon, systemic approach. Some respondents felt that the reluctance to fund certain projects and organizations could be partially attributed to friction between these two groups within GAC. Since the WVL Program was a political commitment with a whole policy behind it (the FIAP), there should have been clearer guidance directed at each unit across all of GAC about continuing programmatic priorities into contractual and other related processes. Unfortunately, this disconnect continues to cause challenges during program implementation—especially around compliance.

In addition to making the application process challenging and prolonging negotiations, inflexibility in compliance demands had a programmatic impact. Compliance demands meant that organizations may not always be able to work with small, grassroots, unregistered, or otherwise hard-to-reach WROs. This arguably has a detrimental impact on the program’s goals and reach.

### **Respondents would like to see greater transparency in selection processes and timelines.**

Participants noted challenges with the selection process for Canadian and Southern-based organizations. The lack of clarity of the selection criteria, in some cases, caused strife and tension among applying organizations—many of whom had established collegial relationships, and were made to compete instead of collaborate.

Some respondents flagged concerns over the delays in receiving feedback on proposals. Applicants reported long delays in communication regarding approval processes—between 8 and 12 months from proposal submission to approval. One applicant noted that they only learned at the very end of the process that the WVL budget for that country had been significantly reduced, which was the principal reason their proposal wasn’t approved. Some survey participants perceived that Canadian organizations received better communication than local/national organizations in the Global South.

In addition to these challenges, respondents highlighted a lack of transparency as to how and when funds would flow. Long waits between proposal development and funds flowing (one respondent cited two years) meant that local WROs were engaged early on, but then had to wait a long time before they could begin their work. For organizations operating on shoestring budgets, it is challenging to wait so long between the initial time investment and the increased capacity that comes with funding. In addition, the long-time lapse led to more work during the project implementation plan (PIP) stage, as realities changed during that time. Several WRO partners have expressed frustration at being so delayed in implementation after conducting extensive consultations.

**Information and guidance on feminist monitoring, evaluation and learning was incomplete.**

Participants noted there were no guidelines as to what constituted feminist monitoring, evaluation and learning (MEL), and cautioned the guidelines should be developed in collaboration with feminist organizations, feminist MEL specialists, and WROs. This continues to pose challenges during implementation.

Some respondents were also concerned over the use of prescriptive indicators, because the indicators were not developed in consultation with WROs. While there are some benefits to having standardized indicators (for example, the ability to compare learnings across contexts and have a consolidated and strategic approach to programming), the standardized indicators created tension between meeting the compliance requirements and ensuring context-specific program design.

Some respondents called for the creation of a community of practice (or the involvement of existing communities of practice, such as that of L'Association québécoise des organismes de coopération internationale [AQOCI]) to design monitoring and evaluation frameworks that are in line with a feminist approach. Another suggestion was to open the indicators up to a consultative process. Since the survey was conducted, a community of practice has been established, bringing together several Canada-based WVL implementing organizations.

**Southern organizations were placed in direct competition with Canadian and international non-governmental organizations.**

The competitive process, which often pitted Southern and Canadian organizations against each other, was challenging for several reasons. First, the playing field was unequal, as Canadian organizations benefitted from their existing relationships with GAC and deeper understanding of GAC funding processes. Furthermore, the process created politics and tensions in the sector. Some national WROs felt like they needed to endorse specific projects and partners, and not others. If the goal is really to get more funding to WROs, a system should be put in place so that these organizations can endorse any project they want and maximize their chances of receiving funding.

# CONCLUSION

**T**he WVL Program is a welcome initiative, and there is widespread appreciation for the feminist intentions behind the program. Given the innovative and much-needed nature of the program, there is shared hope across the sector that WVL will be expanded and extended, as well as eagerness to see the results of these investments in women's and feminist movements. There is also a desire for the government to develop similar initiatives, and to continue making sustained investments in gender equality, WROs, and feminist movements.

However, civil society experiences in the first wave of WVL roll-out have been mixed. Respondents recognize the challenge, for GAC, of moving beyond a program focus on women's rights to adopting truly feminist process (inclusive, equitable, transparent, accessible) given the slow-moving nature of internal change within bureaucracies. There is a shared belief that WVL has the potential to be a catalyst for social change in targeted countries and an invaluable

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**“Despite challenges,  
it is an excellent initiative.  
Everyone wants it to  
be successful.”**

resource for WRO strengthening, as well as a useful learning experience within GAC regarding its institutional processes. CCIC and WRPG members are going through a similar process of learning and organizational transformation under the FIAP, recognizing that we cannot legitimately work to promote gender equality unless we translate our feminist values into our ways of working. We look forward to working with GAC, and to mutually supporting and learning from each other as we all continue this process of transformation.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## FOR GLOBAL AFFAIRS CANADA:

### **Continue to invest in internal discussions, learning and capacity building on feminist approaches.**

After the FIAP was launched, there was a lot of enthusiasm and frequent internal learning moments on feminist approaches within GAC. Now, with the commitment to develop a white paper on Canada's Feminist Foreign Policy, there is a need for continued analytical development, and clarity on how these concepts connect in a coherent way across GAC. Articulating clear, holistic, feminist approaches is an ongoing project and should be supported through regular internal discussions, learning and capacity building—especially given frequent staff transition and turnover. More attention to feminist analysis and process is required across the Department, including in units responsible for contracting and administrative processes.

### **Ensure future programs in support of WROs (including program monitoring frameworks) are informed by consultations with feminist funds, activists, networks, and WROs in all their diversity, as well as Canadian organizations and their partners.**

When developing new programs, GAC should ensure consistent and effective consultation

with potential partners and intended beneficiaries regarding program development, application processes, monitoring and evaluation criteria, and expected results. Consultation processes should respect good practices in stakeholder engagement, ensuring that they are timely, open and inclusive, transparent, informed and iterative<sup>1</sup> and in line with Canada's *Policy for Civil Society Partnerships for International Assistance—A Feminist Approach*.<sup>2</sup> Providing an opportunity for Canadian and Southern-based organizations to inform monitoring and evaluation frameworks respects a feminist approach to international development that values collaboration with and the expertise of those most affected (“nothing about us without us”). Country-specific priorities should consistently be informed by a mandatory scan of local women's movements and consultations with domestic WROs.

### **Establish open, transparent and inclusive application processes that are accessible to a wide range of organizations—including women's organizations based in the Global South as well as diverse Canadian non-governmental organizations.**

Feminist processes and objectives should include shifting power and control over resources to feminist organizations in the Global South. In setting up application processes and criteria, GAC should investigate how Southern feminist organizations (who

1 For further information on good practices, see [https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Effective\\_Engagement\\_Canada.pdf](https://ccic.ca/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Effective_Engagement_Canada.pdf).

2 See [https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues\\_development-enjeux\\_developpement/priorities-priorites/civil\\_policy-politique\\_civile.aspx?lang=eng](https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/civil_policy-politique_civile.aspx?lang=eng)

are not traditional GAC partners) can be considered as program implementers.

GAC should work with global Southern and Canadian organizations to streamline proposal processes and establish what a feminist selection process looks like. This could include different funding streams for different-sized organizations, a fund to support the strengths and models of global feminist organizations working on key themes, and a separate fund aimed at local WROs. Out of the survey respondents who reported having applied, a quarter of them knew for certain that they were competing against a national or local women's organization. Southern organizations should not be placed in direct competition with Canadian and international non-governmental organizations. In the case of Indonesia, there were two separate streams (national and international). This model was viewed as positive and worthy of replicating, since it levelled the playing field and gave Southern organizations a better chance of securing and managing funds. Increasing opportunities to create proposals for multi-country and multi-region programs would also be appreciated.

Clear communication processes should be the norm, along with published information on required budgets, selection processes and criteria, and evaluation frameworks with each call. Significant efforts should be made to improve awareness of GAC funding opportunities among Southern-based and local WROs, and to provide all potential applicants with the necessary guidance to develop their applications.

It would be helpful to have discussions on how to minimize massive investments by organizations in project proposals when they have minimal chances of being selected. For instance, in lieu of reducing this investment by a small invitation-only process, GAC could invite short concept notes, and then proceed with a small handful of applicants by inviting proposals that flesh out plans in moderate

detail—leaving the very specific details for the post-approval stage. There are positive examples from within the government itself to draw on. For example, when Women and Gender Equality Canada was still Status of Women Canada, the department put out a call for proposals that included a small amount of funding for organizations to develop the proposals. Some progressive foundations are adopting this approach too.

Complete explanations of proposal shortcomings should be provided to all unsuccessful applicants, both to ensure transparency and accountability and to contribute to learning and increased capacity for the organizations who applied.

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**Work across GAC to ensure that feminist approaches and intent translate from programming into contracting arrangements, and overall management of WVL until current projects end.**

Respondents highlighted a range of challenges as they worked through their contribution agreements and interacted with those responsible for contracting and auditing processes. Contribution agreement processes and practices could be improved to ensure that compliance respects a feminist approach. In particular, audit-related processes were highlighted as a sticking point.

