Evaluation of the National Women's Alliances Model

Global Institute for Women's Leadership and the Office for Women

Contents

Executive Summary

The primary purpose of this report is to assess the suitability of the National Women's Alliance (NWA) model as a vehicle for bringing women's voices to the Australian Government to inform policy development. More specifically, this report aims to examine (1) how well suited the NWA model is to delivering the objectives of the Women's Leadership and Development Program; (2) whether recent changes to the model have improved NWAs' focus and the delivery of outcomes and activities; and (3) whether the model has been adapted by grantees to their particular contexts, and what impact any adaptations have had on meeting the model's objectives. The report is an outcome of a joint evaluation by the Global Institute for Women's Leadership (GIWL) at the Australian National University and the Office for Women (OfW) in the Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet.

Our analysis suggests that the NWA model is a suitable a vehicle for delivering women's voices to government and appears to be largely achieving the intended NWA outcomes. However, this delivery is currently made possible by the free labour of many women, and as a result additional resourcing and support is needed to effectively leverage the contribution of the NWA. Currently, the full effectiveness of the model is constrained by inadequate resourcing and restrictive grant management procedures. Options to address mismatches between the NWA model and delivery of its objectives and outcomes are a key focus of the recommendations.

Examining recent changes to the NWA model, our research suggests that modifications to the composition of the Alliances have improved the focus and delivery of the program objective of improving representation by better including under-represented women. However, changes to the grant management process, while improving transparency and clarity, have not improved the focus and delivery of the program objectives to lift representation. Instead, these changes appear to impede collaboration by encouraging a compliance-based approach to relationship management. Co-designed reporting requirements that are less time-intensive and emphasise flexibility should increase trust between the OfW and Alliances, and will allow the NWA to focus on delivering model objectives.

We find that the model has been adapted by grantees to suit their particular context, particularly the needs, preferences, and priorities of their members. Adaptations involve changes to the activities undertaken by Alliances in growing and consulting with their membership. These adaptations largely appear operationally necessary for Alliances to secure the trust and engagement of members. Adaptations to governance were also observed; three Alliances have auspicing agreements with larger organisations. These auspicing agreements have helped Alliances to meet model objectives by removing administrative burdens and providing additional resourcing for Alliances to represent the women's sector. However, these resources are provided on an un-costed basis by auspicing organisations and as such, may not be sustainable.

We propose a range of recommendation to support the optimisation of the NWA's contribution to the objectives of the Women's Leadership and Development Program and to help future-proof the NWA model as a bridge between Government and Australian women.

Recommendations

These recommendations centre on the development of strategic advice on options to strengthen the NWA model and delivery of its objectives and outcomes.

Resourcing

1. Establish options to increase and extend grant funding for the Alliances, to ensure they are adequately resourced to fulfil performance expectations, and to future-proof the model's ability to deliver women's voices to Government. Options include:

   a. Lengthening grant agreements to five years, to allow Alliances to engage in longer-term planning, employment and services.
   b. Establish funding arrangements to cover the resource intensive forms of communication and engagement required by Alliances (e.g., for language translation, cultural safety, disability accessibility requirements, and/or travel to remote locations).
   c. Develop guidance on options for direct funding by OfW, PMC or other Government Agencies for work that is beyond the scope of NWA activity plans.

2. Establish options to increase resourcing within OfW to ensure the program has adequate capability and capacity for effective implementation. Options include:

   a. Support capability development, including in cultural safety and vicarious trauma, amongst relationship managers.
   b. Allow time for meaningful engagement with Alliance representatives.
   c. Establish options for OfW provision of administration, communications and marketing support for the Alliances to enhance program efficiency and improve program reach and visibility.

Grant management

3. Undertake consultation with Alliances about grant management processes, with the aim of:

   a. Balancing tensions between expectations of OfW and Alliance members in content of activity plans.
   b. Revising performance reporting requirements to better capture desired outcomes and better reflect variation in cultural and organisational practice across Alliances.
   c. Introducing flexibility in activity requirements to accommodate responsiveness to emerging requests for policy input.

