



**ADVANCING  
GENDER EQUITY  
IN THE CITY  
OF TORONTO:  
ELEVATING THE  
VOICES OF  
WOMEN AND  
GENDER DIVERSE  
RESIDENTS**



**KEY FINDINGS FROM THE GENDER  
EQUITY STRATEGY CONSULTATION**

**Prepared for the City of Toronto's Gender  
Equity Unit by Social Planning Toronto**

**MAY 2022**

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## CONSULTATION PURPOSE AND CONTEXT

Women, girls, trans, 2-Spirit, and non-binary individuals make up more than half of Toronto's population. They are the backbones of our homes and our communities — providing vital care work during the pandemic, building strong social networks and connections across neighbourhoods, and on the frontlines of social justice movements. Yet they face disproportionately higher rates of violence, poverty, and discrimination, earn lower wages, and are underrepresented in leadership positions.

To address intersectional gender inequities, in October 2019 Toronto City Council directed staff to develop a Gender Equity Unit and a City of Toronto Gender Equity Strategy. This work focuses on City of Toronto programs, service delivery, outcomes, and workforce initiatives that will help decrease inequities experienced by diverse women, girls, and trans and non-binary people in Toronto.

As an integral step in their process, the Gender Equity Unit partnered with Social Planning Toronto to facilitate and lead a community consultation. **The consultation aimed to:**

- understand the diverse needs, experiences, and aspirations of women, girls, and trans, 2-Spirit, and non-binary people in Toronto, including but not limited to representation from Indigenous, Black, racialized, and 2SLGBTQ+ communities, persons living with disabilities, newcomers, refugees, low-income residents, seniors, and youths;
- identify the challenges and opportunities for addressing intersectional inequities in City of Toronto programs, services, and policies; and
- identify short- and long-term priorities for the forthcoming Gender Equity Strategy.

With the support of our Advisory Committee and Consultation Leaders, SPT endeavoured to build a consultation process that was grounded in community-based, participatory research practices and prioritized the experiences of equity-owed groups throughout.

## ENGAGEMENT

The cornerstone of the consultation method was a process in which resident leaders and agency representatives, who were deeply embedded in their respective communities, led and facilitated community consultations. Data collection tools were designed and refined to allow for an adaptable and mixed-method approach to gather input from residents. This included semi-structured group discussions, an online public

survey, and an online public story and photo form. In addition, SPT facilitated semi-structured group discussions with community-based agency staff.

The consultation engaged approximately **1,078** residents and community agency staff. Participants held a variety of perspectives and represented diverse socio-demographic experiences including:

**Gender:** The majority of participants (84%) were women, 8% were men, 4% were trans, 7% were non-binary, and 1% were 2-Spirit. It is important to note that gender is expansive, and the identities listed here are not fixed, nor mutually exclusive. As such, some participants identified in multiple ways.

**Age:** The majority (63%) of participants were adults aged 30–64, 11% were seniors (65+), 18% were young adults (20–29), and 5% were youths (12–19).

**Racialized groups:** Approximately 61% of all participants were racialized: 19% were South Asian; 16% were Black; 7% had multiple backgrounds; 6% were Arab, Middle Eastern, or West Asian; and 6% were East Asian.

**Indigeneity:** 5% of all participants were Indigenous: 56% were First Nations; 12% were Inuit; and 35% were Métis.

**Immigration:** Half of the participants were not born in Canada, 18% of them having come to

Canada within the past 5 years.

**Disability:** 32% of participants identified as a person with a disability.

**Sexual orientation:** Approximately one in five participants were 2SLGBQ+.

**Low-income status:** Approximately 44% of participants lived on a low income.

**Family composition:** 16% of participants were from sole-parent households.

**Languages:** Participants spoke over 60 different languages.

## KEY FINDINGS

Consultation findings are summarized across 24 programmatic and thematic areas in the report, including 8 priority program areas:

- housing and shelter
- child care
- employment and income security
- community safety and alternatives to policing
- gender-based violence
- reconciliation
- disability and accessibility supports
- food security

Even though these areas are presented as distinct, many of the concerns raised and

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lessons learned were inherently linked and intersected across services, infrastructure, policies, and communities. Some prevalent and cross-cutting themes emerged:

