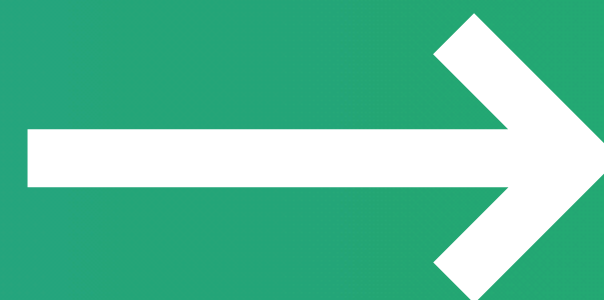


2026 LESSONS LEARNED

From Implementing Gender-Based and
Family Violence Initiatives



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Gender-based and family violence initiatives should be trauma- and violence-informed at every stage

- Build the team's understanding of trauma, violence, and their impacts on people's lives and behaviour.
- Create emotionally, physically, and culturally safe environments for staff and participants.
- Foster opportunities for choice, collaboration, and connection for staff and participants.
- Use a strengths-based and capacity-building approach to support staff and participants.
- Being trauma- and violence-informed also means being survivor-centered and attending to gender transformation, cultural safety, racial trauma and equity, and wellness and resiliency.

Gender-based and family violence initiatives should be flexible, context-specific, and culturally sensitive

- Be prepared to adapt to context, (changing) needs of participants/the community, unexpected challenges, and changing technologies.
- Gather feedback in pilot phases and adapt accordingly.
- One size does not fit all. Initiatives (research, programs, evaluation strategies, etc.) should often be tailored to specific audiences and contexts so that they are relevant and culturally sensitive.
- Take time to get to know the context and community (e.g., by attending events), what they care about, what their needs are, etc.
- Engage partners, champions, and other stakeholders from the community (ideally in an ongoing way) to help with planning and design, and/or to co-develop tools, programs, and services.
 - Find ways to engage each stakeholder in a way that suits their time and expertise and that balances conflicting views.

Gender-based and family violence initiatives should be flexible, context-specific, and culturally sensitive

- Plan the initiative's framing (e.g., description of its purpose) and content to suit the audience so that it increases buy-in, resonates, and meets their needs.
- Plan the initiative's format so that it suits the target audience. Consider the advantages and disadvantages of virtual, in-person, or hybrid formats for the target audience. For example:
 - In-person initiatives can foster stronger relationship development and be more accessible to some (e.g., those without internet or device access, those without home privacy).
 - Virtual initiatives can reduce stigma and privacy barriers (especially in small, rural, remote, and northern communities), provide a sense of anonymity and safety that may allow some to express vulnerability and share with others in group discussions, and be more accessible to some (e.g., those in rural, remote, and northern communities).
- Use culturally suitable terminology and take the time to explain concepts. Where needed, provide translations and use cultural and language interpreters to improve accessibility and communication with participants.
- Hire a team that reflects the diversity of the target audience.

Gender-based and family violence initiatives require time and relationships

- Each phase of an initiative—planning and (co-)development, recruitment, recognition and uptake by the target audience, implementation, evaluation, etc.—takes time and should move at the speed necessary to develop relationships and trust with the community.
- Do not rush the planning and development phase. Spend time with community partners, the target audience, and other stakeholders (e.g., attend events) to:
 - Build credibility, trust, and relationships
 - Understand the context or community
 - Customize the initiative's format and content
 - Develop shared understandings and expectations
- Engage stakeholders in all phases of the initiative.
- Develop clear expectations and guidance before hiring and training staff.

Gender-based and family violence initiatives require time and relationships

- Take the time to build relationships between staff (e.g., program facilitators) and participants/the target audience.
- Take the time at the beginning of training circles and other programs to diffuse resentments, emotions, and misconceptions.
- Where possible, provide extended, targeted support for participants who may have gained tools from an initiative but will continue to struggle with complex needs. For example, harness partnerships to create tailored sustainability strategies for participants following a program (housing, employment, culturally suitable mental health providers).
- Where possible, assess an initiative's impact over many years.

Gender-based and family violence initiatives require structural and organizational support

- Adequate and ongoing funding, support and commitment from organizational leadership, and organizational policies that align with an initiative's principles are needed to sustain gender-based and family violence initiatives.
- Also needed are organizational and funding structures that allow for:
 - Sufficient time and flexibility to plan, adapt, and implement an initiative in a way that is trauma- and violence-informed (e.g., time to build relationships and co-develop with community partners, time to ensure cultural relevance)
 - Access to necessary education and professional development for staff
 - Hiring of experienced supervisors and mentors
- Initiative staff may need to advocate for (and identify other champions to advocate for) structural and organizational support.

