

# Financial Empowerment for Women Living on Low Incomes: An Action Plan

20 actions for adapting financial literacy programming to better support women living on low incomes



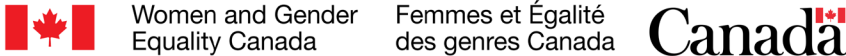
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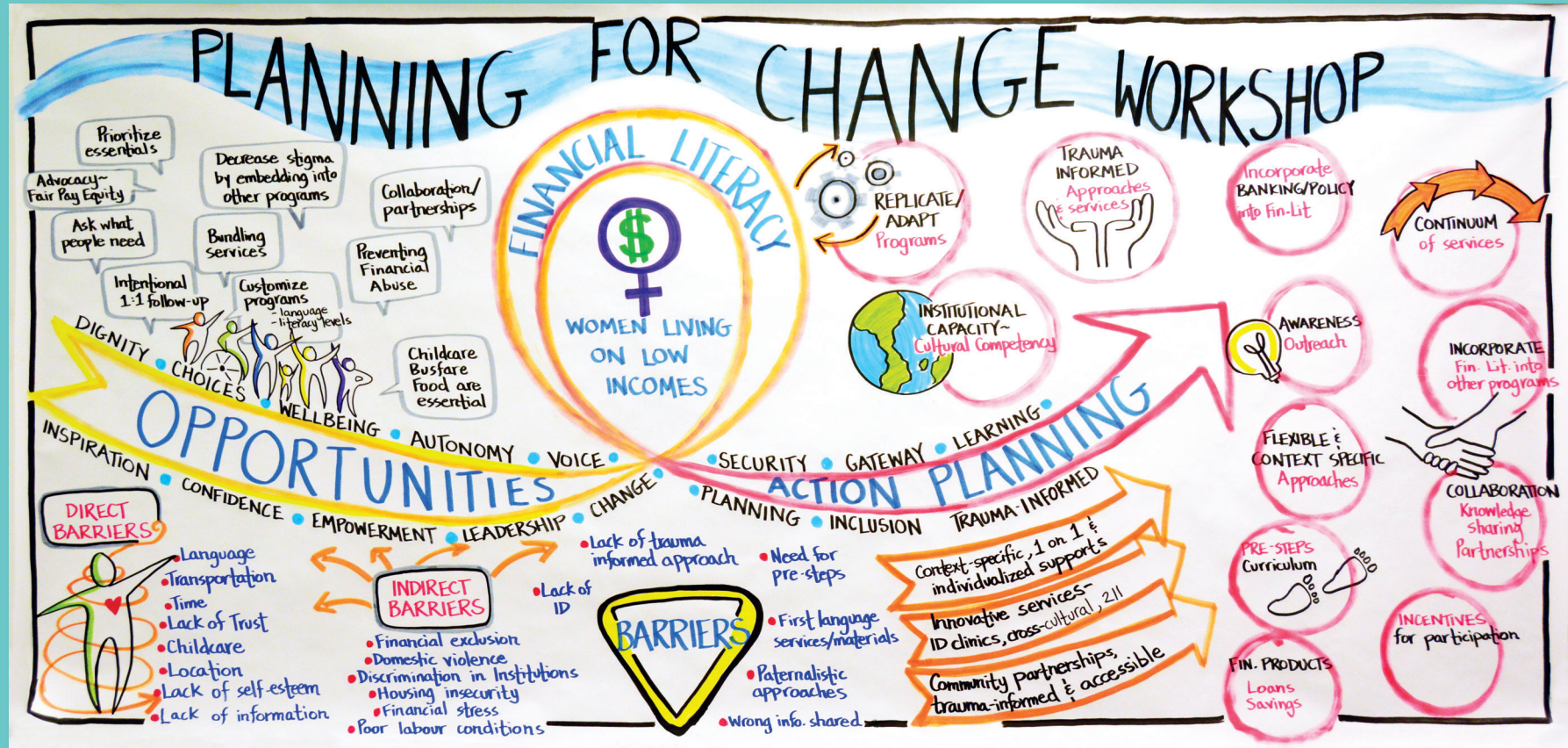
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# Introduction

This action plan is the product of a workshop that brought together 30 private, public, and non-profit organizations from across Canada to address a pressing question:

**What can we do to more effectively help women living on low incomes become financially empowered?**

Canada’s largest financial institutions were invited to the workshop, which was part of a greater project funded by Women and Gender Equality Canada. Partners include Families Canada, the Canadian Credit Union Association, and Vancity.

