



September 1, 2017

The Honourable Indira Naidoo-Harris
Ministry of The Status of Women
777 Bay St., 6th Floor
Toronto, ON M7A 2J4
womensempowerment@ontario.ca

Re: Women's Economic Empowerment - A Call to Action for Ontario

Dear Minister Naidoo-Harris,

The Ontario Nonprofit Network (ONN) is writing to provide input into the development of a province wide Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy. In this submission, we provide context from the nonprofit sector, introduce our women's economic empowerment project and emphasize the importance of including the voices and experiences of our sector in the development of this strategy. In doing so, we highlight key recommendations for ways in which national and provincial gender equity conversations in public policy can be aligned with the opportunities and challenges facing our women-dominated sector.

About ONN

ONN is the independent nonprofit network, with a reach of over 20,000, for the 55,000 nonprofits and charities in Ontario, focused on policy, advocacy, and services to strengthen Ontario's nonprofit sector as a key pillar of our society and economy.

Ontario's nonprofit sector - a key employer of women

The Ontario nonprofit sector is a critical part of the province's social, economic and political fabric, with 55,000 organizations generating over \$50 billion in economic impact for the province¹. The sector has a labour force of over one million and approximately 80% of it consists of women workers.

We know that our sector differs from others as it has its own set of unique trends and challenges that significantly impact employment. ONN's [ChangeWork](#) report sheds light on the reality of job precarity and insecurity, lack of access to benefits and pensions, underinvestment in training and development and uncompetitive wages in the sector. For example, in the Ontario nonprofit sector, 53% of all workers are full-time permanent, 28% of all workers are part-time permanent, 13% are employed part-time and on contract, while 6% are full-time and on contract.

¹https://mowatcentre.ca/wp-content/uploads/publications/128_change_work_summary.pdf

Over the past three years, ONN has been building a [decent work movement](#) in the sector to address these issues.

However, little information exists on the specific experiences of women working in the sector, particularly Indigenous, marginalized and racialized women. In other words, how do 'glass ceilings', 'leaky pipelines', the gender wage gap and precarious work coupled with the sector's unique challenges manifest and impact different women in the nonprofit labour force?

ONN has very recently launched a three-year project, [Decent Work for Women Working in the Nonprofit Network](#), with funding from Status of Women Canada that will apply a [gender based intersectional analysis](#) to:

- (1) Identify barriers to women workers' economic empowerment and prosperity in the nonprofit sector
- (2) Develop and implement pilot solutions to address these barriers at the organizational, network and policy levels

The data and information collected, lessons learned and project successes will be documented and shared with the Ontario nonprofit sector and the communities it serves more broadly, throughout the project. The project will be informed by an advisory council of diverse members, three leaders in the sector from Status of Women Canada's pan-Canadian Network of women leaders, project partners and relevant local, provincial and national stakeholders. We are building relationships with other Ontario organizations that are doing similar work and/or are interested in being part of our project.

(1) Recommendation: We encourage the Ministry to collaborate and engage with our network to better understand issues impacting women's economic empowerment in the nonprofit sector and align gender equity work in the nonprofit sector with that of the Ministry's.

Including voices and experiences from the sector

We support the vision to build an Ontario where every woman and girl is empowered to succeed and want to ensure that this vision considers and includes women who are part of the nonprofit sector. By including our voices and experiences, this strategy has the potential to impact a larger pool of diverse women and girls in Ontario.

While it is important to increase women's representation in underrepresented fields, as stated in the strategy goals, it is also equally important to consider the experiences of women in fields that are over-represented with women. More specifically, ensuring these fields are better supported and made sustainable so that they do not undermine women's economic empowerment by virtue of being a women-dominated field. After all, those sectors that tend to be women-dominated often involve care work (e.g. child care, elder care and health care) that should be valued more highly in an inclusive and equal society.

Literature shows that^{2 3}:

- Women are concentrated in *industries* that parallel their traditional gender roles of homemaking and caregiving: health care and social assistance, educational services, accommodation and food services. This has not changed since 1976.
- Most women are employed in traditionally-female *occupations*: caring, clerical, catering, cashiering, and cleaning.
- Even within women-dominated industries, women tend to have lower-paid positions than men.

Moreover, we urge that the development of the strategy take into account provincial legislation, both proposed and in effect, in terms of its impact on women's economic empowerment in the nonprofit sector. For example, while the proposed Fair Workplaces, Better Jobs Act promises equal pay for part-time and temporary workers compared to full-time workers and Ontario's Pay Equity Act addresses systemic pay discrimination in 'female class jobs', the way these regulatory frameworks interact with our sector's unique challenges and financial models can create adverse unintended consequences for women.

(2) Recommendation: It will be important for your Ministry to understand the unique structural barriers to women's economic empowerment in the nonprofit sector (and other women-dominated sectors) including the application of provincial employment regulations in the sector.

Women's economic empowerment is access to decent work

ONN recognizes that women's economic empowerment has multiple facets, including ownership of assets (and access to debt relief), income and employment, and access to social programs such as child care and economic literacy. For the nonprofit sector, economic empowerment means having access to decent work that takes into account women's intersectional identities. Decent work is a concept developed by the International Labour Organization at the United Nations that is used to conceptualize fair, equitable and stable work for all.⁴ More specifically, it entails: growing high quality employment opportunities, stable employment for family, work and personal life balance, fair income, health and retirement benefits, opportunities for development and advancement, equal rights at work, adaptive culture and effective leadership⁵.

Finally, we note that a nonprofit sector that offers decent work as a matter of course will only be realized if funding agreements take into account the real costs of delivering programs.

(3) Recommendation: We urge you to consider the connection between women's economic empowerment in the nonprofit sector and the Ontario government's own funding practices via grants and ongoing transfer payment agreements with nonprofit service delivery providers.

² <http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/89-503-x/2015001/article/14694-eng.htm>

³ http://hrcouncil.ca/documents/LMI_gender_mix.pdf

⁴ Decent Work (2017) <http://www.ilo.org/global/topics/decent-work/lang--en/index.htm>

⁵ <https://mowatcentre.ca/change-work-summary/>

We look forward to more opportunities to work with the Government of Ontario to contribute to the Women's Economic Empowerment Strategy. We are eager to put the strategy into practice to better support our robust and diverse sector of employers and employees.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Cathy Taylor', written in a cursive style.

Cathy Taylor
Executive Director, ONN