

Equal Futures
NETWORK



RÉSEAU
Avenir égalitaire

Strategic Engagement Plan



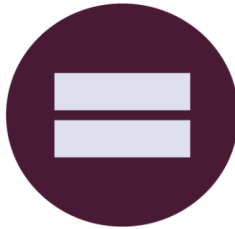
A **CanWaCH** Initiative
Une initiative du **CanSFE**



Women and Gender
Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité
des genres Canada

Updated: September 2023



Strategic Engagement Plan

Without question, the work of the Network cannot exist without the expertise and inclusion of key strategic partnerships within the diverse gender equality (GE) ecosystem from across the country. To fulfill our mandate we must continually, actively and intentionally work to ensure that the diversity of the GE sector is represented as a part of our membership. As a result, we have developed a robust *Strategic Engagement Plan* that identifies important sector partners and stakeholder groups and details our engagement strategy to maximize building reciprocal engagement and partnerships with them.

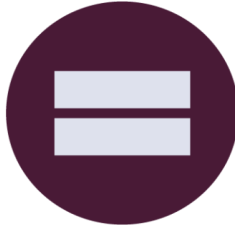
The following *Strategic Engagement Plan* is just a starting point for our engagement work and shares the efforts that we have made and the intentional engagement principles that we have implemented in order to start to engage with pan-sectorial and diverse perspectives and ensure their representation as a part of the Equal Futures Network. This is an evergreen document that will expand and deepen based on the identified needs of the Network and the current landscape for building and sustaining partnerships with the diversity of organizations advancing GE work across Canada and around the world. Below, you will find that we have identified four groups, First Nation, Inuit and Métis communities, the disability community, the 2SLGBTQ+ community and youth, that we determined required a priority focus for engagement and formed the basis of this *Engagement Plan*. These groups were identified through our GBA+ assessment, work with consultants and a yearly assessment of our membership make-up. As we move forward, we recognize that this *Engagement Plan* is not complete and that we will continually have to update it and reassess the priorities for relationship building with our partners as a part of the deeply intentional, pro-active process that sustainable partnership development requires.

What does success look like?

Create a community for gender equality that represents the diversity of the GE ecosystem in Canada by enabling organizations and individuals to find each other, forge connections and share expertise.

Value Proposition

Through diverse partnerships, the Equal Futures Network is working alongside experts and representatives of communities, who represent cross-sectoral focus areas within the GE movement and have unique perspectives, in order to accelerate Canada's progress in advancing gender equality. Equal Futures Network members strengthen connections through conversation, relationship building and designing and participating in capacity strengthening opportunities in order to eliminate industry silos and regional disconnect and thereby creating a collaborative and unified movement to accelerate progress on gender equality across Canada.



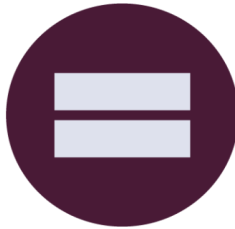
Key Strategic Partners

Inuit, First-Nation and Métis communities and Indigenous owned/led organizations

As we actively work to build and strengthen relationships with Indigenous communities and organizations, it was clear to the Network that we needed to deepen our knowledge and approach to a more robust and reciprocal process to engage with Indigenous communities and organizations. To provide the guidance required, we engaged an Indigenous-owned consulting firm, the [Firelight Group](#), early on in the Network building process (August 2021). They identified that the Network has a good foundation for the knowledge, language, and self-awareness required to navigate future engagement processes in good ways. They identified specific areas to help us improve as well as outlined some key considerations to support our efforts to build respectful and meaningful relationships with Indigenous peoples, communities and organizations. The recommendations from the Firelight Group have served as the foundation for our engagement principles and are reflected through this *Strategic Engagement Plan* and have also informed the development of our tool for Building Authentic Relationships.