Representation

4. Establish options to further improve the inclusiveness and representativeness of the model by:

    a. Funding a cross-Alliance youth forum.
    b. Explicitly including transwomen and non-binary individuals in the NWA purpose.
    c. Formally establishing LGBTQI+ representation, either in an additional Alliance or within existing Alliances

Facilitating policy engagement

5. Support the development of more collaborative and inclusive policy making to better enable the contribution of the NWA program to the objectives of the WLDP; options include:

    a. Consider options for structuring or formalising the process by which Alliances are involved in policy-making decisions.
    b. Supporting capability development in inclusive policy within Government.
    c. Establish a more explicit description of policy collaboration, including the role of Government, in grant guidelines.

6. Undertake an impact evaluation of the NWA program that concentrates on women and the women's sector to better understand barriers and enablers to flow on benefits from NWA activity to WLDP objectives.

Inter-Alliance collaboration

7. Support inter-Alliance collaboration to ensure policy problems and solutions are interpreted and addressed through an intersectional lens; options include:

    a. Establishing inter-Alliance projects to establish patterns of collaborative working.
    b. Working with Alliances to identify appropriate platforms for inter-Alliance communication and collaboration to support knowledge sharing and trust building (e.g. regular forums, online knowledge management platform).

Introduction

The Global Institute for Women's Leadership (GIWL) at The Australian National University (ANU) was commissioned by the Australian Government Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet to support an evaluation of National Women's Alliances in partnership with the Office for Women (OfW). The National Women's Alliances are one of two streams in the Women's Leadership and Development Program (WLDP) that funds engagement with the women's sector and other activities to improve social and economic outcomes for women in Australia.

The National Women's Alliances (NWA) were established in 2010 to create a better, more informed and representative dialogue between women and the Australian Government. There are currently two issue-based NWAs, the Equality Rights Alliance and the National Women's Safety Alliance, and four cohort-based NWAs, National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance, Harmony Alliance, National Rural Women's Coalition, and Women with Disability Australia.

The primary purpose of the evaluation was to assess the suitability of the NWA model as a vehicle for bringing women's voices to the Australian Government to inform policy development. The report is structured around three evaluation outcome requirements:

1. Assessment of how well suited the NWA model is to delivering the objectives of the Women's Leadership and Development Program
2. Analysis of whether (and if so, how) changes to the model in 2020-21 and 2021-22 have improved NWAs' focus and delivery of the specified outcomes and activities
3. Analysis of whether (and if so, how) the model has been adapted by grantees to their particular contexts, including NWA focus area, organisational governance and culture, and what impact any adaptations have had on meeting the model's objectives

Methodology

The evaluation involved a desktop review and interviews with selected stakeholders of the NWA program. Documents for the desktop review were provided by OfW and included grant administration documents, funding agreements, activity work plans, strategic documents related to the project such as program logic, and copies of previous reviews and evaluations.

Key stakeholders for interview were identified in discussion between OfW and GIWL. The initial sampling strategy sought to include representatives from the Alliances, the Office for Women, other government agencies, and the women sector. Due to time and resource constraints, it was not possible to include individuals or representatives of the women's sector (either members or non-members of the Alliances). Table 1 below presents the number of interviews and participants in each stakeholder category. A full list is provided in Appendix 1. All interviews were conducted using a semi structured interview schedule. Some interviews were individual interviews while others were group interviews (focus groups).

Table 1: Interview Sample

Stakeholder group	Number interviews	Number participants
OfW	3	9
Government	1	7
Alliance	6	8
Auspicing and member organisations	3	4
Total	13	27*

*one participant in two interviews

All interviews were recorded and transcribed using speech to text software. Emergent thematic analysis and lines of argument synthesis were used to analyse interview data. Emergent thematic analysis involves reading interview transcripts to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns in participant responses. Lines of argument synthesis involves reviewing participant responses to interview questions to identify their core position on an issue (e.g., resourcing, representation), and how these positions interact in an overall line of argument about a topic or phenomena—in this case, the NWA model.

The project was conducted in partnership between OfW and GIWL and as such is not an independent evaluation. The project may be best characterised as a review rather than a full evaluation, as no outcome data were collected, and no data were collected from the target beneficiaries of the program (Australian women in general, the women's sector, and under-represented women in particular).