## Why financial empowerment for women?

Families Canada’s national study demonstrates that gender-specific barriers prevent women living on low incomes from accessing financial empowerment efforts. As a result, these women have fewer opportunities to expand their economic opportunities, lift their families out of poverty, and help their children become the movers and shakers of the future and the backbone of our economy.

## What do we need to do?

To build a stronger Canada, we need to address these barriers, implement these calls to action, and focus our efforts on initiatives that meet women where they’re at and help move them towards financial stability.

## What should I do with this action plan?

The calls for action in this document are for anyone who has the opportunity to influence or impart financial literacy knowledge, skills, and confidence in women living on low incomes. It’s not just financial literacy program managers who can benefit from this action plan. Anyone providing access to quality financial literacy education has a role in helping implement these calls to action.



## The Context for Action

There are many effective, award-winning financial literacy programs in Canada.

However, many of these programs do not meet the needs of women living on low incomes. Families Canada's national research study "Accessing financial literacy programs: Barriers and opportunities for women living on low incomes" (2020) documents 14 social, economic, and institutional barriers that prevent women living on low incomes from accessing existing financial literacy programs.

To act on these research findings, stakeholders from 30 organizations from various sectors—government, corporate, and non-profit—came together to brainstorm how we can collectively address these barriers and by improving our programs and

systems. Together, the group identified 20 calls to action that will help Canadians better support women's financial empowerment and lift the collective wealth of our country.

So here's what we're asking you to do.

If you are in a position to impact women's financial skills, knowledge or confidence—whether through a formal program, by giving advice to a client or friend, or through policy—take a look at these calls to action. Examine your current efforts. Identify actions that are applicable to you. And consider adapting your approach.

With these actions, we can change the lives of women across Canada, break generational poverty cycles, and build a brighter future for the next generation.

We all have a role to play.

## Calls to Action

**20 actions for adapting financial literacy programming to better support women living on low incomes.**

## Adopt Trauma and Violence-Informed Approaches

**A trauma and violence-informed approach to financial literacy supports women's positive health outcomes, positive financial behaviours, and increases women's safety, sense of control, and resilience.**

**The calls to action in this section of the action plan can help you incorporate trauma and violence-informed principles into your work.**





**A**ll financial literacy programs that reach women should consider incorporating trauma and violence-informed approaches as some clients may have experienced—or currently be experiencing—trauma and/or violence. Domestic violence, physical violence, sexual assault, and systemic violence based on race, class, disability, and age, are just a few forms of violence that may impact women's lives.

As defined by the Public Health Agency of Canada, trauma and violence-informed approaches are based on four key policy and practice principles:

1. Understand trauma and violence, and their impacts on peoples' lives and behaviours
2. Create emotionally and physically safe environments
3. Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection
4. Provide a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support client coping and resilience

A trauma and violence-informed approach does not treat trauma, but it does minimize the possibility of harming and re-traumatize program participants—whether or not you know their experiences of violence. By minimizing harm that may come to participants, you have a greater likelihood of participant retention, and achieving your program objectives.

A trauma and violence-informed approach to financial literacy supports women's positive health outcomes, positive financial behaviours, and increases women's safety, sense of control, and resilience.

The calls to action in this section of the action plan can help you incorporate trauma and violence-informed principles into your work.



## Sensitize program facilitators about the lived experiences of women living on low incomes

### DESCRIPTION

Sensitizing program facilitators (and all points of contact) about the needs and lived experiences of women living on low incomes can help build supportive and safe environments for program delivery. This will help create trusted relationships.

Women living on low incomes have indicated that facilitator's attitudes and behaviour are crucial to their decision to join and participate in financial literacy programs.

In particular, women who experience systemic marginalization can experience further marginalization and stigmatization when participating in financial literacy programs.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Build cultural competency in program staff
- Develop and provide training on:
  - trauma and violence, and how it can impact participant's lives
  - techniques for dismantling power imbalances between the facilitator and participants
  - addressing their biases about marginalized populations
  - women's lived experiences





# 2

## Address women's immediate needs

### DESCRIPTION

Women living on low incomes may be operating in crisis mode for a variety of reasons, including: managing mental health challenges, no access to emergency funds, not enough help navigating the tax system after divorce, and the impacts of financial abuse including forced debt.

