



Midterm Evaluation of the  
Trauma-and Violence-Informed  
Community of Practice

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# Executive Summary

An evaluation of the Trauma-Informed Community of Practice (CoP) was conducted to assess its effectiveness in fostering collaboration, professional growth, and the adoption of trauma- and violence-informed (TVI) principles at the mid-term of its work (2022-2026). Process evaluation examined the Knowledge Hub's effectiveness in implementing the CoP, and outcome evaluation assessed members' experiences, and the value derived from their participation. Conducted through a combination of surveys and focus groups, this evaluation highlights key strengths, areas for improvement, and recommendations for going forward.

## Key Findings

1. **High Engagement and Satisfaction:** High levels of satisfaction were reported with the CoP's capacity to support networking, facilitate knowledge exchange, and create a safe, inclusive environment. The sense of belonging and the use of trauma-informed practices were consistently rated highly.
2. **Community and Connection:** Networking and collaboration has been effectively facilitated within the CoP and members feel they belong to a supportive platform for professionals doing work to advance trauma- and violence-informed practice.
3. **Professional Growth:** The CoP has been effective for knowledge-sharing and professional development, with members valuing resources, activities, and tools which they have been able to apply directly in their projects and organizations.
4. **TVI Approach:** The CoP offers an environment aligned with trauma and violence-informed approaches. A safe, inclusive space has been cultivated with leadership and their work has exemplified the application of TVI principles to a research-focused environment.
5. **Challenges:** Participants identified areas for improvement, including the need for more structured meetings and clearer guidance on financial sustainability.

## Recommendations

1. **Increase Small-Group Engagement Opportunities:** Allocate more time for small-group interactions to foster deeper engagement, allow for sharing expertise and experience across projects, and strengthen collaboration among members.
2. **Support for Financial Sustainability:** Explore funding opportunities, financial management, and partnerships to support members' long-term sustainability planning.
3. **Support with Knowledge Mobilization:** Enhance guidance on knowledge mobilization (KM) strategies, including social media use, reporting to funders, and opportunities for peer exchange and clarify the Knowledge Hub's (KH) role in supporting KM.

## Conclusion

The CoP has proven instrumental in supporting professionals working in the field of gender-based violence by providing essential resources, a strong sense of community, and guidance on trauma-informed approaches. Moving forward, enhancing engagement and providing sustainability resources and knowledge mobilization support will enable the CoP to maintain its positive impact and foster continued advancements and collaboration in the sector.

A story about the Knowledge Hub's role in facilitating the Trauma-and Violence-Informed Community of Practice is [available here](#).

# Introduction and Background

## The Knowledge Hub

The Knowledge Hub at the Centre for Research & Education on Violence against Women & Children, Western University connects innovative trauma- and violence-informed health promotion projects funded through the Public Health Agency of Canada's investment, "*Supporting the health of victims of domestic violence and child abuse through community programs*" (2015-2022) and subsequently, *Preventing and Addressing Family Violence: The Public Health Perspective* (2022-2026). The Knowledge Hub's role is to facilitate a Community of Practice (CoP) of projects, bolster the combined impact of funded projects, and further advance innovations in the growing field of trauma- and violence-informed health promotion. The Knowledge Hub facilitates knowledge mobilization among and for projects through the [Knowledge Hub Presents series](#), [Learning Network and Knowledge Hub Webinar Series](#), social media, and a variety of other resources (reports, bulletins, videos).