This partnership model has allowed for a collaborative mode of research to occur, however, it may have inadvertently introduced power imbalances into the research methodology. The presence of the OfW representatives (as funders of the NWA) likely influenced the nature and completeness of data captured in interviews. These limitations and data integrity issues should be considered when interpreting the findings of this evaluation.

The benefits and risks of the methods of data collection, especially the interviews, were carefully considered by OfW and GIWL. OfW was very aware of the potential power imbalance, which shaped the interview design. The insights gained from the opportunity for OfW to listen first-hand to participant perspectives will directly lead to improvements in management practice and relationship building between OFW and Alliances.

The authors offer their thanks to all those who participated in the interviews for sharing their expertise, time, and, especially, their commitment to improving the NWA model. That generosity and dedication to amplifying women's voices added enormous value to this report.

Findings

This section presents an assessment of how well suited the NWA model is to delivering the objectives of the Women's Leadership and Development Program.

Model suitability

Key conclusions:

The NWA model is suitable as a vehicle for delivering women's voices to government and appears to be achieving the intended NWA outcomes.

The NWA model is suitable for supporting the achievement of the WLDP objectives, but additional resourcing and support are needed to effectively leverage this contribution.

The NWA as a model delivers value to government that is both functional and symbolic. The centralising function of the NWA model creates efficiency for Government consultation. The community membership and general representativeness of the Alliances supports the credibility and legitimacy of the advice provided in this forum. Recognising the marginalisation of women in political participation and funding the women's sector to engage with, and influence, policy symbolises the commitment of Government to more informed and more inclusive policy making.

The NWA as a model is suitable as a vehicle for delivering women's voices to government and is contributing directly to this outcome. The model is suitable for supporting the achievement of the WLDP objectives, but additional resourcing and support are needed to effectively leverage this contribution. The achievement of WLDP outcomes relies on a broad range of factors, particularly whether the women's voices delivered to government via the NWAs result in more effective policy. A more comprehensive evaluation including outcome data and the perspectives of women themselves (especially marginalised women) and the women's sector is necessary to fully assess the model's impact.

This evaluation provides indicative findings that may support the optimisation of the model for achieving both NWA specific objectives and those of the WLDP more broadly. This section is arranged around key design considerations, those being: purpose, representation, collaboration, and resourcing.

Purpose

There was general agreement among stakeholders that a key purpose of the NWA is to bring women's voice to government. However, there was some inconsistency in an understanding of what 'voice' incorporates, and whether the NWA should aim to influence policy as advocates for women. Some interviewees identified policy engagement and impact as a key goal of the NWA, whilst others

did not. This review used the intended objectives identified in the NWA grant guidelines as basis of assessment; those being to:

- Represent Australian women, including underrepresented women
- Collaborate with policymakers to inform Government's understanding of policy issues affecting Australian women
- Collaborate with policymakers to inform the development of policy solutions to issues affecting Australian women.

However, these objectives are not applied consistently in all program documentation provided by OfW. For example, the program logic specifies that the NWA program goal is to "provide the Australian Government with an understanding of the issues affecting Australian women and potential policy issues", whilst recent NWA application forms specify the goal is to "advocate for Australian women and collaborate with policymakers to inform Australian Government policies which impact women". Creating more consistency among documentation may help to enhance clarity for NWAs, and their members OfW and policy makers across government, and increase program implementation and effectiveness.

In addition to this variation, key terms are being interpreted differently by different stakeholders. The purpose and meaning of bringing women's voice to government, representing women or collaborating with government would benefit from being more clearly defined to create a shared understanding of program purpose, process and value. These interpretations will be discussed with reference to the activity being undertaken to achieve program objectives.

Representation

The suitability of the model to represent Australian women, including underrepresented women, was assessed with reference to *who* is being represented and *how* they are being represented. With regards to who is being represented, the program has shifted over time from a focus on issue-based Alliances to one that is now dominated by cohort-based Alliances. In this way, the model is suitable for supporting the representation of underrepresented groups.