It would be important to develop a unified approach within GAC, to ensure that WVL requirements are understood and communicated the same way by all GAC staff. This would ensure consistency between contract staff and program staff, and among program officers. There should be consistent and timely communication to all contract staff on the need for a feminist and flexible approach—to ensure adherence to the program's spirit. This communication may require ongoing follow-up and training to ensure implementation. Again, there are positive examples within the government

itself to draw on—for example, the Department of National Defence’s push to have a whole of department approach to GBA+ through a specialized team that works across all units to ensure a unified, feminist approach.

GAC’s dialogue with civil society on operational issues has been going on for some time, with slow progress in enacting recommendations. Many of these recommendations would contribute significantly to reducing pain points and to ensuring contractual procedures are consistent with programming principles. The internal reform process that these dialogues inform should be given all required resources and political capital, and approached with a feminist lens, which may entail broadening the scope and depth of these reforms.

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**Continue to fund WROs and work closely with civil society to learn from experiences and adjust future approaches.**

Canada can continue to advance its global leadership on women’s rights by engaging in ongoing learning and dialogue with civil society. By adjusting future calls for proposals to reflect lessons learned, GAC can be a leader not only in funding for gender equality, but also in living by stated feminist values. Implementing the FIAP is a transformational process—in terms of the programs funded, but also in terms of the structure and processes at GAC and within Canadian civil society organizations. Organizational transformation is accelerated when we support the creation of spaces for reflective practice and commit to investing time and resources to this.

## **FOR MEMBERS OF THE CANADIAN COUNCIL FOR INTERNATIONAL CO-OPERATION AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS POLICY GROUP:**

**Work with GAC to help ensure that feminist approaches and intent translate through from programming into contracting arrangements, by sharing feminist programming expertise and information about WRO realities.**

Since the announcement of the FIAP, many gains have been made at the policy level a GAC. More work remains to be done, however, to ensure that this is translated into programming practices (auditing, consultation, calls for proposals, contracting, budgeting, etc.). Civil society organizations should bring feminist concerns, approaches, and solutions to their conversations about operational challenges with GAC and other organizations in the sector.

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**Continue to advance discussions on feminist approaches in concrete programs, so this concept is better understood and moves beyond generalities.**

Since there are numerous understandings and interpretations of what a feminist approach means, more joint work is required to go deeper on the practical implications of this concept. Canada-based civil society organizations can create learning spaces that bring together Southern WROs, feminist activists, and GAC colleagues. Specific case studies that elaborate how these principles can be put into practice can help advance the discussion.



# ANNEX 1

Below is the list of survey questions.

Question number	QUESTION	POSSIBLE ANSWER
1	Profile questions	Organization name, title of respondent and email
2	Type of organization	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• International NGO</li> <li>• Canadian organization</li> <li>• Organization registered in an ODA-eligible country</li> <li>• Other</li> </ul>
3	How would you describe your organization's work on gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• It is the exclusive focus of my organization</li> <li>• It is one of the issues my organization works on</li> </ul>
4	How many paid staff does your organization have?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Small (10 and under)</li> <li>• Medium (11–29)</li> <li>• Large (More than 30)</li> </ul>
5	What is the approximate annual income for your organization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Very small \$0–\$500,000</li> <li>• Small \$500,001 and \$1,000,000</li> <li>• Medium \$1,000,001 and \$5,000,000</li> <li>• Large \$5,000,001 and \$10,000,000</li> <li>• Very large \$10,000,001 plus</li> </ul>
6	Were you invited to apply for GAC's Call for Proposals on Women's Voice and Leadership?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
7	Would you have liked to have been asked to apply to a call for proposals in a specific country/region but were not invited?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
8	If you have partnerships with women's rights organizations in specific countries: Have they approached you for information on WVWL in that country?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Uncertain</li> <li>• N/a</li> </ul>

9	If you have partnerships with women's rights organizations in specific countries: Do they know how to access WVLF funding?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Unsure</li> <li>• N/A</li> <li>• Program has not launched yet</li> <li>• There is no way for them to access WVLF funds. Please comment</li> </ul>
10	If you applied for WVLF funding, do you know how many other organizations were you competing against?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
11	Were you competing against a national or local women's organization?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Uncertain</li> </ul>
12	Did you submit one or multiple proposals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No proposal submitted</li> <li>• Yes, one proposal submitted</li> <li>• Yes, multiple proposals submitted</li> </ul>
13	Please indicate the country/regional focus of the proposal(s)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
14	Did you develop and submit the proposal(s) in collaboration with others?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
15	How many people were directly involved in the preparation of the proposal (or the proposals on average) in Canada and internationally?	<p>The same categories were provided for Canada and internationally</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 to 4</li> <li>• 5 to 10</li> <li>• 11 to 20</li> <li>• more than 21</li> </ul>
16	How much time (in person hours) do you estimate your organization (in Canada) invested in the preparation of the proposal (or the proposals on average)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 37.5 to 75 hours</li> <li>• 75 to 100 hours</li> <li>• 151 to 225 hours</li> <li>• more than 226 hours</li> </ul>
17	How much money do you estimate that your organization and your international partners invested in the preparation of your proposal(s)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
18	Did you conduct an in-country consultation with your partners on the proposal(s)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
19	Did you receive guidance from GAC in the proposal stage?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>

