



Women's Enterprise
Organizations of Canada

ANNUAL REPORT

2020/21

POSITIONING STATEMENT

Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada (WEOC) supports a diverse membership of organizations that directly impact the growth and success of women entrepreneurs. Representing an array of populations and regions, WEOC members support women entrepreneurs through a variety of initiatives, including business training, advising, financing, and mentorship. Besides having opportunities to network with peers across the country, WEOC members have access to an innovative library of tools and resources, as well as regular live and virtual cross-country events.

OUR VISION

We lead the way to achieve excellence in the provision of services by women's enterprise organizations.

OUR MISSION

To build a strong national network that strengthens our member organizations.



MARCELA MANDEVILLE
BOARD CHAIR

BOARD CHAIR MESSAGE

The past year was full of challenges, change, and transformation for women entrepreneurs and the organizations that support them. Across Canada, WEOC members worked alongside their clients to navigate unrelenting pandemic waves, which brought near constant changes to operational restrictions and an evolving array of government support.

I have seen first-hand the impact COVID-19 has had on women entrepreneurs in Alberta and know from my WEOC colleagues that they are seeing the same thing across the country. And it's not just a Canadian issue – women have been disproportionately impacted by the pandemic across the globe. Says UN Women: “the impacts of crises are never gender-neutral, and COVID-19 is no exception”. It is encouraging then to see resiliency and positivity reflected in the responses to WEOC's recent national survey of women entrepreneurs. Showing creativity and innovation, many respondents said they used the slowdown and closures to reflect on their businesses and implement changes. They pivoted and adapted, finding success in unexpected places.

The survey also showed that those entrepreneurs who worked with a women's enterprise support organization were more likely to access supports and remain optimistic about the future. Through a variety of services and initiatives, WEOC members helped entrepreneurs leverage their unique values, mindsets, tools, and resources, to respond and adapt to the ever-changing challenges presented during the pandemic. Clearly, the work of WEOC members continues to have wide-reaching impacts on entrepreneurs and their communities.

I had no sense of where the year would lead when I took over as WEOC Board Chair in June 2020. While it has been a year of uncertainty, it has not been without success and cause for celebration. Thanks to the strong leadership of our CEO, Alison Kirkland and the commitment of the WEOC staff, the Board was able to take a welcome step back from operational responsibilities to focus on strategic development. That included a commitment to strengthening our relationship with our government partners and expanding our network of member organizations. I look forward to a time when we can once again meet in person to discuss our shared commitment to women entrepreneurs. We continue to welcome the strong support of The Honourable Mary Ng, Minister of Small Business, Export Promotion and International Trade and the continued commitment to the Women's Entrepreneurship Strategy, which underlines the critical importance of ensuring women have access to the tools needed to grow thriving businesses.

Continued...

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As we do at Alberta Women Entrepreneurs, our fellow member organizations work directly with women entrepreneurs in the ecosystem. This unique perspective helped in the development of WEOC's member platform, discussion forum and learning library, which were launched in March 2021. This platform supports one of our core beliefs, that by providing members access to quality online training, professional development, and peer networking opportunities, WEOC is equipping them to deliver superior support and expertise to their clients. And we know that with this support, women entrepreneurs will succeed in driving the growth of the Canadian economy.

One of my personal highlights from my first year as Board Chair was participating in the WEOC X: Exchange, Expand, Explore national conference in February 2021. Our plan to bring together 75 participants for a virtual conference was blown out of the water when that many participants signed up on the first day of registration. Over the course of the month-long virtual event, we hosted 496 participants

from an array of organizations across the country.

We are eager to continue building on this momentum to create a national network and welcome advisors to the WEOC membership portal to continue learning and growing together.

As I reflect on this year, I extend my sincere thanks to Sandra Altner who handed over the reins for an organization she chaired for almost a decade, to Vice-Chair Jennifer Bessell for taking on this role in an incredibly busy year and to our Board colleagues for your commitment to WEOC. Your wisdom, knowledge, and perspective has shepherded WEOC from an idea to a national organization dedicated to growing women's entrepreneurship in Canada.

Although this past year has had its challenges and disappointments, I am proud of the resilience and optimism of women entrepreneurs. It gives me hope for a strong and successful future, and I cannot wait to see the opportunities forged in the coming year. I look forward to continuing to work together to grow and expand entrepreneurship in Canada.