In the context of this overall positive trajectory and position, there are gaps in representation across and within the Alliances. Of particular note was the lack of representation of LGBTQI+ individuals, including non-binary individuals and trans women, and young people. There was also uncertainty reported by some Alliances as to whether it was appropriate to incorporate men in the program, with the broader goal of enhancing gender equality. The need for representativeness is well understood amongst program stakeholders and gaps in representation are well recognised. However, there are various perspectives on how best to remedy gaps. There was discussion by some interviewees of ensuring these groups were represented within existing Alliances such as through the development of youth councils. There were multiple recommendations to create a new cohort Alliance to represent LGBTQI+, as this group is not well represented in the model and there may be barriers to participation for transgender and gender diverse people participating in the existing Alliance structure.

The co-existence of cohort and issues-based Alliances is also creating some inter-Alliance tension. There are size and power imbalances between Alliances that tend to favour issues-based Alliances. Some concerns were raised about size and scope of ERA compared with other Alliances, creating practical concerns about ERA's workload and potential power-imbalances for smaller Alliances. Inter-Alliance collaboration has been proposed to improve this issue, but the acceptability and perceived value of collaborative approaches varied across the Alliances. There is a lack of clarity on appropriate formats and platforms for inter-Alliance engagement, but there was agreement that OfW facilitation would be important to support trust building in the current context.

Alliances' ability to represent marginalised and underserved communities is complicated by a history of exclusion and discrimination that impedes trust in Government and may limit motivation to engage with Alliances as a conduit to Government. The NWA model requires Alliances to be both inward facing (members and the community) and outward facing (the Government). This can create tension in the activities of Alliances and perceived allegiances, and competing expectations of Alliances' value proposition. Inward facing activity is necessary for Alliances to create trust with community and members, especially for cohort-based Alliances that directly represent marginalised women, and establish a value proposition for ongoing member participation. However, program objectives focus on outward facing achievements.

With regards to how women are being represented in the model, the NWA is designed as a conduit between Government and women and grassroots organisations. In this way, the NWA model provides the advantage of performing a centralising function that creates efficiency for Government. However, a possible disadvantage of a centralising function is that aggregations and translations of women's diverse perspectives that may advertently or inadvertently advantage particular voices. A more comprehensive evaluation that directly captures the perspectives of women and the women's sector is needed to assess the impact of Alliance's centralisation function. In advance of such an evaluation, insights can be drawn from desktop review of the pathways of participation within different Alliances.

Through the Alliance model, the OfW and policymakers are connected to women and women's sector organisations through a variety of pathways, with some closer to individual women than others, due to the structure and format of the membership models within the different Alliances. The ideas of individual women can, in some cases, be translated through multiple separate entities prior to reaching the OfW and policymakers; this is particularly common in Alliances with membership eligibility criteria that allow only organisations to join as opposed to individuals and organisations. Both longer and shorter translation pathways have advantages and disadvantages. Discourse, discussion and networking in each phase can add value but can also result in the loss or marginalisation of minoritised or underrepresented voices.

For example, the National Rural Women's Coalition consists primarily of organisational members, with five peak-bodies forming the Alliance's membership. One of these bodies, the National Rural Health Alliance, has its own member organisations, such as the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Foundation, who then have individual members. The perspectives of individual women engaged in the Australian Nursing and Midwifery Foundation can be synthesised and presented to the National Rural Health

Alliance. The NRHA can then collate and synthesise the perspectives of each of their member organisations and present this to the NRWC. Although these organisations may, separately, liaise directly with government, within the NWA model they form part of a multiphase translation pathway. The NRWC can perform the same synthesis of the views their five member organization prior to delivering the voice of the women's sector to the OfW and policymakers. From a network perspective, this pathway may be advantageous as the additional discourse and discussion in each phase can synthesise the advice provided to the OfW. However, from an individual voice perspective, this model may be less advantageous, as the multi-leveled pathway may result in the loss of information from minoritised perspectives.

