

Women's Economic Council

Annual Report

2011





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Message from the President



The Women's Economic Council (WEC) is delighted with the contribution it made helping agencies across the country support women's community economic development (CED). During 2011, WEC's involvement in helping move women forward economically took many forms including 1) national research and education, 2) staff development programming for frontline agencies helping women initiate or grow CED initiatives and 3) networking opportunities that linked national CED stakeholders closer together for the purposes of information sharing, sector support and partnership.

WEC recognizes that women's contributions are essential to the functioning and vitality of the Canadian economy. Given the shortage of labour in various sectors and within many occupations across Canada and new opportunities for business, WEC appreciates the value women have to offer the marketplace. While women's contributions are still not valued in the same way as men's, WEC understands that when presented with new opportunities and support, women will seize them and eagerly learn, grow and connect with the economy in new ways. For many women, help and support from agencies like WEC at the right time and right place can help make their economic goals a more immediate and sustainable reality. Given that women still comprise the majority of poor people in Canada and 50% of the world's 7 billion people live in absolute poverty, the majority being women and children, WEC sees much work to be done and much progress to be made before women experience equality and equity in the economy.

So with spark and vigour, during the latter part of 2011, WEC staff and board members were busy laying plans for an ambitious project focused on supporting community economic development in four regions in Canada. This new national initiative will support women to start new income generating businesses or activities that can sustain them economically while contributing much to the economy. WEC will be working with rural women, aboriginal women, immigrant women and newcomers in Canada who live in relative isolation from mainstream programming and have limited or no access to services in place to support small business start-up. WEC and its partners are in full anticipation thinking about the women they will partner with and the new prospects and possibilities for the future!

Given WEC's networks and relationships across Canada, our board of directors and staff are very excited about working in new ways with regional partners so that women can own, lead and manage new business in Canada. There is so much energy, expertise, strength and wisdom women can offer our country and WEC is interested in helping women work and contribute to their fullest potential.

Celebrating 2011 and toasting the future,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, which appears to read 'Valerie Carruthers'.

Valerie Carruthers
President

Message from the Executive Director



The Women's Economic Council (WEC) has had an innovative year that has resulted in the establishment of a very exciting, 3 year project, Empowering Women's Enterprises and Networks: A Clustering Project.

As the part-time Executive Director for just over a year now I am proud of WEC's accomplishments and look forward to our future in supporting women-led Community Economic Development in Canada. Our innovation saw WEC offices move into virtual environments, which has meant we are starting to use technology more readily to support our communications and meeting capacities.

WEC worked hard during 2011 with the innovation of its new Clustering project that will see pilots established in four locations in Canada. The project, with the support of host partners, will recruit women business leaders and others to mentor and guide women-led organizations and women entrepreneurs into CED initiatives and or business. Through this project development, WEC has worked extensively and networked with many women-led organizations, other CED groups and has worked in partnership with groups such as the Canadian Women's Foundation and The Canadian Community Economic Development Network (CCEDNet). WEC will also continue to work very closely with Immigrant and Aboriginal women's groups to help address the inequities and barriers to economic security they experience.

WEC continues to work with the Canadian Women's Foundation's economic development committee and provides advocacy on behalf of women and their aspirations towards CED. Some of our advocacy included meeting with Senator's, attending the national Person's Awards, writing letters of support for other women's groups, and attending CED events to contribute the gender perspective. However, due to limited funding this year WEC was constrained in our efforts.

The WEC Board of Directors continues to be a tremendous support by volunteering their time and resources to support the WEC mandate. They have been committed to supporting staff through the transition of a virtual national office that will promote greater reach, and better connection and networking with women and their organizations. WEC was sad to say good-bye to founding member Carol Rock but very pleased indeed to say hello to new Board members Tine Buechler and Roberta Hewson.

The commitment of Executive Assistant, Cathy Dennis is no less than amazing. She remains committed and very actively involved in all aspects of WEC.

WEC will build on past achievements and continue to grow towards our vision of Economic Security for Every Woman.