**“WEOC CELEBRATES THE INNOVATION,
CREATIVITY, AND SPIRIT OF CANADA’S
DIVERSE WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS.
ALONGSIDE OUR MEMBERS, WE CONTINUE
TO SEEK WAYS TO SUPPORT THEIR
SUCCESS, WHICH IS INTEGRAL TO
THE RECOVERY AND GROWTH OF OUR
NATIONAL ECONOMY.”**

ALISON KIRKLAND
CEO, WOMEN’S ENTERPRISE
ORGANIZATIONS OF CANADA



ALISON KIRKLAND
CEO

CEO MESSAGE

Even before COVID-19 turned our world upside down, the WEOC team was expecting a year filled with untold opportunities and unexpected challenges. As we moved into our second year of Women Entrepreneurship Strategy funding, everything we did was still new, fresh, and invigorating for an organization that transitioned in September 2019 from a Board-run entity to a fully-staffed national office.

Pivot, essential service, unprecedented, lockdown, social distancing, and WFH (work from home) became key words in this year's business lexicon and influenced our work. We doubled our staff from a three-member team working in the head office to six all working from their homes in Winnipeg, Wainwright, and Toronto.

Given the abrupt and dramatic changes to our lives, we still jumped headfirst into our new reality. Our first foray into training was a three-day conference in May 2020 that featured a diverse roster of speakers, women's enterprise ecosystem participants, and a handful of entrepreneurs. We followed that up with a highly successful series on intellectual property. We rebranded, launched a new website with a member portal and discussion platform, and implemented a member management database.

Building our membership and collaborating with our eco-system partners was a priority. We connected with close to 100 organizations supporting women entrepreneurs across the country and worked closely with several of them to move the dial for Canadian women entrepreneurs. Our partners include Alberta Women Entrepreneurs, Canada 51, Canadian Intellectual Property Office, Canadian Women's Chamber of Commerce, Export Development Canada, Global Affairs Canada, Newfoundland and Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs, PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise, Réseau des Femmes d'affaires du Québec, The Forum, Women's Enterprise Centre, Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc., Women in Business New Brunswick, Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba, Women Entrepreneurship Knowledge Hub.

This year we carved our niche as the provider of resources for organizations that support women entrepreneurs. We remain grateful to our funder, Western Economic Diversification Canada, for its ongoing funding and special project supports that enabled us to deliver a robust, four-part project designed specifically for our target market. It included a two-wave national survey to assess how women entrepreneurs were responding to COVID-19; an online discussion platform to connect individuals across Canada who are supporting women entrepreneurs; the February-long symposium WEOC X: Exchange, Expand, Explore that drew six times more participants than anticipated; and jumpstarted an online library of business resources in a variety of formats: videos, manuals, workbooks, articles, and tip sheets.

It indeed was a year like no other, and I am deeply grateful to the Board of Directors for their insight and support. While each of them was navigating the unusual path for their own organization, they were always available to provide guidance and share their wisdom. Thank you!