Figure 1: Multi-phase translation pathway example

In another example, members of the National Women's Safety Alliance are mostly individuals with lived experience and/or subject matter experts in gender-based violence. NWSA also has organisations who are committed to their mission as members. NWSA is directly connected to the experiences of individual women, synthesising perspectives only once when presenting them to the OfW and policy makers. This model has advantages for the raising of individual voice, but may be less advantageous from an organisational networking perspective. There was suggestion in interviews that all Alliances should accept individual members to strengthen the voice of women's lived experience within the NWA model.

Figure 2: Single-phase translation pathway example

More research is needed to more fully understand the nature of the various translation pathways within the NWA model and their implications for the delivery of model's objective to represent women.

Collaboration

The implementation of the current model enables the delivery of women's voice to government, but more could be done to enhance *collaborations* between the Alliances and Government. Grant

guidelines designate objectives to collaborate with policymakers to inform Government, however, there is variation in interpretations of the extent to which, and how, informing policy should influence policy outcomes. There is no commitment for the NWA model to direct or change policy development. However, the delivery of WLDP objectives to improve social and economic outcomes for women relies on the development of more inclusive and enabling policy. These mismatches between the NWA model and the goals of the WLDP highlight the need for greater clarity and structure on how policy collaborations between the Alliances and Government should occur.

Collaboration with OfW primarily occurs via relationship management. However, the resourcing of OfW staff primarily for formal grant management appears to, at times, result in transactional relationships between Alliances and their relationship managers. Continued emphasis on administrative controls is likely to inhibit trust building, reinforce power imbalances, and raise consciousness of resource dependency. Some Alliance interviewees noted that more recognition from Government about their work—including positive acknowledgements from the Minister's Office— would help enhance the relationship and boost morale among NWA staff.

There were variations in this experience both across Alliances and within Alliances over time, with some participants reporting strong and high-quality relationships, both currently or historically. However, a lack of trust (from both directions) is apparent in some instances, exacerbated by a lack of continuity in personnel in both the OfW and Alliances. In line with earlier evaluations of the model, Alliance interviewees frequently described a desire for a more collaborative relationship with Government, and a lack of feedback on material or advice provided during reporting procedures. To enhance the relationship between NWA and OfW, consideration should be given to resourcing relationship building, including time for meaningful engagement between Alliance representatives and OfW, and support for appropriate role clarity and capability development amongst OfW and Alliances.

Some interviewees noted that better communication between OfW and NWA would allow Alliances to forecast upcoming policy requests from government and proactively develop advice. Other interviewees believed that Alliances would have more substantial policy impact if Government familiarised them with the Australian policy cycle, and provided more support for ad-hoc and urgent policy requests. If policy change is a key outcome of the NWA, more support, communication, and guidance on the role of NWAs and their value to the policy 'system' would maximise the program's impact.

Collaboration with policy makers is primarily possible via government consultation activity. However, there is significant variation in the scope and timing of this engagement, and there were few examples of formalised or fully embedded models of collaboration. Descriptions of policy engagement by both Alliance and Government interviewees illustrate a largely unstructured and ad hoc approach to Alliances' engagement with policy makers. Whilst policy insights from the Alliances were described positively in interviews, the process by which the engagement occurs could have an improved structure. For policymakers to fully realise the value add of Alliances' insights, policymakers should be encouraged to engage with Alliances in the stages of policy development in which lived experience or

implementation insights are most valuable and most impactful. Additionally, policymakers may benefit from explicit guidance from the OfW and NWA on inclusive policy making, engagement with marginalised communities and the value of lived experience, to support capability development in inclusive policy making.

Consideration of future collaborative designs can be informed by examining existing network relationships relevant to the NWA model, and when, and how, higher levels of collaboration may be valuable, depending on available time, trust, and willingness to work together. Figure 3 below presents a stakeholder network map for the NWA program, including current forms of engagement between different groups. These relationships differ in the degree of collaboration undertaken, ranging from information-based networking to collaborating. Although collaboration is a stated objective of the model, analysis revealed that relationships within the network more often consist only of information sharing, which may be less likely to contribute to strategic objectives around effective policy or women's leadership and development. More collaborative and partnership-based structures would also better support the embedding of the feminist expertise captured in the NWA model.