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

Patricia Baxter
Executive Director

Board of Directors and Staff

Board of Directors

| | |
|--------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Valerie Carruthers | President |
| Carol Rock | Treasurer (resigned- December 2011) |
| Gulalai Habib | Secretary |
| Rosalind Lockyer | Director and Founding member |
| Melanie Conn | Director and Founding member |
| Roberta Hewson | Director |
| Tine Buechler | Director |

Staff

| | |
|-----------------|---------------------|
| Patricia Baxter | Executive Director |
| Cathy Dennis | Executive Assistant |

WEC Statements

Vision

Economic security for every woman

Mission

Advancing women-centred CED to improve the lives of women, their families and communities

Action

The Council strengthens the women-centred CED sector and organizations through information-sharing and technical assistance.

The Council helps to provide a national voice for women-centred CED to increase awareness of the effectiveness of holistic women-centred CED.

The Council raises public awareness about policy changes necessary to support women's economic security.

The Council researches and documents issues, trends and outcomes of the diversity and spectrum of women-centred CED.

Mandate

Women's Economic Council is a national charitable organization of women-centred community economic development organizations and practitioners.

Community Economic Development (CED) is local economic development that is focused on people, employment, self-employment, inclusion and sustainability. Its goal is to provide meaningful work for all, at a level of income that provides a secure livelihood, in jobs that are environmentally, socially and economically sustainable.

Women-centred CED adapts the CED framework to accomplish changes for women. It starts with women's lives and challenges deeper and more systemic elements of economic and social equality in a practical way, working with women at the grass roots level and building a foundation to increase women's economic security and independence. It is built on a foundation of empowerment and offers a holistic, long term approach to development. It includes training and skills development, co-operatives, small business development supports, social purpose enterprise, micro-lending, and much more.

The Council works to represent women who can benefit from CED as a means to break the cycle of poverty improve the lives of their families and communities, including:

- Women who are exploited in their work – unpaid and underpaid
- Women who have experienced domestic violence
- Women with disabilities

- Women experiencing or at risk of homelessness
- Women in or at risk of persistent poverty
- Aboriginal women
- Immigrant and refugee women
- Visible Minority women
- Women experiencing mental illness as a barrier to work

The realities of intersecting oppressions mean that many women experience complex and multi-faceted economic, social and political exclusion. The Council respects and supports the many routes women take to overcome multiple oppressions, and we stand in solidarity with all women as we work toward women's equity, equality and economic security.

Projects and Action Summaries

Aboriginal Women's Cluster Model Feasibility Study

The Feasibility Study was completed in March 2011, its recommendations then published and distributed to potential funders for their consideration. The study was resourced by Indian and Northern Affairs Canada (INAC) to look at an innovative model that would provide holistic networking and community support to build Aboriginal women-led CED initiatives. WEC interviewed several national Aboriginal women's organizations and regional groups to direct and advise on best approaches, to explore how this model might work in Aboriginal communities, and how non-Aboriginal women's groups might work together and support women-led CED.

The study determined that this model would be advantageous for all women at the community level. WEC pursued project support to implement the Cluster Model in four regions of Canada targeting a range of women, but with a priority focus upon Aboriginal and Immigrant women as well as rural/northern and isolated women. This led to funding a three year project called Empowering Women's Enterprises and Networks: A Clustering Project. This is a three year pilot project with Cluster Sites located in Vancouver, B.C., Winnipeg, Manitoba, Thunder Bay, Ontario, and Bell Island, Newfoundland/Labrador. In 2011 WEC was able to secure host partners from PARO in Ontario and WISE in Newfoundland. It is anticipated that two other host partners will be found in B.C. and Manitoba to establish Cluster Sites in those regions. The project will see WEC partner with women-led organizations who will work with WEC to recruit women business leaders and others to mentor and lead women's organizations and individuals towards the establishment of CED entities and/or entrepreneurial business development.

<http://womenseconomiccouncil.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/05/11131-WEC-Aboriginal-Cluster-Model-Report.pdf>

Leadership and Women's Economic Security: A Sustainability Approach

WEC's Leadership and Women's Economic Security Project was completed in April, 2011. The project actively engaged over 70 organizations and almost 900 women in 12 communities across Canada to enhance women's leadership and women's economic security and independence.