Sometimes these experiences are met by a lack of understanding from the financial industry.

In response, financial literacy programs can support women who have experience trauma and/or violence by providing tailored support to address their immediate needs and life circumstances.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Develop helpful resources that address women's immediate needs into financial literacy programming
- Build facilitators' capacity to refer program participants to complementary support (emergency funds, free tax clinics, counselling services, family support centres, etc.)
- Engage policy makers, financial institutions, and justice institutions to address the barriers to participation related to women's immediate needs
- Work with stakeholders to set up loan guarantee funds to provide women who are leaving domestic violence situations with access to crucial services right away so they can



- financially free themselves from their abusers
- Avoid imposing your solutions on women who may be experiencing difficult situations

**"...if you're worried about buying milk tomorrow, you're not going to be able to talk about planning for your child's education."** – WOMAN LIVING ON LOW INCOME, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

# 3

## Create emotionally and physically safe environments

### DESCRIPTION

Creating a safe space—in person and/or online—where everyone can feel comfortable and respected can help build women's strength and capacity.

Key interviewees who participated in Families Canada's national research study emphasized how their own previous experiences of marginalization and struggles to overcoming it informed how they deliver financial literacy programming. They noted that facilitators who faced precarious life conditions themselves were more sensitive to the needs of a vulnerable population, which helped to dismantle power imbalance in dyad "the facilitator – the participants".

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

To reduce power imbalances, program facilitators can consider whether to share personal experiences of living on a low-income. Remember: respect is reciprocal.



**"It's more than finances. It's more than financial literacy. It's people, and making connections, and fostering healthy relationships, and being safe. Is it safe to talk to this person? [...]** You need to feel safe in the circle that you're in." – WOMAN LIVING ON LOW INCOME, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

# 4

## Incorporate cultural safety principles

### DESCRIPTION

Cultural safety is an approach to working across ethnic and other differences to make systems and organizations responsible for ensuring that service environments are safe for everyone—regardless of their expressed or assumed culture. This approach to policy and practice is compatible with, and often an embedded component of, trauma- and violence-informed approaches.

Incorporating bias-free and non-discriminatory cultural and local context into financial literacy programs is incredibly important in Canada’s multicultural environment. This is especially true for racialized and immigrant communities. Financial literacy programs that target newcomer women may need to address pre-conditions, such as having government identification, or understanding the Canadian systems of taxation and banking, before introducing more common financial literacy topics. Cultural norms need to be well-understood and addressed.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Recruit financial literacy program facilitators who can demonstrate their experience, knowledge and understanding of culture as it pertains to financial literacy education, and can describe considerations for how they would deliver the program in a culturally safe way
- Facilitators:
  - Actively work to reduce power imbalances between yourself and clients
  - Be mindful and aware of assumptions based on people’s appearance or presumed ethnicity
  - Avoid actions which demean, disrespect, or disempower clients



# 5

## Identify female champions to mentor other women and highlight women’s success stories

### DESCRIPTION

Inviting facilitators, peers, mentors, or guest speakers who are women to participate can be an effective approach to financial literacy education. This is especially true if these women were able to overcome precarious life conditions and gain financial well-being. Women living on low incomes who participated in Families Canada’s national research study emphasized on multiple occasions how inspirational and helpful it would be to have a female mentor as a role model and guide.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Dedicate funding to support the involvement of women champions
- Reach out to former program participants who are women, overcame precarious life conditions, and gained financial well-being through your program

**“Hire women that come to this program and do something successful [...] like a success story.”** – WOMAN LIVING ON LOW INCOME, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

**“I grew up with an alcoholic father**

**[who] was very abusive to my mom. So, my mom wasn’t allowed to work, my dad wanted to be his own boss. [...] I want to be an independent woman that works and brings in my own money, but I never grew up like that [...] now I’m trying to give my kids better than what I had growing up, and I don’t know how to start, or where to start...”** – WOMAN LIVING ON LOW INCOME, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