20	Which aspects of the proposal application were most difficult for you to complete?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
21	What information or guidance would you have appreciated having from GAC, but did not receive or could not access?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
22	Were you successful in one or many proposals?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• Unclear—we have not yet been informed</li> <li>• We have been informally informed yes, but it hasn't been officially announced</li> <li>• We have been informally informed no, but never received official confirmation to that effect</li> <li>• Yes. Please indicate the number of successful proposals</li> </ul>
23	If yes, how much funding did you receive for the project(s) in total?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• \$0—\$3,000,000</li> <li>• \$1,000,000—\$5,000,000</li> <li>• \$5,000,001—\$10,000,000</li> <li>• \$10,000,001 plus / et plus</li> </ul>
24	If yes, please indicate how funding is divided	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 60% WRO/40% project implementation</li> <li>• 70% WRO/30% project implementation</li> <li>• Different experiences in each country. Provide details</li> </ul>
25	If yes, did you have to revise your proposal(s)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, minor revisions</li> <li>• Yes, substantial revisions</li> <li>• No revisions</li> </ul>
26	If you have not yet received a decision, has there been any information conveyed by GAC about a realistic timeline for communicating their decision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>

27	How long did you have to wait between submitting your proposal and getting word of whether it was successful?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 months</li> <li>• 6 months</li> <li>• 7 months</li> <li>• 8 months</li> <li>• 9 months</li> <li>• 10 months</li> <li>• 11 months</li> <li>• 12 months</li> <li>• We still have not yet been informed. Please indicate the number of months since you submitted</li> </ul>
28	How many months did you wait between getting confirmation that your proposal had been accepted and signing a Contribution Agreement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 5 months</li> <li>• 6 months</li> <li>• 7 months</li> <li>• 8 months</li> <li>• 9 months</li> <li>• 10 months</li> <li>• 11 months</li> <li>• 12 months</li> <li>• Other, please specify</li> </ul>
29	Were there (or are there) challenges in negotiating the Contribution Agreement?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
30	To what extent has your organization been able to negotiate terms and conditions more in line with the flexibility and responsiveness needed by women's rights organizations on the ground?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents were given the opportunity to indicate a percentage</li> </ul>
31	Any comments on the process of negotiating terms and conditions?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
32	To what extent has your organization been required to shift elements of program design post- submission?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents were given the opportunity to indicate a percentage</li> </ul>
33	Any comments on the post-submission adjustments?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
34	The original goal of WVWL was to provide women's rights organizations with flexible funding. In your opinion, to what extent have program requirements been adapted to that vision?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respondents were given the opportunity to indicate a percentage</li> </ul>
35	Are the GAC requirements around grantmaking/supporting women's rights organizations different for WVWL than earlier initiatives (i.e. pre FIAP)?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Uncertain</li> </ul>

36	Do you receive non-WVL GAC funding for gender equality programming in a country that has a WVL Program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes, please specify for which country or countries</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>
37	If yes, do you feel like your organization and/or local partners were meaningfully consulted in the design of that country's WVL Program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• No opinion</li> <li>• Different experiences in each country. Please provide details</li> </ul>
38	If yes, do you feel like local civil society/ women's movement(s) in that country were meaningfully consulted, and their perspectives and priorities integrated, in the design of that country's WVL Program?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> <li>• Different experiences in each county. Provide details</li> </ul>
39	Are there other concerns or challenges with the Women's Voice and Leadership program that you would like to raise?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
40	Are there positive experiences from the Women's Voice and Leadership program that you would like to raise?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
41	What specific recommendations do you have to help improve GAC's procedure for designing future initiatives to support women's rights organizations?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
42	Do you have any final comments?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Open-ended question</li> </ul>
43	Would you be willing to share your lessons learned on the WVL process with others civil society groups, in a WRPG capacity-building activity?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Yes</li> <li>• No</li> </ul>