

Blueprints for Resilience



An Outcome Evaluation of WomenStrong International's Programmatic Model

WomenStrong International supports 19 women-led organizations¹—referred to as “partners”—worldwide to help address the most pressing needs of women and girls. Through flexible funding, capacity strengthening,² collaborative learning, and community building, WomenStrong supports these local leaders in driving meaningful, lasting change in their communities.

To understand the impact of this approach, WomenStrong commissioned an independent outcome evaluation to explore two central questions: How are organizations building strength and resilience given WomenStrong's support, and in what ways have partners changed over the past three years as WomenStrong revised its programmatic model?

All partners were invited to participate in the evaluation. A total of thirty-eight staff representing seventeen out of 19 partner organizations responded to an outcome harvesting exercise. An additional critical moments exercise was completed with six WomenStrong partners.

The four main findings are as follows: (1) partners are demonstrating resilience in multiple ways, even in the face of crisis-level threats; (2) partner organizations are largely healthy, with strong organizational culture and leadership; (3) partners are innovating, testing new approaches and initiatives tailored to their local context; and (4) WomenStrong's holistic, multidimensional, tailored support is a critical driver of partners' health, resilience, and sustainability.

1. Partners Are Demonstrating Resilience in Multiple Ways, Even in the Face of Crisis-Level Threats

Partners are actively strengthening their resilience through practical, forward-looking strategies — including diversifying their funding sources, formalizing fundraising strategies, embracing long-term strategic planning, deepening engagement in networks, and investing in both specialized roles and continuous organizational learning.

- Fourteen out of 17 (82%) of the partner organizations participating in the outcome harvesting exercise reported that, over the past three years, their organization has actively pursued and maintained multiple revenue sources.
- Some partner organizations (6 out of 17, or 35%) have taken steps to structure their fundraising processes by establishing and maintaining dedicated (partnership) development teams.
- The overwhelming majority of partners (16 out of 17, or 94%) describe their organizations as having a strong direction, based on factors such as a clearly defined mission, vision, and strategic plan.
- Partners are forming and sustaining meaningful relationships across peer organizations, communities, and within the women's rights movement that enhance their resilience and expand access to both practical and emotional support.
- Partners are strengthening their internal capacity by building more specialized teams, clarifying roles, streamlining workflows, and developing stronger structures that support long-term sustainability.
- Eleven organizations (65%) described organizational learning as central to their resilience. Partners are embedding systems for reflection, feedback, and data use —enabling them to stay aligned with their missions, monitor progress, and adapt in real time.

¹ In early 2025, WomenStrong funded an additional six grantee partners in the area of climate and environmental justice, bringing their total number of current grantees to 25. These six new grantees were not included in the outcome evaluation.

² The term “capacity strengthening” was used throughout the research instruments and, therefore, this report, but WomenStrong has since shifted to calling this work “organizational strengthening.”

2. Partner Organizations Are Largely Healthy

Partner organizations are demonstrating strong evidence of positive organizational health across multiple domains. These include resilience, strong inclusive organizational cultures, effective internal and external communications, and empathetic, participatory leadership.

- The overwhelming majority (35 out of 38, or 92% of respondents to the outcome harvesting exercise) view their organization's culture as healthy.
- All 17 out of 17, or 100% of partners reported investing significant time and resources in cultivating organizational cultures that prioritize staff wellbeing and foster both individual and organization-wide learning.
- Partners are using both internal and external communications as strategic tools to drive growth, enhance visibility, strengthen partnerships, and build internal cohesion. Externally, they've established strong digital presences, diversified media engagement, and used conferences to boost visibility and expand networks. Internal communications efforts include regular meetings and other feedback mechanisms.
- All partners report strong leadership with flatter, more democratic structures. Fourteen out of 17 (82%) of partners described their organization's leadership as participatory, team-based, and/or power-sharing.

3. Partners Are Testing New Models and Initiatives

Four out of six partner organizations participating in a "critical moments" exercise indicated that they are testing new models and/or legal operating structures. In some cases, these maneuvers allow partners to withstand onerous local labor or NGO laws and broaden the spheres within which they can operate.

- Several partners are pursuing innovative organizational strategies to strengthen their impact and sustainability. Two partners noted that they are exploring social entrepreneurship models; another partner forged unexpected alliances with private sector institutions, including banks and cooperatives; and one organization transitioned into a network structure as its active legal entity.

4. Multidimensional, Tailored Support Is Key to Partners' Health and Resilience

Recognizing that no two organizations have the same needs, capacities, or strategic priorities, WomenStrong's model empowers partners to identify the resources that will be most meaningful for their growth and resilience.

- When asked about WomenStrong's support, 97% of partners said that it was either "vital" or "very helpful" in helping them achieve both internal and external change.
- Unrestricted funding was pointed to as the most critical piece of WomenStrong's support by 14 out of 17 or over 80% of partners.
- Analysis of the 18 most significant moments across partner organizations reveals that WomenStrong's impact stems from offering a blend of unrestricted funding, technical support, and strategic connections.
- Funding targeted specifically at core functions, or capacity strengthening, has provided an additional resource that has helped organizations to pivot and respond robustly to crises.
- WomenStrong's investments don't stop at the health of partners' organizations—there are clear ripple effects into programmatic work and broader systems-level influence

We conclude that, with empathetic, flexible, and skilled support from grantmakers—as well as a growing network of partners and public- and private-sector allies—women-led organizations advancing gender equality can become models of resilience and architects of change. Propelled by their own sense of direction and dedication to their mission, partner organizations are laying the blueprints for resilience as they adopt new tactics for survival, test bold ideas, and offer lessons in how lasting change begins from within.

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