Leadership Training was provided to 552 women across Canada, and further activities were facilitated during 2011 which are reported to have reached a minimum of 300 additional women. Information from the participating organizations indicates that they acquired new resources and tools which they are using, their staff learned new approaches for sharing the information, and they expanded their networks with other CED organizations.

The Economic Literacy Train-the-Trainer sessions far exceeded the target set by the intended outcome. In total, there were 70 participants from 26 organizations, including 8 women-centred CED organizations, compared to the targets of 16 participants and 8 organizations. Organizations reported training a total of 342 women in their communities since receiving the training, which far exceeds the target of 240. A further 19 other organizations had staff, volunteers or students participating in the Train-the-Trainer workshops and they may have trained other women as well.

Both of these programs were evaluated by a third party consultant. The results found that we exceeded our planned outcomes. We reached more women and organizations than originally hoped and continue to keep in touch with them as these organizations continue to use WEC curriculum and programming in supporting women toward economic security.

Policy and Advocacy

The Canadian Women's Foundation supported WEC's work towards impacting women's policy and advocacy in CED. Their support allowed the WEC Board of Directors to meet regularly with women-led CED organizations and brief others on our work and determine if there was partnership potential. Additional activities include the following:

- Participation on the Economic Development Committee with CWF – this included analysing project proposals, providing advice and providing educational information on Aboriginal groups, collaborating on the establishment of an emerging women leadership training institution.
- Continued membership with the Common Thread Co-op (a social enterprise/Co-op) in Vancouver
- Revision and update of the WEC website
- Lobbied all federal parties during the election regarding women led CED issues
- Worked with several women-led organizations in their efforts towards CED and/or financial literacy support
- Participation at one national conference sponsored by CCEDNet (Toronto)
- Participation at the BC Regional CCEDNet Conference
- Board member participated with CCEDNet on the Peopled Centre Economy Committee and Chaired the Public Policy Council (CCEDNet Nationally)
- Collaborated with CCEDNet on funding proposals

Future Projects

For the future, WEC plans on continuing the path towards capacity building, along with providing resources and tools that will support women-led organizations and women directly on their journey towards economic security. We are exploring some exciting opportunities that will use technology to ensure we are keeping abreast with the best ways to offer our services and access to our resources.

Governance and Operations

The WEC Board of Directors continued to work on strengthening internal governance policies, including operational procedures to support good governance practices and diligence. The Board of Director's Policy manual was updated and revised, new operating procedures were developed, observed and practiced, and attention was given to Board Succession Planning and a process for recruiting new members.

Two new Board members joined the Board of Directors. Roberta Hewson from Manitoba, and Tine Buechler from Ontario. WEC said good-bye to a founding Board member Carol Rock from Ontario. Carol was a tireless inspiration for WEC, we will miss her as we carry on, but will never forget her leadership and great strategic mind.

The office transitioned into a virtual office atmosphere. This meant that the Executive Director, Executive Assistant, and Project staff would work from their home base offices. The head office for WEC remains with PARO in Thunder Bay, Ontario.

Due to limited staff and resources supporting the organization, WEC Board of Directors acts as a working board, contributing when they can to support the operation and future planning of the organization. Eventually the organization will transition into a policy-making Board.

Action and Networking

The Board of Directors for WEC met twice in 2011 in different locations across Canada. The policy when meeting is to either meet with local women's organizations and/or have guests come and present and or provide training for the Board. This is to ensure we are networking and connecting, and keeping abreast of women's issues, especially how they relate with women-led economic development.

In 2011 sessions were held with the following:

- Status of Women Canada
- Native Women Association of Canada
- Packtuutit Inuit Women's Organization
- Immigrant Women Organization of Ottawa
- Senator Nancy Ruth

Invitations were sent to other federal departments but commitments to attend were not realized.