Resourcing

In interviews there was almost unanimous agreement that current funding of the NWA does not align with the performance expectations of the NWA model. More specifically, the level of expertise required for NWA activity completion, particularly around research and policy activity, was described as greater than the funding designated for personnel. Interviewees also noted that the funding available for personnel is below market rates for qualified policy and advisory positions.

There was a general acknowledgement from interviewees that a key consequence of NWAs' limited funding is the NWAs heavily reliance on the unpaid labour from the women's sector. This work is largely provided by volunteer workers, paid employees working longer hours than they are remunerated for, and donated staff time from the auspicing agencies. NWA interviewees expressed gratitude for this work, but noted that the voluntary nature of the work left Alliances lacking sustainability. To allow Alliances to succeed in informing policy and decision making, and to future-proof the voice of under-represented women in government, greater funding is required.

Interviewees noted that greater funding would allow the Alliances to fund member engagement activities and fully pay current or hire more personnel, which would in turn enable them to provide better in-depth advice to government (including both the OfW and other government departments). Additional personnel would also allow the Alliances to provide advice to government in a timely manner, which would be particularly valuable given the increasing requests for quick policy advice from government. Overall, NWA interviewees noted that they could imagine significantly greater engagement with government and more imaginative and sustained policy impact if they were better resourced. Examples for funding increases proposed in interviews include substantial increases in direct funding for staff (e.g., 2-3 times current funding), OfW provision of administrative and communications support, and top-up funding for program accessibility requirements (e.g. travel to regional and remote areas, language translation and disability accessibility).

Both Government and Alliance interviewees noted that longer funding cycles would also maximise the NWAs impact. The short-term nature of existing funding led to insecurities about the Alliances' futures, which made long-term planning difficult. The worry and planning about the future distracted Alliances from their core tasks. Longer-term funding would allow for more imaginative policy initiatives, and longer-term thinking about how to enhance gender equality in Australia.

Another theme that emerged throughout interviews concerned funding inequities across Alliances. Some Alliances that have membership bases that require more resource intensive forms of communication (i.e., language translation, cultural safety, disability accessibility requirements, and/or remote locations) noted that the extra funds required to adequately represent their members and support staff put them at a funding disadvantage, and hampered the involvement of marginal women. Interviewees noted that while all Alliances have accessibility requirements, additional funds for more substantial accessibility requirements would increase equity and inclusivity within the NWA model.

Recent changes

This section presents analysis of whether (and if so, how) changes to the model in 2020-21 and 2021-22 have improved NWAs' focus and delivery of the specified outcomes and activities.

Key conclusions:

Changes to the composition of the Alliances have improved the focus and delivery of the program objective of representation by better including under-represented women.

Changes to the grant management process do not appear to have improved the focus and delivery of the program objectives on representation and appear to be impeding the delivery of the objective for collaboration by encouraging a compliance-based approach to relationship management. Changes to the objectives articulated in grant guidelines have not resulted in a shared understanding of the purpose of the program.

Composition of Alliances

The composition of the model was recently changed to strengthen focus on representation, particularly of under-represented groups. The changes involved adding an additional cohort Alliance representing women with disabilities and amalgamating two thematic Alliances relating to women's economic security. The addition of another cohort Alliance was generally viewed positively, with women with a disability an agreed upon gap in the earlier composition of the NWAs and general agreement on the importance of representing marginalised voices. However, differences remain between cohort and thematic Alliances, and there are variety of views on the advantages and disadvantages of both forms. The Alliance that resulted from the amalgamation of two thematic Alliances is very large, which was raised as a concern by multiple interviewees, both in terms of imbalances across Alliances and in terms of the ability to deliver across such broad themes.

The composition of the Alliances appears likely to be an enduring challenge within the model, and the women sector more broadly, in relation to whose and what views are represented. Existing differences in approach and interpretation are to be expected, given the broad range of views incorporated within 'women's voices', and do not appear inhibitive to the program objectives.

The overall weighting of the current Alliance composition towards cohort Alliances is well suited to the program objective of representing women's views. However, as discussed in Section 1, there remain some underrepresented groups who could be better included in the model.

