

WOMEN'S WAY 2011 Women's Issues Summit Executive Summary



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A Powerful Voice for Women!

**Download the full report on the
2011 Women's Issues Summit at
www.womensway.org**

Introduction

The issues facing women, girls, and families today are numerous, complex, and interrelated. A domestic violence victim is unable to leave her abuser because she does not have enough money to live on her own. A grandmother requires emotional, financial, and legal support while raising her grandchildren. A young teen, pregnant after being molested by a relative, needs counseling and financial assistance to terminate her pregnancy.

For these women and girls, and many others, WOMEN’S WAY exists.

WOMEN’S WAY effects change in the Greater Philadelphia region, working to improve the lives of women and their families by funding women-led, women-serving organizations, and creates a lasting impact through strategic advocacy and public policy change.

WOMEN’S WAY raises money and public awareness to fight for and achieve women’s equality, safety, self-sufficiency and reproductive freedom through women-centered funding, advocacy, and education.

In order to fully understand the issues affecting women and girls, WOMEN’S WAY gathers data through numerous strategies, including its annual *Women’s Issues Summit*, which convenes representatives from 60-70 nonprofits to identify community and organizational needs. The Summit also provides WOMEN’S WAY and attendees with an opportunity to explore partnerships and complementary programming.

With this unique model of interactive community inquiry, WOMEN’S WAY has created a think tank of direct service representatives knowledgeable of diverse topics including education, health care, housing, girls’ empowerment, and violence prevention, among others. WOMEN’S WAY has gained a reputation for its expertise and has served as a consultant to local and national funders that wish to administer similar needs-based surveys.

Through the *Women’s Issues Summit*, WOMEN’S WAY keeps its finger on the pulse of the community.

History and Purpose

In 2004, WOMEN'S WAY began implementing a strategic plan which generated an evolution in the organization's structure. Among the many changes was the creation of the Community Women's Fund (launched in 2006), moving WOMEN'S WAY toward a more flexible, responsive, and diverse identity as a funder.

WOMEN'S WAY had managed a small competitive grantmaking program since 1980, supporting small women-led and women-serving nonprofits in the Philadelphia area with annual grants ranging from \$500 to \$3,000. The new Fund, as compared with the original grantmaking program, has an increased number of grant cycles, has brought in new organizations through expanded eligibility criteria, and awards larger grants up to \$20,000.



The Fund is uniquely community-driven. An all-volunteer committee, coordinated and facilitated by staff, vets proposals and makes funding recommendations to the WOMEN'S WAY board of directors. Annual funding priorities are established by the community inquiry model of the Summit.

The first Women's Issues Summit was held in 2005 and is now in its 7th year. This unique event allows nonprofit organizations to actively partner with WOMEN'S WAY to determine where the greatest community and organizational needs lie.

In all previous Summits, four issues have been consistently paramount:

- Promotion of women's economic self-sufficiency
- Access to health care, including reproductive health care
- Violence prevention
- Girls' empowerment

Because of their prevalence, these four meta-issues will serve as standing funding priorities for the Fund moving forward.

Methodology and Format

WOMEN'S WAY developed the Summit to address the following goals:

- Solicit client needs from those working directly in the community
- Have agency representatives identify the most critical needs
- Gather additional information about the most critical needs
- Strengthen WOMEN'S WAY's role as a source of information about women's and girls' needs in the region

An additional goal of informing WOMEN'S WAY's public policy agenda emerged later as the advocacy program became fully integrated into the organization's work.



The methodology and format have evolved throughout the years. During the 2011 Summit, attendees self-selected into one of five issue-specific (ex. violence prevention) or population-specific (ex. girls and youth) breakout groups germane to their organization. Professional facilitators lead the groups through a brainstorming session to identify emerging client and organizational needs,

and then assisted them with the selection of the top five to six needs. To allow for greater input, groups were then co-mingled for additional discussions on needs. The event concluded with group report-outs.

Post-Summit, staff compiled all of the individual groups' outcomes and common themes were identified to inform the funding priorities for WOMEN'S WAY's 2011-2012 fiscal year.

2011 Summit Findings

A total of 28 discrete community and organizational needs were selected as the most crucial at the 2011 Summit, with technology support and advocacy (both self-advocacy and systemic, policy-changing advocacy) emerging as the most common. Additional highly-ranked needs included: capacity building, general operating, and social media.

The importance of general operating support, the short-term benefits of funding direct services as well as the long-term impact of supporting advocacy to make systemic change, have long been recognized in WOMEN'S WAY's overall funding philosophy and, as such, are not recognized in the adopted funding priorities.

Funding priorities for Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 cycles of the Community Women's Fund:

- Services and initiatives aimed at preventing community and personal violence
- Programs promoting economic justice and self-sufficiency
- Access to health care and reproductive health services, comprehensive sexual education, and initiatives that further the dialogue about reproductive justice
- Organizations helping girls develop a healthy self-image and leadership skills
- Projects and capacity building requests for information technology systems, both for an organization's internal use and use by their clients
- Social media campaigns to increase an organization's outreach and visibility and to educate clients to use in positive ways

The extent to which WOMEN'S WAY will be able to support projects addressing these funding priorities will depend upon the submission of well-written proposals with detailed projects and specified anticipated outcomes. WOMEN'S WAY will endeavor to have all funding priorities addressed by its cohort of grantees for the year.

Use of Findings

In addition to the funding priorities, the 2011 Summit findings will inform WOMEN'S WAY's public policy work; provide themes for upcoming events; and serve as a tool to educate funders, legislators and elected officials, grant applicants and other nonprofits, donors and the general public. This executive summary and the full report are downloadable on WOMEN'S WAY's Web site (www.womensway.org).

Conclusion

WOMEN'S WAY has established a trusting relationship with organizations that attend the Summit. Attendees know that WOMEN'S WAY will use their input to invest in emerging and critical areas of need both for nonprofits and the clients they serve.

The Summit has become a signature event for WOMEN'S WAY, solidifying its reputation as a convener and expert on women's issues and strengthening its relationships with the nonprofit community. It is hoped that the Summit outcomes will spark dialogue about the crucial needs of women and girls in the Philadelphia area.



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