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Recruitment and retention for gender-based and family violence initiatives can be lengthy and costly

- Plan for considerable time and cost of recruitment and retention.
- Tailor recruitment strategies for the target population.
- Meet participants where they are: identify the best locations, platforms, and schedules for recruitment, data collection, and program delivery.
- Use strengths-based rather than deficit-based language in recruitment materials.
- Consider and leverage participant motivation for participating when designing recruitment and retention methods (e.g., wanting to contribute to research that will help others; intervention for men might be framed around shared priorities such as psychological safety, team cohesion, or operational excellence).
- Consider participant safety (e.g., it may pose risk to recruit people currently experiencing abuse).

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Recruitment and retention for gender-based and family violence initiatives can be lengthy and costly

- Consider how context and group norms might impact recruitment and retention (e.g., stigma and discrimination related to gender-based and family violence in newcomer communities) and adapt the framing of the initiative accordingly.
- Consider how the political climate might impact recruitment (e.g., community partners may be difficult to recruit if there is political uncertainty and a lack of resources).
- Take time to develop relationships and a strong reputation in the community prior to recruitment.
- Develop strong partnerships with organizations that have existing relationships with the target group and that might help with outreach and recruitment.
- Identify community champions or ambassadors to be spokespersons or recruiters for the initiative.

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Recruitment and retention for gender-based and family violence initiatives can be lengthy and costly

- Provide community outreach and education about the value of the initiative (e.g., host a social event to explain the initiative, introduce facilitators and researchers to the community, and develop relationships with the community and potential participants).
- Use multiple platforms (offline and online) to promote and recruit.
 - Social media (posts and paid, targeted advertisements)
 - Information document with QR code
 - Referrals and word-of-mouth
 - Posters in common locations
 - Collaboration with community partners
 - Direct, personalized contact (e.g., via phone calls, text messaging, tabling/conversations with potential participants at relevant public locations, a hosted social event)
- Use personal strategies where possible (e.g., reach out personally).
- Provide reminders and resources to support participation and retention such as compensation, transportation, bus tickets, snacks, childcare, and language supports.

Gender-based and family violence initiatives require ongoing staff support

- Staff burnout, vicarious trauma, and the impacts of structural factors can contribute to high staff turnover and disrupt program continuity and participant engagement.
- Proactively plan and budget for staff care (e.g., add 20% to budget).
- Take the time and resources to provide continued support, supervision, mentorship, and care (e.g., mental health support, self-care training, health benefits, adequate pay) for researchers, program facilitators, and other staff who may encounter difficult topics.
- Hire a sufficiently large team.
- Provide clear goals and expectations for staff.
- Provide sufficient (ideally hands-on) staff training to increase staff confidence to deliver an initiative. Providing training over time can allow staff to ask questions that emerge during early iterations of an initiative.

Gender-based and family violence initiatives require ongoing staff support

- Build meaningful relationships among staff (e.g., via regular meetings and debriefings), with dedicated time and space to discuss strengths and challenges. This can help build trust, resilience, belonging, collective care, and shared commitment.
- Use other [trauma- and violence-informed practices](#) to help identify and prevent staff burnout.
- Promote organizational strategies and structures that will support staff wellbeing.

Ethical research decision-making for gender-based and family violence initiatives comes with unique challenges and should be trauma- and violence-informed

- Account for the extensive time often needed to obtain research ethics board clearance.
- Consider relevant frameworks such as trauma- and violence-informed research principles (safety, trust, collaboration, empowerment, voice, and choice), and [First Nations Principles of OCAP®](#) (ownership, control, access, and possession).
- Engage partners, champions, and other stakeholders in ethical decision-making.

Ethical research decision-making for gender-based and family violence initiatives comes with unique challenges and should be trauma- and violence-informed

- It may, at times, be necessary to hold your ground and educate research ethics boards on:
 - The value of and need for trauma- and violence-informed approaches and safety measures
 - The value of and need for community-based approaches
 - The strength and agency of survivors and others being engaged in gender-based and family violence research
 - The realistic risks of participation in research on sensitive topics (e.g., providing citations to research evidence documenting that research participation in the topic of interest is not traumatic)
 - The value of research participation for prospective participants (e.g., providing agency, providing a chance to share experiences, providing equitable access to research and pilot program participation)
 - The benefits of the research to society
 - The risks of delayed research (e.g., delayed service provision)

Virtual gender-based and family violence initiatives require additional safety and accessibility considerations

- Ensure that participants can participate privately (especially important if there are others participating in a group program who could be identified).
- Consider providing resources to reduce access barriers like tablets and data cards.
- Consider safety and privacy risks and mitigators.
 - In some cases, it may be preferable to require participant video so that facilitators can ensure the right people are present and monitor safety and wellbeing.
 - In other cases, video may hinder participant comfort and privacy.
 - Where possible, giving the choice to have cameras on or off can offer participants control.
- Consider ways to provide choice and control (e.g., allowing participants to choose their own pseudonyms or avatars).