Highlights of the key recommendations:

1. Build Internal Organizational Competencies and Knowledge
 2. Develop an Engagement Plan and Principles
 - a. Develop an engagement plan that identifies broad timelines, activities and opportunities, including mutually beneficial actions and initiatives. Be clear and transparent about constraints, and discuss expectations about objectives and outcomes honestly.
 - b. Draft engagement principles that uphold Indigenous principles of reciprocity, accountability and relationality, and follow Indigenous protocols and practices to demonstrate respect for Indigenous ways of knowing and being, and willingness to grow beyond personal and institutional policies, practices and procedures.
 3. Focus on the Process of Relationship Building
 4. Engage Community, and Uphold Elders, Knowledge Holders and Grassroots
 5. Address Barriers, Challenges and Limitations
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1. Commitment:
 - The Equal Futures Network is committed to working with Indigenous communities in partnership that supports Indigenous-led organizations and their work promoting gender equality in their communities across Canada.
 - We are committed to learning, listening and building authentic relationships and taking the lead from Indigenous communities, letting them define, guide and determine the priorities for engagement that best support their own community.
 - We are committed to celebrating Indigenous joy, success and sharing stories that highlight the beauty of their communities.



2. Objective(s):

By engaging with these communities we want to:

- a. **Amplify** the stories, perspectives and issues of Indigenous peoples with the Network and broader GE community with our members across the country with an overarching goal to create a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of issues and barriers that Indigenous people, specifically those that women and gender diverse individuals experience in the GE movement;
- b. **Connect** with Indigenous-led community and grassroots organizations committed to achieving gender equality in their local and regional areas to listen and learn from their experiences;
- c. **Share expertise** with like-minded organizations who share Equal Futures Network values of partnership, collaboration and relationship building ensuring that the diversity of organizations working to advance gender equality from coast-to-coast-to-coast is represented.

3. Engagement Strategy (includes approach, actions, initiatives, etc.):

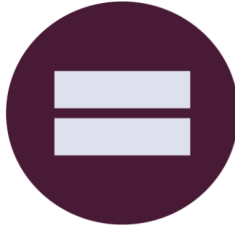
- a. Joining the Equal Futures Network

By continually reflecting and assessing the growing membership of the Network we will identify the gap areas and critically reflect on whose perspectives/representation is absent from the membership. With this in mind, we will strive to achieve proportional representation of Indigenous-led organizations and organizations whose programming has a specific Indigenous-focused lens.

Currently (September 2023) we have 32 Indigenous-led organizations within the Network which represent 6% of the Network's membership and 58% of organizations have an Indigenous-lens to their programmatic focus.

- b. Outreach - Establishing Early Relationships

In our approach to establishing early relationships, an individual, personal outreach approach has been taken. Emails will not be sent to a generic address, where possible emails should be sent to CEO/ED/Org head and clearly articulate the values and commitments of Equal Futures Network without overwhelming the recipient with too much detail. An invitation for a phone call will always accompany the email and in cases where it is appropriate a call will be used as the first method of contact. In early communication ensure that timelines, the broad scope of the nature of the engagement is clearly discussed and all relevant documents are shared. For example, if the outcome of the engagement is for the individual to agree to be a part of the Advisory Committee, ensure that a discussion around the time commitment, objectives around the purpose of this position, all expectations and share all relevant documents (like the Terms of Reference and Annual Work Plan) are shared and be transparent about any constraints.



Importantly, being open to any and all suggestions that are brought forward that will strengthen the reciprocal nature of this relationship even if it involves shifting away from the status-quo. For us, we have learned that being flexible and open-minded is the key to building mutually beneficial relationships.

c. Strengthening Commitments: Seek Experts and Information

In order to strengthen our commitments in this area we sought experts and information to holistically develop a Network that supports relationship building with Indigenous communities. In particular, we worked with an Indigenous consultant to determine key priorities, gap areas and areas for improvement in our relationship building process and our Network's work and projects as a whole. We were already sharing and supporting indigenous led/created research/content/resources as well as engaging and building relationships with Indigenous led organizations without expecting immediate gains for the Network and working with the consultant showed us how to be more intentional and open with our wants for establishing partnerships. This laid the foundation for building trust and developing mutually beneficial relationships based on the needs and priorities of our partners and putting them in the driver's seat for moving the relationship forward.