## Study Description

This project was an evaluation of a national community of practice (named the Trauma-Informed Community of Practice) facilitated by the Knowledge Hub. The literature on Communities of Practice (CoPs) continues to expand, with numerous studies highlighting the widespread benefits of participation, such as promoting learning, knowledge mobilization, and capacity building (McKellar, 2019; Hafeez et al., 2019; Bertone et al., 2013; Li et al., 2009). Some evaluation frameworks for CoPs explore value at various levels, including individual, organizational, and community levels. The effectiveness of these evaluations is often contingent on adapting the evaluation plan to the specific characteristics of the CoP. As Wenger-Traynor et al. (2023) assert, evaluations should be molded to suit the unique context of each CoP to fully capture its dynamics and outcomes. In the case of the Trauma- and Violence-Informed Community of Practice, the evaluation was designed to reflect its distinct features: a non-voluntary, time-limited, and closed group that operates virtually with periodic in-person meetings, all while being facilitated by a single project (the Knowledge Hub) focused on knowledge management within and beyond the community. This evaluation places particular emphasis on examining the relationships between individuals rather than organizations (McKellar, 2019), and concentrates on short- and medium-term outcomes, such as the role of the Knowledge Hub in supporting trauma- and violence-informed (TVI) research, practice, and care, rather than longer-term sustainability issues (Li et al., 2009; Cox, 2005).

The purpose of the current evaluation is twofold:

1. to take a process evaluation perspective to examine the ways in which the Knowledge Hub is effective, or not, in implementing the Trauma- and Violence-Informed Community of Practice. This examination is expected to better prepare the Knowledge Hub (and the Public Health Agency of Canada) in implementing similar formats of communities of practice, as well as adding a case study to the literature on unique implementation and facilitation;
2. to take an outcome evaluation perspective to examine the value of the Trauma-Informed Community of Practice to its members. This examination is required to ensure accountability of the Knowledge Hub's activities to the funders (PHAC) and is also expected

to assist the Knowledge Hub (and PHAC) in recognizing the strengths and weaknesses, as well as the value-added and gaps, in offering this kind of community of practice.

## Research Questions

- How effective is the Knowledge Hub in implementing the activities and events of the Trauma-Informed Community of Practice?
- To what extent and in what ways are the members of the Trauma-Informed Community of Practice experiencing value in their participation?

## Methods

The evaluation was conducted through online surveys and focus groups which were delivered to the same population - members of the Trauma- and Violence-Informed Community of Practice. A survey, created by Knowledge Hub, provides broader and mostly quantitative data on the experiences of members of the CoP. The survey was distributed from June to August 2024 using Western's Qualtrics software and its anonymous link method (which was sent to all members of the population via email). Participants were sent 3 reminder emails to participate. A total of 22 individuals responded to the online survey out of a potential maximum of 46 CoP members (47.8% response rate).

Focus groups aimed to gain a deeper understanding of CoP member experiences. The focus groups occurred through Zoom and were facilitated by Knowledge Hub's Research Coordinator and Evaluator. Three focus groups took place between July and August 2024, each lasting approximately 90 minutes and involved 9 participants in total. Simultaneous interpretation was provided as required and live transcription captured the content of the conversations.

## Results

The following broad thematic areas emerged from the analysis of both the survey and focus group data combined:

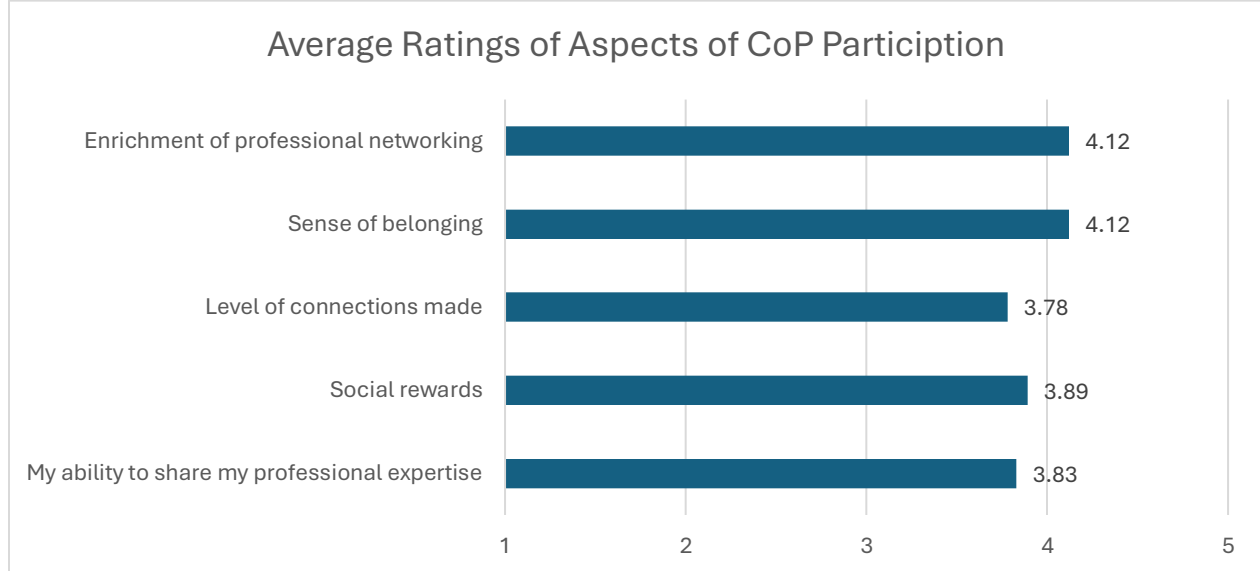
- Community and Connection
- Professional Growth and Resource Sharing
- Trauma-and Violence-Informed (TVI) Approach, Safety and Diversity within the CoP
- Challenges, Areas of Improvement and Hopes Going Forward

### Community and Connection

Overall, the evaluation results demonstrate strong engagement and satisfaction among CoP members. Both the survey and focus group data highlighted the CoP's value in fostering a sense of community, support, and collaboration. Many participants specifically identified community and connection as the primary benefits of their involvement in the CoP.

The survey asked respondents to reflect on the value of their participation thus far and how it may have impacted them personally. The aspects rated most highly by participants were the sense of belonging and the enhancement of professional networking opportunities gained through their involvement in the CoP [see Figure 1].

Figure 1.



On a 5-point Likert scale with the options “very insufficient (1)”, “insufficient (2)”, “neutral (3)”, “sufficient (4)” and “very sufficient (5)”, participants rated aspects of their experience. Average ratings are shown in the figure above.

Focus group participants shared that networking, and collaboration have been effectively facilitated within the CoP. They feel they belong to a supportive platform for professionals doing work in the field of trauma and violence. Further, the sense of belonging to a larger community has created a capacity for learning and growth. As one participant explained,

*“I think the connections with others in the field are wonderful... potentially none of these projects would have ever interacted with each other. Definitely expanding knowledge and skills and access”*

Also discussed, was a sense of belonging and connectedness gained from CoP participation. Participants shared that working in the field of trauma and violence prevention has challenges that make it imperative to work together, support and uplift one another’s work, and reduce isolation.

*“And sometimes we feel like we have no power in the system. .... It’s helped my practice in the sense that I receive a certain amount of support, and I have interesting discussions with people. You can’t just talk about these things with anybody. It’s really something that’s specific and has to do with what we do as professionals.”*

Participants particularly appreciated in-person meetings for strengthening relationships and connectedness to others doing similar work.

*Having the chance to meet together like the time we had in Montreal is especially important to keep us all thinking about each other and thinking about the work and what our common challenges and common successes are.*

## Professional Growth and Resource Sharing

The CoP serves as a platform for exchanging knowledge and ideas, which participants described as vital for their professional growth. Participants described the learning experience as collaborative, sharing that they have gained significant insights from discussions and interactions with others as well as from hearing about projects that have shifted their thinking or understanding as articulated in this comment:

*“I was able to become more aware of other realities, and from adjusting my interventions, I was able to get to know extraordinary people who inspire. My horizon is broadened, and I am stimulated to improve the quality of my work as a whole.”*

Participants described learning from others’ strengths, challenges, and insights and incorporating the learnings into their own work.