Funders

Status of Women Canada



Canadian Women's Foundation



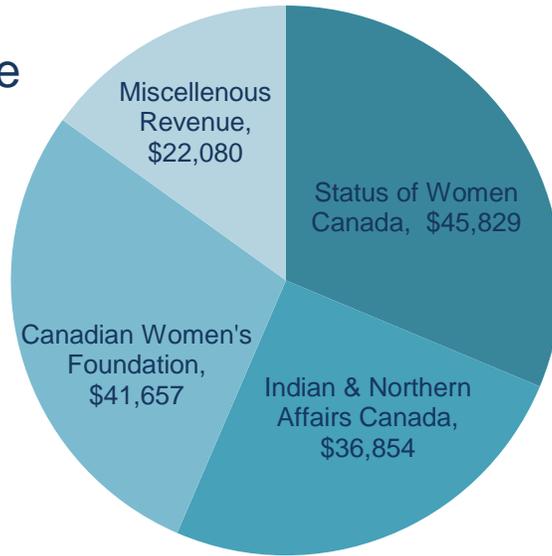
Indian and Northern Affairs Canada



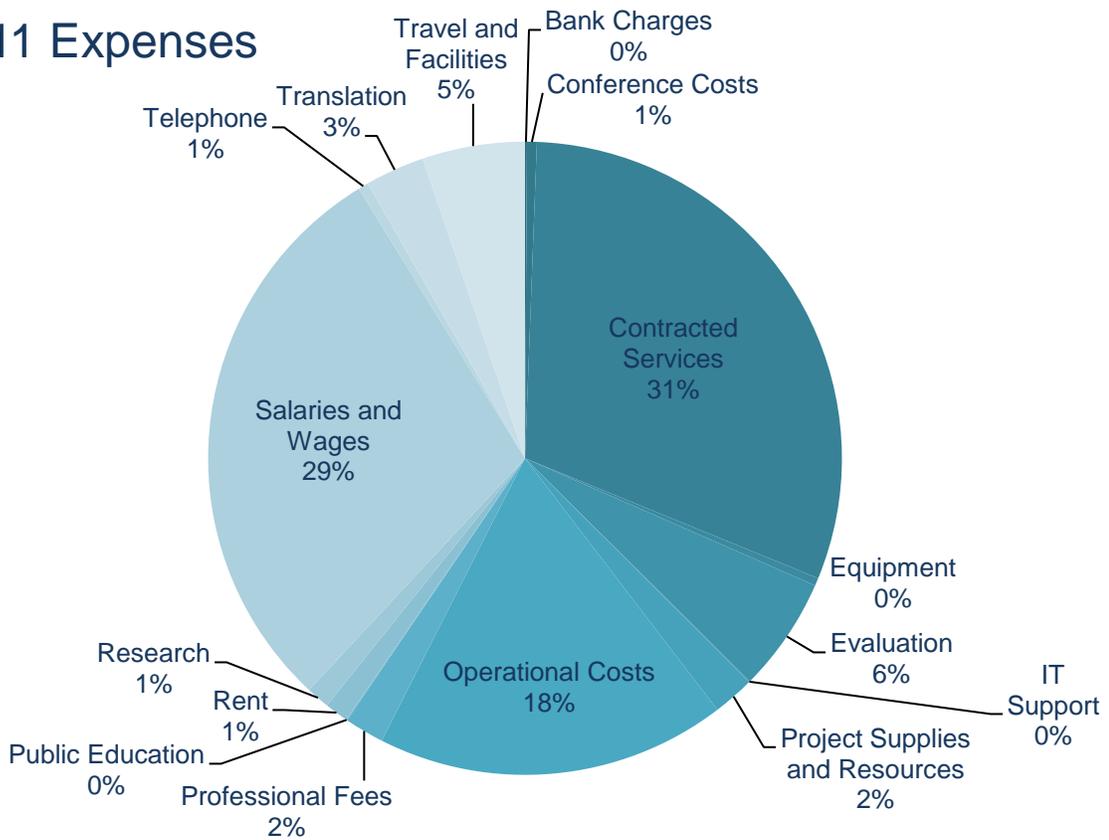
WEC is grateful to work with these funders as we move women towards economic security. Thank you for your support and guidance as we continue our work.

2011 Financial Summary

2011 Revenue



2011 Expenses





Empowering Women To Build Sustainable Communities

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