Grant management

Grant management procedures were changed in an attempt to enable better focus and delivery of NWA objectives. This included changes in the grant guidelines, grant administration, and performance evaluation frameworks to standardise ongoing reporting requirements. On paper, changes in grant management appear to improve the focus of the NWA model. However, in practice, these changes do not appear to be improving the delivery of specified outcomes and activities. Grant guidelines contain objectives relating to collaboration between Alliances and Government, but the relationship between Alliances and policymakers can appear more transactional than collaborative. The need to manage compliance with the grant guidelines appears likely to exacerbate this condition. The specificity of the activity work plans was described by some Alliances as constraining their ability to meet both member and OfW expectations. Some OfW personnel, on the other hand, considered the activity work plans overly flexible. The quantity of reporting requirements was described as overly burdensome by some of the Alliances and may not be optimising the efficiency of use of scarce resources within the model.

The new performance evaluation frameworks aimed to articulate a clear program objective, such that Alliances are to advocate for Australian women and collaborate with policymakers to inform Australian Government policies which impact women. However, there are varying interpretations of the program objectives that exist, even after this reiteration. As has been discussed, interpretations of the nature and meaning of advocacy, representation, and collaboration varied across interviews.

Changes to grant management introduced standardised planning and reporting templates that include key performance metrics. The four key performance metrics Alliances must report against are: i) grow a membership base of organisations and individuals, ii) work collaboratively with other Alliances, iii) consult with Australian women to identify issues, and iv) gather evidence and develop solutions to priority issues affecting Australian women.

There are benefits of standardised grant management from the perspective of the program funder. However, reporting burdens and a lack of feedback on reports was a common theme identified in interviews. Interviews revealed stress associated with reporting, the frequency and complexity of this, and the lack of feedback received after delivering a report. Current performance and reporting requirements were described by some Alliances as contributing to their work in a way that detracted rather than enabled their capacity to work towards the model objectives. In some cases, performance reporting was described as adding strain to Alliances' already limited resources. In addition, these adaptations to reporting emphasise compliance rather than a collaborative relationship between

Alliances and the OfW. This adds to broader relational tensions in the model as Alliances attempt to navigate reporting compliance while delivering the model objectives, to advocate for women and collaborate with policymakers.

Model adaptation

This section presents analysis of whether (and if so, how) the model has been adapted by grantees to their particular contexts, including NWA focus area, organisational governance and culture, and what impact any adaptations have had on meeting the model's objectives.

> ### Key conclusions:
>
> The model has been adapted by grantees to suit their particular context, particularly the needs, preferences and priorities of their members. These changes better enable Alliances to meet their objectives to grow their membership base and capture their members' voice.
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> Adaptations to governance were also observed; three Alliances have auspicing agreements with larger organisations. These auspicing agreements have helped Alliances to meet model objectives by removing administrative burdens and provided additional resourcing for Alliances to represent the women's sector.

Activities undertaken

The model has been adapted by grantees to suit their particular context, particularly the needs, preferences and priorities of their members. These adaptations largely appear operationally necessary for Alliances to secure the trust and engagement of members, and therefore to meeting the model's objectives.

Activity work plans demonstrate that all Alliances are undertaking the four key activities required of them. However, the specific ways in which these activities are conducted vary between the Alliances, which reflects the differing needs and requirements of their membership base. Alliances had varying ways of growing and consulting with their membership. For some Alliances, consultation involves surveys, meetings, and online forums. However, other Alliances organised community workshops and programs to engage members and better understand their communities' needs and concerns. For example, the NRWC set up book-clubs with their members during the COVID-19 pandemic to maintain member engagement; support regional, remote and rural women's mental health; and allow these women to share their experiences and issues during the period. Relatedly, NATSIWA (in conjunction with Westpac and others) organised workshops with female First Nations business owners to provide advice on how to promote their businesses online. This allowed NATSIWA to build trust with their base and better understand the issues facing First Nations businesswomen.