*“Gaining some experience or support from colleagues doing the same type of work across the country and you know getting some information from them. It’s the exchange of ideas of like-minded people.”*

Participants also described the learning as going beyond their own growth to that of their organization or workplace because many participants have been able to take what they have learned and share it with others or use it in their work providing services.

*“I feel the Knowledge Hub coming together and sharing those resources and sharing those ideas and learnings- it has helped us to look at things from a different perspective or a different lens, and it has made our resources more versatile.”*

*“I have a great experience with the CoP. Through the different activities, I have gained more theoretical knowledge that is useful and practical in supporting survivors of IPV in my area of work.”*

## Enhanced Learning of TVI Approaches

Both survey respondents and focus group participants highlighted the knowledge and skills they gained in TVI approaches through their participation in the CoP. Some respondents reported experiencing a steep learning curve in TVI, while others noted exposure to new tools and ideas that enhanced their pre-existing knowledge. A number of participants reflected on how their experiences within the CoP have led to more practical applications of their TVI knowledge to their work.

Survey data confirmed that the CoP was effective in helping members deepen their understanding of TVI practice and research, and in enabling them to apply their TVI knowledge more effectively. Respondents rated their learning experiences related to trauma- and violence-informed principles through their participation in the CoP. This was a closed-ended question with 10 response options. Most common TVI knowledge responses:

- “I knew something but now am applying it” (n=5)

- “I knew something but now have a better understanding” (n=3),
- “I knew a lot but now have an even better/novel understanding” (n=3).

Participants also discussed how their understanding of implementing TVI approaches with diverse cultures and communities deepened through learning from fellow CoP members, other projects, and KH-organized content. One participant expressed:

*“It really transformed the way that we work as a whole. Because the more we went forward in the project, the more we learned from the community. And we noticed that one of the aspects was to be culturally sensitive and to double up the efforts when it comes to understanding the ways, the cultural ways in which trauma is expressed. Previously, we weren't aware enough to be able to see how every community expresses their needs.”*

## TVI Approach, Safety, and Diversity within the CoP

Survey respondents and focus group participants emphasized the importance and impact of the CoP's trauma-informed approach, particularly the safe and inclusive space that has been cultivated. Survey respondents were asked to reflect on how the KH has supported the embodiment of, and learning about, trauma- and violence-informed principles through the implementation of the CoP. Using a 5-point Likert scale ranging from “very satisfied” to “very dissatisfied,” respondents rated the extent to which they felt the KH promoted a trauma- and violence-informed experience based on the principles of safety, trustworthiness, choice, collaboration, and empowerment. Most respondents reported being either “satisfied” (36.36%, n=8) or “very satisfied” (27.27%, n=6). The options of “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied” received no responses.

Focus group participants described the CoP as a supportive environment where they feel safe and comfortable and where there is leadership and exemplification of a space that is trauma- and violence-informed. The CoP was described as an environment where people feel comfortable sharing their experiences and learning and growing together. The significance of representation amongst individuals with various ethnic, racial, and linguistic identities within the CoP was also identified. This representation was described as crucial for inclusivity, safety, and effective engagement. As these two participants shared,

*“Members from, you know, different backgrounds also creates a safe environment.”*

*“The fact that you took into consideration the Francophone dimension and that you got [a French-speaking KH staff person] involved, well that was very useful. In doing that you made it more inclusive and people who speak French better are able to play a bigger role... So, I'd really like to thank you for that.”*

Specific reference was made to the importance of including Indigenous practices, leaders, and voices to strengthen the work of the members of the CoP and make the environment feel inclusive, and safe.