**“Just having like maybe a group of other women that just work solely to coach women with financial stuff, so we don’t feel judged. It’s because of mental illness, substance abuse, or general abuse programs, it didn’t start from nowhere. So, maybe women who are trained to understand that and financial issues would help.”** – WOMAN LIVING ON LOW INCOME, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT



# 6

## Provide one-on-one support in addition to group sessions

### DESCRIPTION

Group sessions can be an economical way to reach many women in programming. They can also foster opportunities for collaboration and connection, which is one of the principles of trauma and violence-informed approaches. Focus group participants noted that peer support in group settings can be essential for exchanging helpful information and available resources. They also found value in knowing that they were not alone in their day-to-day struggles and that other women faced the same circumstances. Group sessions were also valued because they can help participants address the anxiety and distress that can arise during the program.

Nonetheless, one of the most persistent recommendations by women in the national study was to also have one-to-one sessions in financial literacy programs. One-on-one sessions allow financial literacy educators to focus on important issues identified by participants and adapt the curriculum to an individual's reality and context. Focus group participants also noted that private one-on-one support can be helpful in rural/ close-knit communities where participants may have concerns over privacy.

When one-on-one support is paired with group sessions, programs can more effectively meet participants' needs.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Dedicate funding to support one-on-one support
- Explore 'hub models' to connect community agencies, program facilitators, and women champions
- Collect more data on the impact of one-on-one vs group sessions
- Increase cross-sectoral collaboration to support mentoring relationships

**“You don’t want people to know it [financial hardships]. You want to hide it. It’s embarrassing.”** – WOMAN LIVING ON

LOW INCOME, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

# 7

## Include topics on confidence, self-esteem and stress management in programming

### DESCRIPTION

Managing money can be stressful—especially when trying to make ends meet while living on a low income.

In Families Canada's research study, many women shared that they feel distressed not only when dealing with financial matters, but also while thinking about them. Dealing with financial issues during financial literacy programs can trigger anxiety, distress, unpleasant feelings. If this is not addressed appropriately, women may withdraw financial literacy programs in order not to face additional sources of stress in their lives. The complexity of feelings and emotions experienced while dealing with financial issues should inform how financial literacy programs are designed.

Including topics such as confidence, self-esteem and stress management is part of adopting a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support coping and resilience—which is one of the key principles of trauma and violence-informed approaches. When those topics are incorporated, participant retention rates will be higher and more women will successfully complete financial literacy programs.

**“Most importantly [...] roleplay, or if you can, actually go to a bank with somebody [...]. How do you take money out? How do you put money in? How do you cash a cheque? How do you ask for help? All of those kinds of things may be totally new if you’re coming from a community of 200 people in the far north.”** – KEY INTERVIEWEE, FAMILIES CANADA RESEARCH STUDY





## CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

Partner with organizations who can provide complementary programming

- To tackle anxiety and distressful feelings, incorporate:
  - Mindfulness exercises
  - Breathing exercises or meditation
  - Colouring or art breaks
- To build self-confidence:
  - Assure individuals that they are not alone; other people are in the same situation
  - Familiarize women with banking rules and procedures to build confidence
  - Roleplay common financial situations. Seeing and practicing how to ask for help at the bank, deposit money, take out money, and how to cash a cheque can build self-confidence. If necessary and possible, accompany a program participant to a financial institution to support them as they try to access services or information that are new to them
  - Provide opportunities for women to discuss discriminatory attitudes they have encountered when trying to access financial information, products, services, or programs

**“When they were talking about the confidence factor, I think that also helps in kind of giving you the motivation to go through all of the processes in order to help yourself get out of debt. Because, if you’re not confident about it, and you’re sitting there and you’re like, ‘What’s the point? It’s not going to work. I’m just going to be stuck in this situation forever.’ That confidence will give you that motivation to take the first steps to help yourself and kind of work towards that.”** – WOMAN LIVING ON LOW INCOME, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

# Program Outreach and Delivery

**Ensuring program outreach methods address barriers that women may face is a crucial first step for engaging and supporting women living on low incomes.**

**The following calls to action provide considerations for reaching women living on low incomes and specifics of financial literacy program delivery. When these calls to action are implemented, we will see more women living on low incomes registering in financial literacy programs and completing them.**



# 8

## Enhance Program Outreach

### DESCRIPTION

Women who participated in Families Canada’s research study identified a lack of information as a major barrier which could prevent them from participating in financial literacy programs.