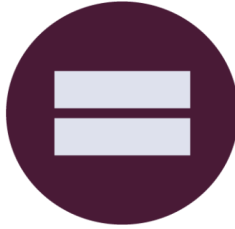
Additionally, we demonstrated our commitments and work through policy formation like our [Equal Futures Network Values](#), a public statement in which we affirmed our commitment to Indigenous engagement and our values for feminism and equity. Additionally, we took guidance from the consultant on wording changes prioritizing decolonial language whenever possible. Finally, we are conducting on-going internal organization wide learning, knowledge development and utilizing critical sector resources like the [VIDEA decolonization toolkit](#) to inform our work.

d. Sustaining Relationships

In order to sustain these new relationships we endeavored to create meaningful partnerships, knowledge sharing and capacity strengthening opportunities that are Indigenous led/created, recognize diversity in perspectives and voices and ensure that we are listening to many Indigenous perspectives and voices and not the same voices/excluding valuable perspectives on different issue areas. We focused on long-term engagement and being a good partner by importantly letting Indigenous partners take the lead in what this looks like. Most importantly, we amplified our Indigenous partners' knowledge and expertise and focused on not occupying space that we should not be in while also celebrating their success and joy.

We also focused internally on how we, as an organization, are upholding traditional systems of colonization and what we could be doing better to work in partnership to pursue a more inclusive, collaborative and respectful path forward grounded in the [94 Calls to Action](#) from the Truth and Reconciliation Commission and the [United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples](#).

4. Engagement with the Equal Futures Network



An intersectional lens is applied at all levels of the Network's programmatic work including the GE summit, representation on the Advisory Committee to programmatic areas including speakers, panel discussion subject matter. For membership and attendance at our flagship events, we will strive to create an inclusive and diverse environment that is welcoming to our Indigenous community members. We will track self-identified Indigenous membership within the Network as well as at attendance for our key events and utilize this data as a benchmark for future years.

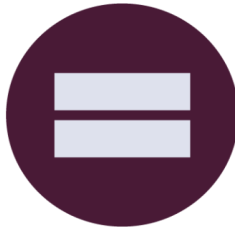
5. Constraints (if applicable):

- a. **Time:** Building relationships with Indigenous communities takes time to build trust and meaningful engagement and oftentimes it is through existing relationships that connections are further made within the community.
- b. **Budget:** Compensating Indigenous community members for their time and knowledge is paramount to building healthy, safe, and supportive relationships budgeting for this, especially as we try to engage with as many Indigenous communities as possible, may present a constraint.
- c. **Ensuring diverse representation:** Ensuring that representation from the Indigenous community can be difficult as there is such a breadth of cultures, languages, experiences, areas of expertise and knowledge to incorporate. To the best extent possible, this needs to be taken into consideration when planning activities that will highlight Indigenous knowledge and plan for multiple perspectives/participants from across the Indigenous community.
- d. **Language:** Especially when working with Elders the language barrier can present a constraint to our engagement.
- e. **Indigenous Worldviews:** There will never be complete harmony between Indigenous worldviews and the work of the Network, especially when it comes to concepts like gender equality. Some may not agree or feel connected to how we are advancing this work and might choose not to engage based on this.

Engaging the Firelight Group early on in the project was instrumental in creating foundational guiding documents and frameworks for the Network (such as our [territory acknowledgement and values](#)) as well as supporting our relationship building and engagement processes, in particular figuring out the mutually beneficial offers of the Network and some of the key constraints that might hinder Indigenous engagement. Since undergoing this work, the Network has increased Indigenous membership with 10% of our current membership being from Indigenous-led organizations and it continues to be a central focus in all of our engagement activities.

The disability community and disability-led and focused organizations

1. Commitment:



- The Equal Futures Network is committed to working in partnership with the Disability community to connect with disability-led organizations and organizations who work in disability programming at the local, regional and global levels and amplify their gender equality work;
- Connect with like-minded organizations who share Equal Futures Network values of partnership, collaboration and relationship building ensuring that the diversity of organizations working to advance gender equality from coast-to-coast-to-coast is represented;
- To incorporate an intersectional lens in all levels of our work and ensure that stories from all equity deserving groups are shared to shape the national narrative of gender equality.
- Ensure that all activities undertaken by the Network use an accessibility focused lens to ensure that everyone is able to access and participate in our work (for example, physically accessible spaces for events, using ALT text on social media posts, using closed captioning and simultaneous interpretation in our virtual spaces, etc.). This is an on-going commitment that will require frequent assessment and shifts.