*“Having those wonderful Indigenous leaders coming to the in-person meeting and kind of holding all of us and giving us, you know, context to our work.”*



## Suggestions for enhancing the TVI approach

Both survey respondents and focus group participants had recommendations for making the CoP more trauma- and violence-informed going forward. Survey respondents were asked how the KH could better support a trauma- and violence-informed experience for the CoP. A total of 5 responses were collected for this question. One suggestion was to improve transparency about roles and activities:

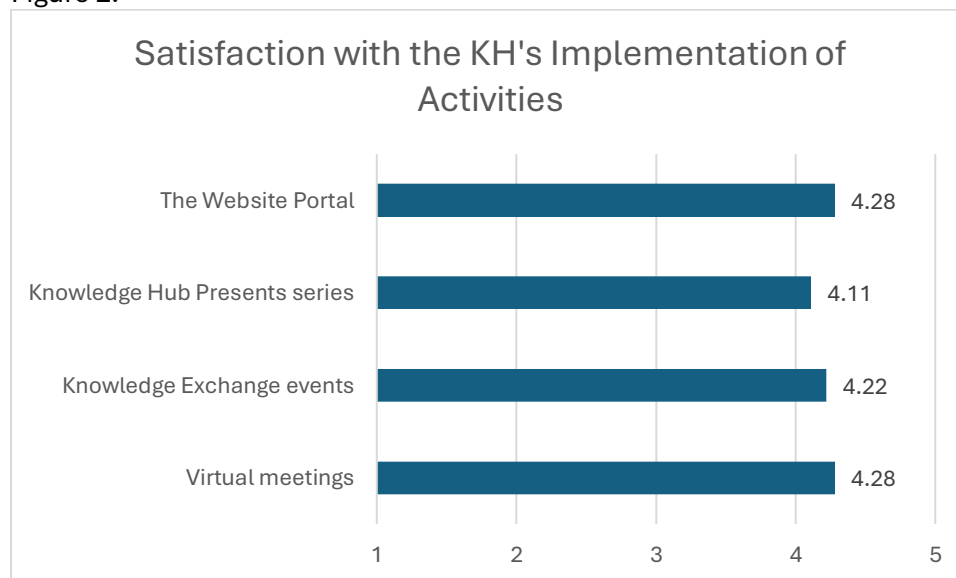
*“Providing clearer instructions and expectations when asking the group to participate in activities or discussions. Improved transparency about what specific role and responsibility the Knowledge Hub has in supporting projects and making this information clear from the outset.”*

Other participants made recommendations for more collective input from the group, and to ensure that the expertise on trauma and violence within the CoP group is fully utilized. A focus group participant shared that they would like the opportunity to learn more from their CoP colleagues specifically about implementing TVI approaches in their work.

## Implementation of the CoP by the KH

Survey respondents reported their satisfaction with aspects of the implementation of the CoP, including virtual meetings, knowledge exchange events, Knowledge Hub Presents series and the website portal (5-point Likert scale with the options “very satisfied”, “very satisfied”, “neutral”, “very satisfied” and “very satisfied”). Respondents did not rate any aspects of their experience as “very unsatisfied” or “satisfied” and rated all aspects consistently high [see Figure 2].