For example, immigrant women who recently came to Canada shared that they never heard about financial literacy programs but were interested in participating in one. However, their only point of information was an organization that provided settlement assistance.

**“If you’re not on the right page or the right group or something, you won’t even know about them.”** - WOMAN LIVING ON LOW INCOME, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

In other cases, women who were on social assistance said they could receive information about financial literacy resources through their social workers. But many women who were not affiliated with any social services said they relied on word of mouth about financial supports and benefits/credits that they may be entitled to.

**“That would be a great place to advertise, at the offices, the welfare office, it’s a legit place.”** - WOMEN LIVING ON LOW INCOMES, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Some women also shared that they actively searched for information about how to improve their financial situation. However, they noted that paid financial training often overshadowed free support in search engines.

“The paid [programs] always pop up first in the searches. The free ones are never advertised very well.”

An important consideration—some women living on low incomes do not have access to internet or devices at home. When outreach is conducted through both digital and in person methods, organizations will be better positioned to reach more women living on low incomes.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Partner with organizations that already provide services to women living on low incomes who can help promote your financial literacy program. Examples include welfare offices, settlement support organizations, family support centres, libraries, domestic violence centres, etc.
- Invest in targeted advertising campaigns

# 9

## Bolster multi-sectoral collaboration for program delivery

### DESCRIPTION

Increased multi-sectoral collaboration is crucial for addressing many barriers that prevent women living on low incomes from accessing financial literacy supports. When organizations with different areas of expertise come together with the common goal of supporting women and everyone brings something of value to the table, women will be better supported. When it comes to financial literacy education, financial experts can provide financial expertise and coaching. But to meet many of these calls to action, multisectoral collaboration is needed.

When multisectoral collaboration is boosted, financial literacy programs can become part of a holistic set of services that work together to lift women up and help them reach their potential.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Increase stakeholder networking events, with specific focus on supporting women living on low incomes
- Increased partnerships between financial literacy programs, domestic violence support organizations, women’s shelters, health and wellbeing programs, psychological wellbeing programs





# 10

## Ensure program timing is flexible

### DESCRIPTION

Many women living on low incomes work 2-3 jobs to make ends meet, which impacts their availability. Women need to fit attending programs between their working hours and taking care of children, if they have them. Even if they can set aside time to participate, due to the realities of shiftwork it can still be challenging to commit to attending at the same time every week. When program timing is carefully addressed, more women will be able to access to financial literacy programs.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Discuss preferred program times with women directly; or with community partners who have established relationships with women living on low incomes



# 11

## Consider transportation options when delivering programs in-person

### DESCRIPTION

Focus group participants expressed that no matter how beneficial a program could be, transportation to the program site can be a participation barrier.

For example, women in metropolitan and urban areas mentioned they might have to pay for a bus ticket, which they might not be able to afford. Women in small towns discussed that without a robust public transportation system, their only option is often to use a taxi:

**“[I]f they had a cab [that is paid for] I think more people would go, right? Because you don’t want to waste an hour of your time walking to a place that’s an hour away just in the hopes that you’ll get the information you need.”** - WOMEN LIVING ON LOW INCOMES, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

**“I think it’d be better if they could really support people in getting them there, making sure they’re comfortable, right?”** - WOMEN LIVING ON LOW INCOMES, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Unsurprisingly, women in cold cities emphasized that sometimes walking or taking the bus are not options. A single mother from Winnipeg explained that in winter she had to walk 20 minutes to the bus stop carrying her daughter and wait 20 minutes for a bus.

For women who do have access to cars, the cost of the gas can be a crucial factor for attendance:

**“[I]f there are no incentives, it’s not always worth it because the cost of even gas to get here, if you’re not close, is high.”**

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Host programs in spaces that women already access
- Provide bus passes or gas gift cards or arrange for taxis for participants in advance
- Discuss transportation needs with community partners who have established relationships with women living on low incomes

# 12

## Choose in-person locations with care

### DESCRIPTION

Women explained that even if transportation was provided, they would not participate in case it would take them a long time to travel to the program location.

For a lot of women in this study, it was not only the duration of their way to the premises, but also the fact that they needed to bring all their children with them.