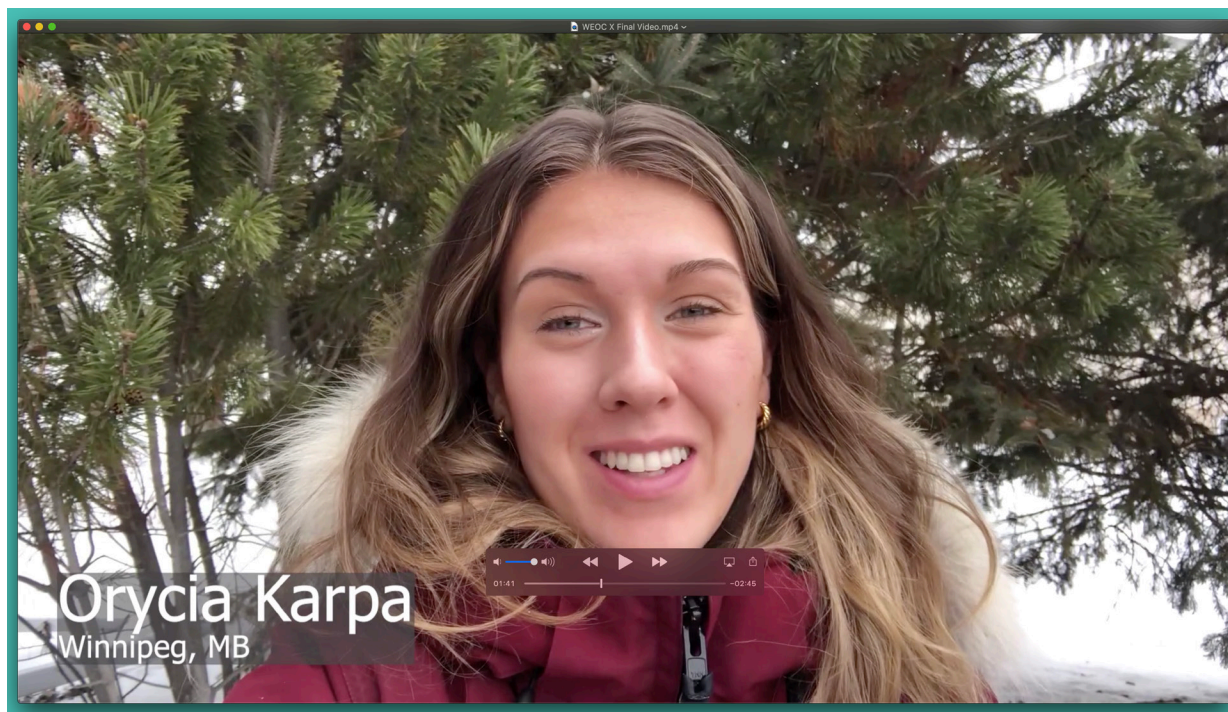
Exciting, hectic, challenging, and inspiring – our small but mighty team rolled up their sleeves and got to work. I am immensely proud of them and everything we accomplished this year and am looking forward to another successful year to come.



HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE YEAR

In a year like no other, WEOC was able to connect, share, grow and learn from the strong network of entrepreneurial support organizations across Canada. CEO Alison Kirkland spoke at myriad events, participated in panel discussions, moderated important conversations and took part in a variety of remote, but engaging, virtual events. Together as an organization, we participated in dozens of online discussions with peers in the association, communications, membership, and women's entrepreneurial communities. WEOC introduced a new look, a new website, and a new membership portal, complete with a rich learning library. It's been a productive and encouraging year, and we are excited to work together in the months to come.

WATCH THE WEOC X WRAP-UP VIDEO:



WEOC X: EXCHANGE, EXPAND, EXPLORE

**2021 NATIONAL CONFERENCE FOR
WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURIAL SUPPORT
ORGANIZATIONS AND STAFF**

In February, more than 250 entrepreneurial advisors and 20 expert presenters from across Canada came together to exchange, expand, explore. Advisors who work directly with female entrepreneurs took in live presentations from top experts, participated in critical conversations and panel discussions, and networked with other business advisors, financial advisors, marketing experts, and leaders from across the ecosystem. We were happy to work with women entrepreneurs from across the country – from Victoria to Nunavut to St. John's – to provide registrants with a specially curated gift box as well as daily door prizes.

“ I APPRECIATED THE OPPORTUNITY TO CONNECT WITH AND LEARN FROM OTHER ADVISORS, AND LEADERS ACROSS THE COUNTRY.

It was interesting to hear the viewpoints from various speakers and panel discussions on challenges and solutions that we all face in supporting women in business. WEOC X: Exchange, Expand, Explore provided me with new tools and resources that I could immediately use in working with my clients.”

BETSY SAUNDERS
**BUSINESS GROWTH ADVISOR,
NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR
ORGANIZATION OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS**

“ THIS CONFERENCE HAS BEEN EXCELLENT SO FAR.

Every session I’ve attended has been so informative. I also really appreciate the intros, welcomes, and Mentimeter activities.”

NORA COTTRILL
SCADDING COURT

**“THE WEOC X CONFERENCE MADE ME
FEEL CONNECTED WITH MY COLLEAGUES
ACROSS THE COUNTRY AND INSPIRED
TO CONTINUE OUR WORK OF SUPPORTING
WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS.**

The session on accessibility was particularly eye-opening and the presenter provided many useful examples of short-term and long-term changes we can make in our marketing and program delivery to make them more accessible and inclusive.”