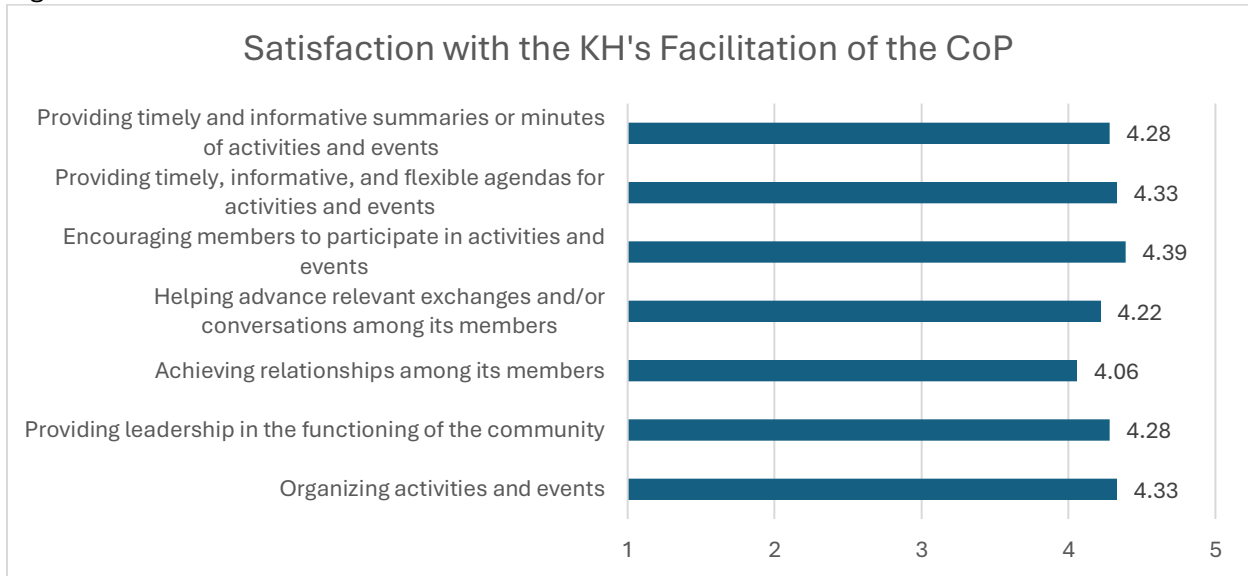
Figure 2.



On a 5-point Likert scale with the options “very satisfied (1)”, “satisfied (2)”, “neutral (3)”, “satisfied (4)” and “very satisfied (5)”, participants rated aspects of their experience. Average ratings are shown in the figure above.

Respondents also rated their satisfaction with the Knowledge Hub's *facilitation* of the CoP. High levels of satisfaction were reported regarding the KH's encouragement of members to participate in activities and events, the organization of activities and events, and the provision of timely, informative, and flexible agendas for activities and events [see Figure 5].

Figure 3.



On a 5-point Likert scale with the options “very satisfied (1)”, “satisfied (2)”, “neutral (3)”, “satisfied (4)” and “very satisfied (5)”, participants rated aspects of their experience. Average ratings are shown in the figure above.

Focus group participants shared that they value the opportunities they have had to connect with the CoP and KH in-person as a complement to online communication and meetings. Connections and collaboration have been able to develop and flourish on a more profound level as a result of the occasions where in-person meetings have taken place. As these participants explained,

*“Anyway, I've gone to three in-person meetings. People were more tightly connected from one meeting to the next. So, I think the team has done a terrific job. The more things go, the more people are connected. And I'm always happy to see this person or that person you can connect with them and new people...”*

*“The informal meetings are really important too. What's great is that there are a lot of informal discussions, and that's when you actually get down to brass tacks.”*

In-person meetings have significantly enriched participants' understanding of the work of the diverse projects within the CoP, provided valuable learning experiences through shared challenges and successes, and reinforced a sense of community and collective purpose.

Participants have appreciated getting to know the KH staff members and have described them as creating a welcoming environment that has made the CoP experience engaging and conducive to learning. The KH's efforts to accommodate different needs are appreciated, fostering inclusivity and allowing members to engage comfortably.

*“I think the team is great. I really do... I guess just as an example, my first meetings were done online. You know, as the projects rolled out and then we had our first in-person meeting in Toronto and [KH team member name] addressed me by my first name right off the bat. That is a simple tactic, and it makes people feel comfortable and welcome. And I appreciate that immensely.”*

Many shared an appreciation for the openness, frequency and types of communication, and described KH team members as readily accessible via email or Zoom. Participants highlighted the responsiveness of the team, noting that questions and concerns are addressed quickly, which enhances their overall experience.