Additionally, women emphasized that the location should be safe.

**“[I would go if] it’s a safe location. Like there are some places that are very, very sketchy and really good programs [are] in these areas...[but] I do not want to walk through that area, it’s scary.”** - WOMAN LIVING ON LOW INCOME, FOCUS GROUP PARTICIPANT

Generally speaking, because women are disproportionately affected by gender-based violence, they seek a safe location with a safe pathway to get there.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Host programs in spaces that women already access
- Work with community partners to identify safe spaces



# 13

## Provide incentives for participation

### DESCRIPTION

Providing incentives for participation like gift cards, food, reimbursement for bus tickets/gas, and childcare are practical changes that can help make financial programs more accessible to women living on low incomes. These incentives must reflect the lived realities of the women who attend.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Ask businesses that provide essential services (grocery stores, gas stations, etc.) to sponsor or support local program sessions



# 14

## Adapt program materials for literacy levels and language

### DESCRIPTION

For some women living on low incomes, English or French may not be their first language. Low proficiency in one or both of Canada's official languages is an obvious barrier to participation in many financial literacy programs in Canada. This is especially true for newcomer women living on low incomes. However, it is also an issue for women living in official language minority communities. For example, women from an Anglophone minority community in Quebec also reported experiencing a language barrier. For these women, a lack of French proficiency was a barrier not only in accessing nearby financial institutions but also was perceived as a reason for discrimination when dealing with bank workers. Additionally, some focus group participants reported that specific financial literacy vocabulary, jargon, and legal language that is included in some financial programs could be a significant barrier to participation.

Equally, some women living on low incomes have had limited opportunities to complete or pursue education due to systemic barriers. Ensuring that program materials are written at an appropriate literacy level can help ensure programming is effective.



### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Work with local partners to identify which languages program materials should be available in
- Recruit program facilitators who can deliver the program in languages other than English and French, if necessary

## Systemic Change

**Everyone has a role in supporting women's financial empowerment. The following calls to action provide considerations for changing the landscape of financial literacy education, with a focus on actions that stakeholders from various sectors can take. When these calls to action are implemented, we will see systemic change that supports women's financial empowerment.**



# 15

## Incorporate financial literacy into other programming

### DESCRIPTION

Canada has many education programs that help adults build essential skills and core literacies, such as civic literacy, cultural literacy, digital literacy, family literacy, financial literacy, health literacy, and workplace literacy. Financial literacy education is one of many components that help adults participate in society, achieve their goals, and develop their knowledge and potential.

Incorporating components of financial literacy education into other education programs is an opportunity to better meet women's needs. This is especially important as women living on low incomes often have many competing priorities. This approach also recognizes that financial concerns and decision-making are both deeply personal and embedded in larger family and societal contexts. It also helps meet women where they are at. For example, women could learn how to budget for a baby at pre- and post-natal and parenting classes.

When more comprehensive education programs that incorporate financial literacy elements are available at every life stage, women will have more

opportunities to gain core financial literacy knowledge, skills, and confidence.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Who could be involved: education program providers, program participants, financial literacy experts, schools, and other stakeholders
- Leverage pre-existing programs
- Bring in financial literacy experts that work with women to identify what they want to learn
- Develop and evaluate the newly improved, comprehensive programs
- Share lessons learned and successes with other stakeholders

# 16

## Scale up evidence-based financial literacy programs

### DESCRIPTION

Evidence-based programs are rigorously tested in controlled settings and proven effective at meeting their objectives. It's important for experts in the field – not just the people who developed and evaluated the program – to examine the evaluation methodology and agree with its conclusions about the program's effectiveness. Ultimately, when you scale up an evidence-based program, you can be confident you're delivering a program that works and is highly likely to make meaningful change in the lives of women living on low incomes.

Success would look like diverse stakeholders working together to scale up evidence-based financial literacy programs. A sign of success would be when women across Canada have access to financial literacy services and programs that can take them from "crisis mode" to being "future-focused."