- Participants across all demographic groups identified the **essential nature of City services** to their economic, physical, and mental wellbeing, and the individual and community benefits of these assets.
- They also provided concrete examples demonstrating how the design and delivery of City services often **does not recognize the needs and realities of women, girls, and gender diverse individuals** and sometimes perpetuates exclusion and inequality.
- Across multiple issues and City programs and services, women and gender diverse residents also talked about feeling **neglected and undervalued, and bearing a disproportionate burden** due to the pandemic.
- **Gender-based violence and feelings of lack of safety** negatively influenced experiences with City services and infrastructure, and was a primary consideration in the daily lives of women and gender diverse residents. Participants pointed to trauma-informed, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive approaches that should be applied widely.
- Participants highlighted the need for **holistic approaches to community safety and alternatives to policing,** including stronger preventative programming. Participants' stories demonstrated discriminatory barriers embedded in current structures and recourse mechanisms that perpetuate insecurity for women and gender diverse individuals, especially those who are trans, non-binary, racialized, without status, sex workers, and living with a disability.
- Deaf individuals and individuals with disabilities provided concrete examples of **ableism and a lack of accessibility across the city** and the resulting impact on their ability to meet their basic needs, to get around, to access vital programs, services, and supports, and to participate fully in all aspects of social, economic, and political life.
- **Additional accessibility concerns** related to language, literacy, technology, and internet access were raised. Participants shared their suggestions to address these challenges and reduce the barriers experienced by people living on a low income, newcomers, non-English speakers, lone-parent caregivers, seniors, and unhoused individuals.
- **Poverty and affordability** was top of mind. Many women and gender diverse residents spoke to the high cost of living in Toronto — intensified by low wages, precarious employment, and insufficient social security programs. The consultation findings shed light on the feminization and racialization of poverty, which must be

addressed to achieve gender equality.

- The **COVID-19 pandemic** is a cross-cutting issue that continues to affect women’s and gender diverse residents’ wellbeing and significantly influences their access to City programs and services.
- The extraordinary **resilience, strength, and wisdom** of women and gender diverse residents is evidenced in the opportunities they identified for improvement, in the successful initiatives they shared for the City to learn from and build on, and in the creative solutions they proposed for advancing gender equity in Toronto.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The feedback received throughout the consultation indicates the strong need and desire for an intersectional Gender Equity Strategy for Toronto. The rich data included in this report provides a starting point for what should be an ongoing process of engagement and consultation for the Gender Equity Strategy.

**Moving forward, Indigenous women, girls, 2-Spirit, and gender diverse communities must lead, co-create, and direct culturally appropriate and resonant engagement plans and activities.** Meaningful consultation, engagement, and partnerships involve acknowledging the colonial context and ongoing systemic barriers to sovereignty and self-determination, and respecting Indigenous

communities’ rights. Concrete steps are outlined in the report for further engagement with Indigenous communities.

**We further recommend that the City assess in detail the needs and barriers and participant recommendations** included in this report and develop a thorough response. Based on the consultation research, **SPT has also put forward 10 strategic recommendations** for the development and implementation of Toronto’s Gender Equity Strategy:

1. Resource gender equity
  2. Build gender equity competencies across all City divisions, programs, and service areas
  3. Embed gender-based analyses and gender equity across City divisions, strategies, and priorities
  4. Scale up and expand the City programs and practices that are meeting needs
  5. Develop a gender-based violence action plan within the Gender Equity Strategy
  6. Redefine equity across the City, grounding it in a comprehensive and nuanced intersectional gender equity lens
  7. Prioritize population-specific engagement and outcomes
  8. Build upon sector and community expertise
  9. Collaborate with federal and provincial partners
  10. Strengthen trust, accountability, transparency, and relationship building
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The City of Toronto — through its Gender Equity Unit — demonstrated its commitment to trust-based relationship building during the consultation. Participants were excited about the development of a Gender Equity Strategy, but they were also explicit in their desire to see action and accountability in its implementation, and to be informed of the Strategy's progress.

As well, community-based organizations and resident leaders have a deep understanding of and connection to the communities they live and work in. Leveraging this knowledge and expertise will continue to be invaluable to the City in the development and implementation of the Gender Equity Strategy.