The variation in community engagement reflects the differing sensitivities of Alliances' membership base. Alliances that aim to represent the voice of minoritised women who have relatively low trust in

Government and/or low connectedness with policy makers (i.e., First Nations women; Australian women from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds; women living in rural, regional, and remote areas of Australia) expressed difficulties in recruiting members and keeping their membership engaged. For these Alliances, giving back to communities via workshops and programs was described as essential part of building trust with their members, to better understanding the issues affecting their members' daily lives. This may be particularly true for relatively newer Alliances without auspicing agreements that are still in the process of developing strong community ties. Alliances also expressed a need to engage in work 'on the ground' to develop policy advice that is fit for purpose, and articulated a need for funding for capacity building and community engagement. Indeed, some Alliances expressed a lack of clarity about what forms of community engagement was deemed in or out of scope by the OfW.

These adaptations of the NWA model point to a broader challenge within some Alliances when trying to balance the needs of the OfW and the needs of Alliance members. On-the-ground community engagement has been deemed 'out of scope' or secondary by the OfW in previous years, to ensure the NWA remains focused on forming policy advice and providing a voice for Australian women to Government. Previous reports identified that the OfW had concerns about the Alliances value for money in their delivery of program objectives, especially if secondary activities are being undertaken that may not appear strongly linked to the primary objective of the NWA. However, interviews with Alliances suggest that on-the-ground community engagement practices are, for some Alliances, an essential first-step in building their capacity to act as a conduit between Australian women and Government. This was particularly important for Alliances serving populations with less well established civil society infrastructure.

Overall, these model adaptations appear to have a positive impact on the ability for the NWA to meet their objectives. Specifically, they better enable Alliances to grow their membership base and capture their members' voice. However, these activities are likely to have a negative impact on Alliance workloads, as the activities are technically out of scope.

A more shared decision-making process between the OfW and the NWA when determining the activities funded by the NWA may allow Alliances to balance the competing needs of the OfW and their members, and to ensure that Alliances can build trust and engage with minoritised communities. This would provide more clarity about what is in scope for Alliances, support the implementation of the NWA model in a collaborative way, and recognise variation in how different groups of women engage with their Alliance.

Auspicing agreements

Another key way that Alliances have adapted the NWA model is in regard to their governance. Specifically, the Equality Rights Alliance, National Women's Safety Alliance, and Harmony Alliance are auspiced by larger organisations (YWCA Australia, YWCA Canberra and Social Policy Group respectively), whilst the other Alliances are stand-alone. Auspicing agreements were talked about positively by many interviewees, and appear to bring significant benefits for these Alliances due to

their history in effective governance and management practices. Interviewees specifically noted that auspicing agreements removed administrative burdens included in the Alliance work, allowing the Alliance staff more time to complete the work directly relevant to their activity plans. However, auspicing entities note that this support is unfunded, which may threaten its sustainability. Some interviewees noted that auspicing agreements allow Alliances to more easily gather information on the issues facing their membership base, as they can utilise the larger organisation's existing networks with Australian women and the women's sector.

Whilst the benefits of auspicing are clear, this adaptation of the NWA model may not be suitable for all Alliances. There is a risk that auspicing organisations may have an undue influence on the Alliance's agenda. Additionally, Alliances that represent women who face multiple, intersecting forms of disadvantage, may lose credibility and trust with their membership base if they are tied to a larger organisation whose values are not always aligned. Auspicing further indicates that the work of the NWAs is unsustainable without considerable support from the sector. Auspicing is not a reality that all Alliances can or may want to achieve, and therefore reinforces the importance of adequate funding to future-proof NWAs going forward.

Appendix 1: Interview participants by category

Alliances

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance Deputy Chair

National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance CEO and Board member

Harmony Alliance

National Rural Women's Coalition CEO

National Rural Women's Coalition President

Equality Rights Alliance Convenor and YWCA Australia CEO

Women With Disabilities Australia CEO

National Women's Safety Alliance Director

Government

OfW First Assistant Secretary

OfW Assistant Secretary

OfW Relationship Managers (7 participants)

Policy maker roundtable (7 participants from multiple Departments)

Auspicing organisations

Social Policy Group CEO

YWCA Canberra CEO

YWCA Australia CEO