2. Objective(s):

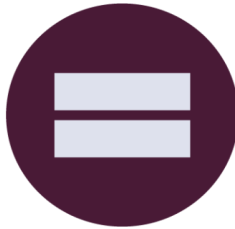
- a. **Amplify** the stories, perspectives and issues of the disabled community with the Network and broader GE community with our members across the country with an overarching goal to create a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of issues and barriers that the disabled community faces, specifically those that women and gender diverse individuals experience in the GE movement;
- b. **Connect** with the disability-led grassroots, local, regional and national organizations who are committed to achieving gender equality in their local and regional areas to listen and learn from their experiences;
- c. **Share expertise** with like-minded organizations who share Equal Futures Network values of partnership, collaboration and relationship building ensuring that the diversity of organizations working to advance gender equality from coast-to-coast-to-coast is represented.

3. Engagement Strategy (includes approach, actions, initiatives, etc.):

- a. Joining the Equal Futures Network

By continually reflecting and assessing the growing membership of the Network we will identify the gap areas and critically reflect on whose perspectives/representation is absent from the membership. With this in mind we will strive to achieve proportional representation of disability-led organizations and organizations whose programming has a specific disability-focused lens.

Currently we have 2 disability-led organizations within the Network which represent under 1% of the Network's membership and an additional 36% of membership have identified as having a disability-focused programmatic lens. Based on the recommendations from our GBA+ assessment we created a new category for tracking disability focused/led organizations which was incorporated when we



updated the Membership Application Form in the fall of 2022. This update has allowed us to better track disability across all of the current categories where our data is collected which in turn has supported us as we build out our engagement with these organizations and communities. This is still an on-going process and this area will be of focus in the engagement priorities for the Network moving forward.

b. Outreach - Establishing Early Relationships

In our approach to establishing early relationships, an individual, personal outreach approach has been taken. Emails will not be sent to a generic address, where possible emails should be sent to CEO/ED/Org head and clearly articulate the values and commitments of Equal Futures Network without overwhelming the recipient with too much detail. An invitation for a phone call will always accompany the email and in cases where it is appropriate a call will be used as the first method of contact.

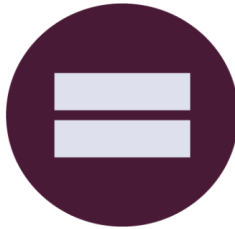
Additionally, to demonstrate commitment to disability issues and learn more about the priorities of community members Equal Futures Network follows social media accounts, networks and hashtags and amplify those on our channels and use an intersectional approach to bring forward a disability lens in our discussion of pertinent GE issues and challenges in our events, blogs/written pieces and social media.

c. Strengthening Commitments: Seek Experts and Information

In order to strengthen our commitments we will seek experts and information to holistically develop a Network that supports relationship building with the disability community. We have demonstrated our commitments and work through policy formation like our [Equal Futures Network Values](#), a public statement in which we affirm our commitment to feminist values and equity. We engage with partners and share content and knowledge so that disability groups see themselves reflected in our Network. Finally, have begun to amplify the knowledge, information and disability content as part of the status quo on Equal Futures Network social media channels, engaging with disability orgs/content creators for international days.

d. Sustaining Relationships

In order to sustain these new relationships we will endeavor to create meaningful partnerships, knowledge sharing and capacity strengthening opportunities that are designed by and for the disability community, amplifying their on-going work and not occupying space that is not for us. We incorporated a disability lens into forward facing and internal content and ensured accessibility is achieved in as much of what we do as possible (closed captioning, translation, ALT text on social media posts, etc.). Finally, in recognizing the incredible diversity of the disability community we prioritize amplifying a diversity of perspectives and voices across the disability spectrum in order to highlight as many perspectives and voices as possible. In addition, we want to ensure that we are not highlighting the same voices and perpetuating the exclusion of other, valuable perspectives on different issue areas.