**CHAUNDA HONKONEN
MARKETING & COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER,
WOMEN’S ENTERPRISE CENTRE**

COVID-19 RECOVERY RESEARCH. NAVIGATING THE ROAD TO SUCCESS: HOW TO SUPPORT WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS

As part of the COVID-19 Recovery Project, WEOC retained Environics Research, an independent market research consultancy, to undertake this national project to learn more about women entrepreneurs in general, and the impact of the pandemic on their businesses. This report outlines the findings of Phase 1, which includes integrating insights from qualitative and quantitative research. Phase 2 of the research was conducted in Spring 2021 to understand the changing landscape.

Insights stemming from the research will be useful for participants in the women's enterprise ecosystem, to evaluate existing programs and identify gaps in order to contribute to the overall success of women entrepreneurs across the country.

The survey took place in two waves: October 2020 and March 2021, and in total, more than 900 women were surveyed or interviewed.

The goal was to identify what, if anything, had changed between wave 1 and wave 2.

The first wave highlighted a general feeling of optimism about the future among women entrepreneurs but also highlighted the additional burdens that women entrepreneurs are shouldering. They used the early days of the pandemic to reflect on their business, evaluate its direction, and pivot where possible. Many used the time to implement planned changes that had been on the 'back burner' and incorporate digitization of business processes, systems, and offerings.

The second wave showed continued optimism and that customer attraction and retention, increasing revenue, marketing and business development are priorities.

**[READ THE PHASE 1 INTEGRATED REPORT
ON OUR WEBSITE.](#)**

HIGHLIGHTS FROM PHASE 1

7/10

ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE FUTURE.

Many are looking forward to the future and can recognize silver linings emerging as a result of the pandemic.

9/10

HAVE IMPLEMENTED AT LEAST ONE ACTION TO MANAGE THE IMPACTS OF COVID 19 ON THEIR BUSINESS.

Leveraging their unique values, mindsets, tools, and available resources, they've adapted, pivoted and implemented various strategies to help them cope with the ever changing and challenging situations they face.

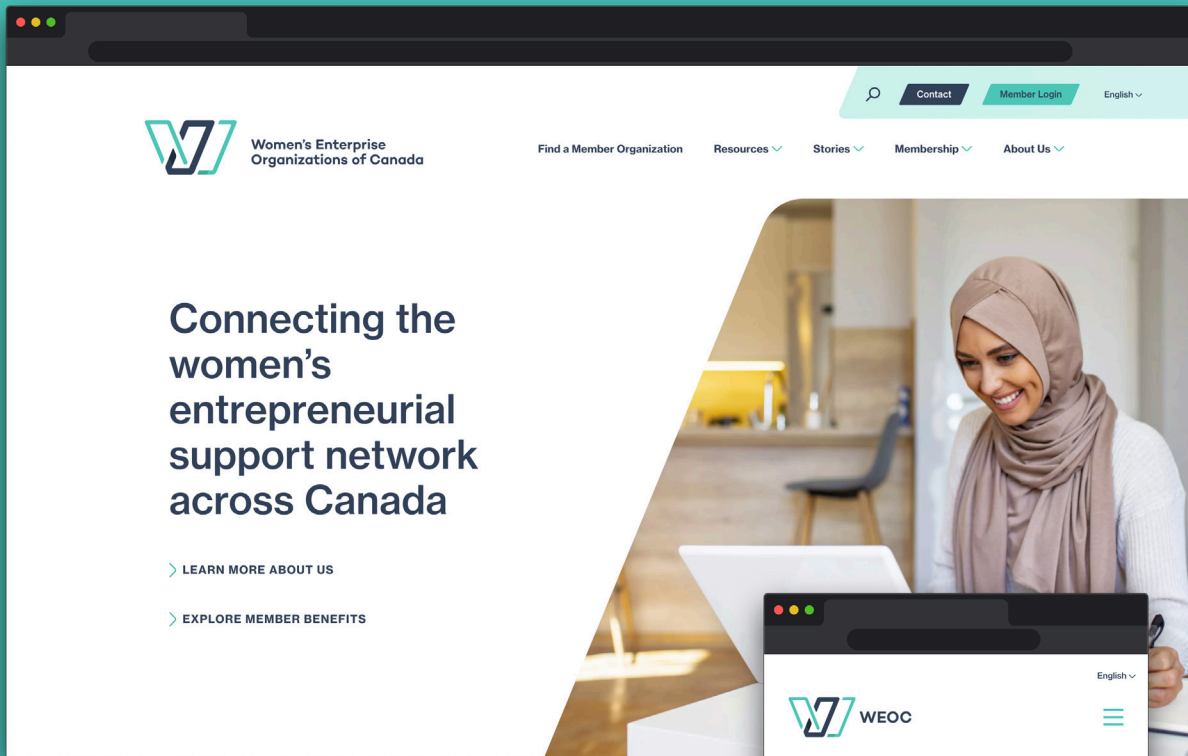
Organizations and groups that support women entrepreneurs play an important role in business success, helping to neutralize some of the impacts of the pandemic among their constituents.