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Identify evidence-based financial literacy programs
- Build the evidence-base of promising programs
- Bring together stakeholders who have evidence-based

programs and stakeholders who want evidence-based programs and have a conversation

- Develop a blueprint for replicating evidence-based programs, taking into consideration the types of funding and partnerships needed and well as adaptations that may be needed to fit the program to the new local context
- Build a team of funders, donors, corporations, not-for-profits and other stakeholders
- Who could be involved: governments; community organizations; corporate donors; organizations that own financial literacy programs; local champions from geographic areas where the evidence-based programs could expand into; communications and media partners to build awareness of these programs, assist with outreach to new participants, and help with "myth busting" about financial literacy and financial literacy programming

# 17

## Increase awareness and outreach

### DESCRIPTION

At Families Canada's Action Plan workshop, many stakeholders identified the need to increase awareness and outreach. More specifically, there is a need to leverage partnerships and networks to increase awareness of: 1) why tailored financial literacy supports would better meet the needs of women living on low incomes, 2) how women's needs may differ from other demographics, and 3) where women can go to access these tailored financial literacy supports.

A successful campaign would lead to financial literacy increasingly becoming a household concept, and national awareness of available financial literacy programs and their benefits.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Who could be involved: women living on low incomes, community and service providers, informal and formal community groups (ex. ethnic and religious groups), public spaces (ex. public transport, grocery stores, libraries, schools), public sector, private sector, nonprofit sector, communications and media agencies
- Build a network, which includes service providers
- Develop a campaign that is based on women's needs and advice for women, is timely, and considers women's unique barriers



# 18

## Establish partnerships to build a continuum of services

### DESCRIPTION

Often, crucial supports for women living on low incomes are "siloed", making them incredibly difficult for women to identify and access in tandem. However, stakeholders can reduce this barrier by establishing partnerships and building "one-stop-shop" continuums of services in their communities. This would help increase access to holistic services and destigmatize accessing financial literacy supports at the community level. Flexible "drop-in" service models would make these integrated services more accessible to women.

Additionally, increased partnerships would help prevent stakeholders from duplicating efforts and reduce competition for the same funds.

We'll know we have succeeded when cross-sectoral connections are made, organizations' services become complimentary rather than competitive, women have increased access appropriate services, the stigma of accessing financial literacy supports decreases at the local level, women's awareness of financial literacy programming increases, funders prioritize collective impact models, and stakeholders are better able to meet the needs of women living on low incomes.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Who could be involved: women living on low incomes, their communities, and their families; governments; community, provincial/territorial, and national organizations; financial institutions; existing and new coalitions; libraries; and the private sector
- Build a network of organizations that value collective impact models
- Build an advocacy strategy to gain support
- Map partners' services for referral purposes
- Bring key stakeholders together to build connections to integrate services
- Establish "drop-in" days at community-level organizations
- Leverage public libraries as points of entry
- Learn from successful "one-stop-shop" continuums of services that are already established Provide/identify funding opportunities to support this work

# 19

## Build institutional cultural competency

### DESCRIPTION

When institutions are culturally competent, they are more inclusive and accessible. Building institutional cultural competency will help ensure that institutions are consumer-focused, put the diverse needs of their clients (including women living on low incomes) first, and that women are not pressured into accessing financial services that they may not be comfortable with.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Who could be involved: governments, financial institutions and their shareholders/members, other stakeholders
- Incorporate cultural competency and respectful communication training into corporate social responsibility programs
- Ensure institution employees know their clients' rights
- When members of your organization demonstrate high levels of cultural competency, highlight and celebrate their efforts



# 20

## Create a community of practice

### DESCRIPTION

At Families Canada's Action Plan workshop, many stakeholders identified the need for a community of practice for individuals who are interested and/or experienced in supporting women's financial empowerment. Specific goals for this community of practice could include identifying learning priorities within the community, knowledge sharing, providing peer support, providing fair compensation for women living on low incomes who participate in the community of practice, and championing women and their stories. Stakeholders indicated that a successful community of practice would result in increased social support for financial literacy educators, increased reach to women living on low incomes across Canada, and more connections between community organizations.

### CONSIDERATIONS FOR IMPLEMENTATION

- Who could be involved: women living on low incomes, financial literacy programs, financial literacy educators/program facilitators, governments, community organizations/family support centres, other stakeholders
- Conduct an environmental scan to identify gaps and key stakeholders
- Reach out to interested partners
- Co-create solutions with women living on low incomes and empower them to be the decision-makers
- Engage in post-program support