*“I think everybody's so warm and welcoming, and I appreciate the chance to get to interact with folks, especially when we're in person. And I appreciate the regular communication. I think the team's done a really good job of stewarding us and being on top of things. They're very quick to get back to you if you have any kind of questions, so that's great.”* <sup>[OBJ]</sup>

## Challenges, Emerging Issues, and Hopes Going Forward

Challenges or suggestions for improvement were identified by survey respondents and focus group members. They identified some emerging issues that could be explored collectively and shared their hopes for the future of the CoP.

### Small-Group Engagement

The most consistent feedback centered around a need for more meaningful small-group interactions. Both survey and focus group data highlighted the value of deepening engagement through smaller, more targeted discussions. Participants expressed a strong preference for more time to engage directly with peers about their projects, share specific challenges, and collaborate on solutions.

Survey respondents were asked open-endedly to share their “less-than ideal experiences with the CoP” thus far. One respondent wrote:

*“Long keynotes and individual presentations that do not engage with the room or members of the CoP. Lack of opportunity for CoP members to share their own expertise and speak directly to the progress of their projects with others in the CoP at large.”*

Focus group participants emphasized the limitations of large group formats online, noting that time spent on updates or lengthy presentations could be better allocated to smaller group discussions.

*“The organization of our meetings feels a little bit challenging; a lot of time is given to updates that could probably be communicated via email, where more time could be given to the actual exchange between people in the group. Often, if you're put in a small group in zoom, maybe like 5 minutes, and by the time you are reminding each other of who we are and what we're doing, we didn't even get to the question... Then you're done and we didn't get to the actual activity, so this is a place where growth could happen.”*

Several participants echoed this sentiment, suggesting that small groups could be more focused on sharing detailed project experiences and leveraging the collective expertise of members. One participant emphasized:

*“For me the biggest thing is just wanting to better utilize the expertise in the room. I learned so much from my fellow colleagues doing projects. Find a way for the community of practice and those leading it to group us into areas of expertise and then allow us to have that time before an in-person meeting to talk about what are our main challenges, what are areas of success and then...present it.”*

Participants further voiced a preference for interactive discussions over presentations, particularly in small groups, to foster greater engagement and comfort in sharing ideas. As one participant shared:

*“And then in a large group workshop, I think having a keynote is great, but it feels a little bit like we're being talked at. I think we're coming to a point in our projects where we want to be able to share with one another.”*

*“I do really appreciate the fact that we were a small group, and I was able to speak a little bit, because often when there's a larger group, I will just take notes and listen.”*

There is a clear desire for more small-group opportunities that allow members to dive deeper into discussions, share their expertise, and engage with one another on a more personal level. These smaller settings may facilitate stronger connections and more meaningful collaboration within the CoP.

## Knowledge Mobilization

Survey respondents identified several areas where they need additional support in knowledge mobilization (KM). Key priorities included:

- guidance on using social media to communicate about research,
- support in reporting to funders,
- opportunities to exchange KM strategies with peers.

Some participants emphasized the value of dedicated spaces for discussing effective KM approaches, sharing experiences, and seeking collaborative support within the CoP. To enhance KM efforts, several respondents also expressed a need for greater clarity on the role of the Knowledge Hub (KH) and the type of KM supports that are available. Clearly defining what is available would help CoP members better understand how to access assistance and leverage existing KM opportunities.

## Emerging Issues

Project sustainability and funding were identified as emerging issues of concern. Participants discussed the short-term nature of their initiatives and planning the future of their work. They expressed hopes for increased guidance, collaboration, communication, and community engagement as critical components going forward in their remaining time together as a CoP.

Many participants felt that they needed more guidance and capacity building and there was hope that the KH could provide leadership and opportunities for growth and education in this arena.