Current members of organizations/groups that support women entrepreneurs are likely to view the pandemic through a neutral lens, as having both positive and negative impacts (40%). In contrast, non-members are significantly more likely to report that the pandemic has had negative impacts (49%).

“NEVER UNDERESTIMATE THE RESILIENCE OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS; THEY REPRESENT INSPIRATION IN MOTION.

Through the pandemic, we saw some beneficiaries who seized opportunities to grow their businesses. Similarly, some had their businesses squeezed, which required them to make tough decisions. And did they ever. In the face of uncertainty, those women resolved that they would survive. Finally, we saw businesses that would be challenged to continue with the status quo of pre-pandemic business practices and had to close their doors. Make no mistake – they did not fail. Rather, they saw the purpose to reinvent themselves and forge ahead as a company designed to welcome what the future holds. We can sum up our major success of the year in a word: resilience.”

NICK KOCHAR
WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS OF SASKATCHEWAN INC.
PROGRAM ADVISOR



WEOC WEBINAR

WEOC hosted the WEOC Learning Sessions with the Canadian Intellectual Property Office and exceeded expectations in terms of the quality of the engagement and the attendance, which again included participants from across the country. WEOC was able to present some of these sessions in both English and French, furthering our reach and building our network.

OUR SESSIONS INCLUDED:

- IP Basics – Bring Your Creations to Life. Learn Why Intellectual Property Matters
- IP for Women Entrepreneurs
- Traditional Knowledge and IP

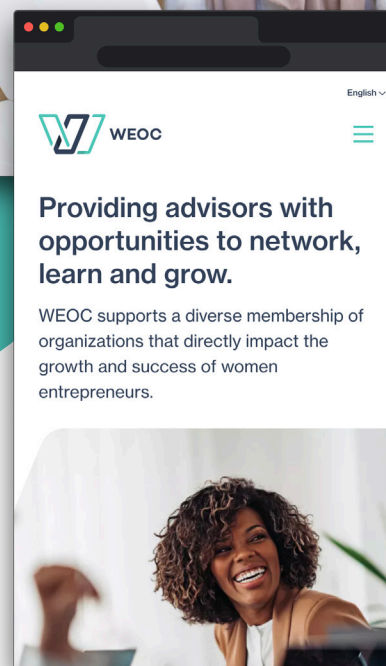
NEW BRAND & WEBSITE

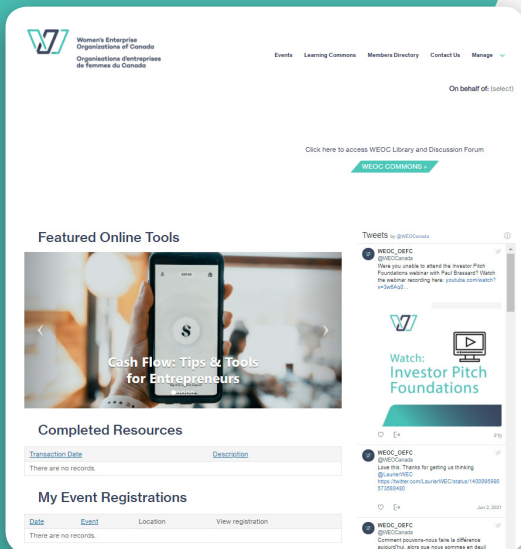
WEOC launched a fresh, impactful, and inclusive new brand in March designed by Winnipeg-based firm Urban Ink. Owner Marcelle Lussier also worked with The Hatchery, in Victoria, BC to produce a new, bilingual website at weoc.ca.

Completely bilingual, the new brand is bold and crisp, demonstrating forward movement and collaboration.

The new website highlights the many events and activities happening around the ecosystem. It also shares resources for COVID-19 recovery, links to engaging articles and recordings. The site includes dozens of original stories aimed at women's entrepreneurial advisors, with topics like:

- Storytelling for Entrepreneurs
- Fundamentals of Competitive Grant Applications
- Supporting Black Owned Businesses
- Retirement = Entrepreneurship?





MEMBERSHIP PORTAL

In March 2021, WEOC launched an exclusive membership portal, which provides members with:

- Exclusive access to our Learning Library, an evolving collection of online tools and resources;
- Free access to WEOC events and training sessions;
- Deeper connections through one-on-one and group discussions with peers across the country;
- The opportunity to share their perspectives and learn from others.

SEPARATING WEOC AND WECM

Funding for the establishment of the national WEOC office resulted from a proposal to Western Economic Diversification Canada from the Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba (WECM). With the successful completion of a full year of activity and the development of separate financial statements, WEOC and WECM completed the legal requirements to operate separately. The process was finalized in November 2020.

ONLINE RESOURCE LIBRARY

It was part of the COVID-19 Recovery Project and enabled us to develop 133 tools in various formats on topics covering human resources, marketing & branding, operations, funding & finance. We are working to having as many tools as possible in English and French.

Sections include:

- Funding & Finance
- Export
- Marketing & Branding
- Operations
- Skills & Tools
- Collaboration

WEOC WAS PROUD TO SUPPORT THE WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURIAL NETWORK BY SPONSORING EVENTS THAT BOTH RAISED OUR PROFILE IN THE ECOSYSTEM AND SUPPORTED IMPORTANT WORK:

- Sedulous Women Conference
- Canadian Council for Aboriginal Business (CCAB) Conference
- Women in Small Business
- Students in Entrepreneurship
- Global Women's Entrepreneurship Day
- The Forum's The Go To Podcast
weoc.ca/stories/the-go-to-podcast/
- WEKH Women Entrepreneurs National Conference

Ready, Set, Get Back to Business.

*Moving forward
during COVID-19* May 12-14

READY, SET, GET BACK TO BUSINESS

In Spring 2020, WEOC presented a learning symposium for women entrepreneurs and entrepreneurial advisors focused on navigating the COVID-19 pandemic. These were early days of the pandemic, and the symposium was WEOC's first national event to be presented virtually. From May 12-14, 2020, the Ready, Set, Get Back to Business symposium provided live presentations that focused on helping women entrepreneurs successfully navigate changes to their businesses caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Individuals from WEOC member organizations participated as expert speakers and panelists, while event attendees were individuals who work with women entrepreneurs.

The three-day symposium featured three engaging sessions a day, with topics like:

- Moving Forward Through Export
- Protecting Your Mental Health for Business Decision Making
- What's Your Financial Plan to Move Forward?
- Cultivating Customer Loyalty
- Pivoting and Resetting for the Future

The unique, free event allowed for cross-Canada collaboration among women's entrepreneurial support organizations and connected entrepreneurs from across the country. Using an exclusive app, we included digital ads for WEOC member organizations, giving them a platform to promote their organizations and upcoming programs. It also provided a place to network and build community by sharing ideas on the various sessions and key issues facing entrepreneurs. This virtual meeting place was new to the ecosystem as we all grappled with presenting large-scale events online.

FEEDBACK FROM PARTICIPANTS:

- "Very informative information. I loved hearing from other entrepreneurs and their business stories."
- "This Symposium was extremely informative and helpful. The resources and content are invaluable. My brain has been fed I'm grateful to have been able to participate in this symposium. Thank you very much."
- "Many thanks to organizers - all sessions were interesting, varied and necessary."
- "What a great three days!"

BOARD MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS



Alberta Women Entrepreneurs is an organization dedicated to enabling women to build successful businesses. We provide unique programs and services to women in business through mentoring, advising, financing and skills and network development.



**WOMEN'S
ENTERPRISE
CENTRE**

Women's Enterprise Centre is BC's leading resource for women entrepreneurs, offering skills development, business loans, free business guidance, business resources, mentoring, networking and events!



The Women's Enterprise Centre of Manitoba has helped thousands of women throughout the province find information, improve their skills and acquire financing so that they can start, expand or purchase a business. Our team of committed and successful entrepreneurs and professionals deliver resources to support women at every business stage. We offer advisory services, in-person and online training and loans up to \$150,000 to qualified businesses.

BOARD MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS CONTINUED



Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan Inc. (WESK) is a non-profit membership organization which works with women who are considering starting a business, purchasing a business, or operating an existing business. Our priority is to help women throughout Saskatchewan achieve their entrepreneurial goals. Programs and services offered by Women Entrepreneurs of Saskatchewan include business advisory and support services, start-up and expansion lending, networking and mentoring opportunities, and business development seminars which focus on entrepreneurial skill development.