*“It’s the sustainability of this program that is a long-term goal. In the community of practice, we’ve had some really great discussions about sustainability of programs after the federal money has gone but we’re still in the weeds.”*

*“It’s always an objective for us. We want our projects to be sustainable and to continue even once the money’s been cut. We want to make sure that the groups can make these tools their own and their programs, but, hey, it always comes down to money. If we’re not here in two years, will there be people in the field who will be able to continue with this work? We want to make sure that we’ve left something.”*

## Hopes for Moving Forward

Participants discussed a desire for ongoing collaboration and networking specifically around sustainability and funding. Building relationships among one another and with stakeholders was seen as a possible strategy for moving forward with funding goals with a focus on solidarity and collective action. Participants expressed a strong interest in sharing best practices and resources among different projects, reducing competition for funding, and enhancing collective impact within the field of trauma and violence work more broadly. This includes engaging the communities that are served by the projects in this funding cycle to ensure that funding is responsive to the needs of service users.

*“We are organizations and individuals who are trying to tackle an important women’s health and social justice issue. I just feel like we need solidarity to carry on and to not always be in this place of competing for money.”*

*“...I think the KH could play a leadership role in helping our sector and/or collection of projects set priorities at the systems- and sectoral levels. The KH can play a role in helping us sense-make, which I think is a requirement for moving towards more collective action. It’s not about having all the answers but perhaps offering some directions and facilitating a process around them.”*

## Discussion

Valuable information was collected regarding the implementation and facilitation of the Trauma- and Violence-Informed Community of Practice through an online survey and focus groups. The data demonstrates key achievements of the CoP at the mid-term mark:

- the CoP effectively fosters collaboration and meaningful connections, offers professional growth opportunities, and creates a space for knowledge exchange within the gender-based violence sector.
- the Knowledge Hub’s facilitation of the CoP has created a sense of belonging, facilitated valuable resource-sharing, and enhanced members’ knowledge, skills and abilities in applying TVI principles.

Participants consistently reported high levels of engagement and satisfaction with the CoP. They appreciated the inclusive environment and supportive network, which reduced isolation and provided a platform for professional collaboration. In-person meetings were highlighted as instrumental in strengthening connections and deepening the sense of community. Members also valued the CoP's diverse cultural perspectives, including the emphasis on Indigenous practices, which enriched their understanding and application of TVI principles.

## Opportunities for Improvement

Survey respondents and focus group participants identified key areas for improvement for the CoP and shared their hopes for going forward.

### Recommendations for the Remaining Funding Period

To maximize the impact of the CoP, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. **Increase Small-Group Engagement Opportunities:** Allow for more small-group discussion opportunities within the activities of CoP. These sessions would enable deeper engagement, allow for sharing expertise and experience across projects, and foster meaningful discussions. Allocating more time for small-group interactions would strengthen collaboration and enhance the CoP experience.
2. **Provide Opportunities to Explore Sustainability:** Facilitate discussions that explore sustainability planning, including information on potential funding sources, best practices in financial management, and strategies for securing ongoing funding. This support would assist members to continue their important work.
3. **Support Knowledge Mobilization:** CoP members may benefit from (KM) support including guidance on social media use, reporting to funders, and opportunities to exchange KM strategies with peers. Greater clarity is required regarding the Knowledge Hub's (KH) role in supporting KM.

## Conclusion

The Trauma-and Violence-Informed CoP has fostered a strong sense of community and connection, providing a supportive space where members can collaborate, exchange ideas, and learn from one another. Participants highlighted professional growth and resource sharing as key benefits. For the people who participated in this evaluation, participation in the CoP has:

- Enhanced their capacity to apply knowledge mobilization strategies,
- Enhanced their ability to navigate challenges,
- Strengthened their work.

Additionally, the CoP's commitment to a trauma- and violence-informed (TVI) approach has been foundational in promoting safety, inclusivity, and diverse perspectives within its activities. Moving forward, there is an opportunity to deepen small-group engagement and facilitate more cross-project knowledge sharing to maximize the CoP's impact. Continuing to build on these strengths while refining engagement strategies will ensure the CoP remains a valuable and sustainable space for collaboration throughout the remainder of the funding period.

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