The mission of the Réseau des femmes d'affaires du Québec is to support and contribute to the advancement of the leadership abilities of women entrepreneurs. We assist women business owners to increase and diversify their supplier networks in order to better position themselves among the larger, more successful Canadian and American organizations.



Newfoundland And Labrador Organization of Women Entrepreneurs helps women entrepreneurs start, grow and advance successful, leading-edge businesses that capitalize on emerging economic opportunities. NLOWE stays ahead of the trends so that we can encourage business development in key growth sectors, and we offer training opportunities such as workshops and seminars to help women entrepreneurs take advantage of changes in the economy.



PARO Centre for Women's Enterprise provides programs and services to women across Ontario who are ready to start, grow or build new opportunities.

BOARD MEMBERS



MARCELA MANDEVILLE
BOARD CHAIR, CEO
ALBERTA WOMEN
ENTREPRENEURS



JENNIFER BESSEL,
BOARD VICE-CHAIR, CEO
NEWFOUNDLAND &
LABRADOR ORGANIZATION
OF WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS



JILL EARTHY
CEO
WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE CENTRE



SANDRA ALTNER
CEO
WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE
CENTRE OF MANITOBA



ROSALIND LOCKYER
FOUNDER AND CEO
PARO CENTRE FOR
WOMEN'S ENTERPRISE



RUTH VACHON
PRESIDENT AND CEO
RÉSEAU DES FEMMES
D'AFFAIRES DU QUÉBEC



PRABHA MITCHELL
CEO
WOMEN ENTREPRENEURS
OF SASKATCHEWAN INC.

“WITHOUT A DOUBT, HAVING EVERY MEMBER OF OUR TEAM PULL TOGETHER TO DELIVER AN UNPRECEDENTED LEVEL OF SUPPORT TO WOMEN BUSINESS OWNERS THROUGHOUT THE PANDEMIC HAS BEEN OUR MAJOR SUCCESS OF THE YEAR.

During the initial shock of the situation, we proactively offered loan clients deferred payments and interest forgiveness for three months, established a dedicated webpage for COVID-19 resources, and developed weekly ‘Strength in Numbers’ info sessions to share developments in the types of emergency government support available for business owners. Delivering the Regional Relief and Recovery loan program to BC women entrepreneurs is also an accomplishment we are very proud of because the volumes far exceeded levels we normally see.”

MELANIE RUPP
**SENIOR DIRECTOR, LOANS &
ADVISORY SERVICES, WOMEN’S
ENTERPRISE CENTRE**

NEWSLETTER

We are sharing news, best practices, and relevant resources in our monthly newsletters. They are delivered to member organizations, government officials, and individual entrepreneurs, with open and click rates that are consistently above industry average.

THE FEBRUARY 2021 NEWSLETTER HAD A 39% OPEN RATE AND 14% CLICK RATE. THE TOTAL PERCENTAGE INCREASE IN SUBSCRIBERS FOR THE YEAR IS...

272%

STATS FROM OUR MEMBER ORGANIZATIONS

46+ ENTREPRENEURIAL ADVISORS ATTENDED
WEOC X: EXCHANGE, EXPAND, EXPLORE

6497+ TRAINING/
ADVISING SESSIONS

17,327+ PARTICIPANTS ATTENDED
TRAINING ADVISING/SESSIONS

\$7,986,675+
IN LOANS AND FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

SOCIAL MEDIA

Increase in followers across platforms,
December 2020 to April 2021:



↑
TWITTER
46%



↑
FACEBOOK
94%



↑
INSTAGRAM
152%



↑
LINKEDIN
554%

STAFF

ALISON KIRKLAND,
CEO

BRUNO BERTO,
COVID PROJECT COORDINATOR

CHANTAL HERRIOT,
OFFICE ADMINISTRATOR

ORYCIA KARPA,
COMMUNICATIONS COORDINATOR

JESSICA PANG-PARKS,
**MEMBERSHIP & ENGAGEMENT
(AUGUST 2020-FEBRUARY 2021)**

JILL REITEN,
**COVID PROJECT EVENT
& ONLINE LIBRARY COORDINATOR**

LINDSAY STEWART GLOR,
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER

CONTACT

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 Women's Enterprise Organizations of Canada.