4. Engagement with the Equal Futures Network

An intersectional lens is applied at all levels of the Network's programmatic work including the GE summit, representation on the Advisory Committee to programmatic areas including speakers, panel discussion subject matter. For membership and attendance at our flagship events, we will strive to create an inclusive and diverse environment that is welcoming to our disability community members. We will track self-identified disability metrics within the Network and utilize this data as a benchmark for future years.

5. Constraints (if applicable):

- a. **Budget:** due to extensive and differentiating accessibility needs it is not possible to eliminate all barriers that limit access to the Network. We will endeavor, to the extent possible, to work with our members to ensure that accessibility is a priority and all activities and events use a disability-lens.

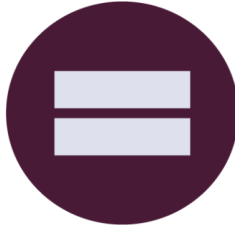
The 2SLGBTQ+ community and 2SLGBTQ+-led and focused organizations

1. Commitment:

- The Equal Futures Network is committed to working in partnership with the 2SLGBTQ+ community to connect with organizations at the local, regional and global levels and amplify their gender equality work;
- Connect with like-minded organizations who share Equal Futures Network values of partnership, collaboration and relationship building ensuring that the diversity of organizations working to advance gender equality from coast-to-coast-to-coast is represented;
- To incorporate an intersectional lens in all levels of our work and ensure that stories from all equity deserving groups are shared to shape the national narrative of gender equality.

2. Objective(s):

- a. **Amplify** the stories, perspectives and issues of the 2SLGBTQ+ community with the Network and broader GE community with our members across the country with an overarching goal to create a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of issues and barriers that the disabled community faces, specifically those that trans, non-binary and gender diverse individuals experience in the GE movement;
- b. **Connect** with the 2SLGBTQ+ grassroots, local, regional and national organizations who are committed to achieving gender equality in their local and regional areas to listen and learn from their experiences;
- c. **Share expertise** with like-minded organizations who share Equal Futures Network values of partnership, collaboration and relationship building ensuring that the diversity of organizations working to advance gender equality from coast-to-coast-to-coast is represented.



3. Engagement Strategy (includes approach, actions, initiatives, etc.):

a. Joining the Equal Futures Network

By continually reflecting and assessing the growing membership of the Network we have identified the gap areas and have been able to critically reflect on whose perspectives/representation is absent from the membership. With this in mind we will strive to achieve proportional representation of 2SLGBTQ+-led organizations and organizations whose programming has a specific 2SLGBTQ+ focused lens.

Currently we have 73 2SLGBTQ+-led organizations within the Network which represent 14% of the Network's membership and 289 organizations (54%) who have a 2SLGBTQ+-focused lens to their programming.

b. Outreach - Establishing Early Relationships

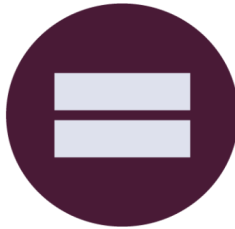
In our approach to establishing early relationships, an individual, personal outreach approach has been taken. Emails will not be sent to a generic address, where possible emails should be sent to CEO/ED/Org head and clearly articulate the values and commitments of Equal Futures Network without overwhelming the recipient with too much detail. An invitation for a phone call will always accompany the email and in cases where it is appropriate a call will be used as the first method of contact.

c. Strengthening Commitments: Seek Experts and Information

In order to strengthen our commitments we will seek experts and information to holistically develop a Network that supports relationship building with the 2SLGBTQ+ community. We have demonstrated our commitments and work through policy formation like our [Equal Futures Network Values](#), a public statement in which we affirm our commitment to feminist values and equity. We engage with partners and share content and knowledge so that 2SLGBTQ+ groups see themselves reflected in our Network. Finally, we amplify the knowledge, information and 2SLGBTQ+ content as part of the status quo on Equal Futures Network social media channels, engaging with 2SLGBTQ+ orgs/content creators for international days and seek to partner with these organizations for our flagship events.

d. Sustaining Relationships

In order to sustain these new relationships we endeavor to create meaningful partnerships, knowledge sharing and capacity strengthening opportunities that are designed by and for the 2SLGBTQ+ community, amplifying their on-going work and not occupying space that is not for us. An intersectional lens has been incorporated into all activities of the Network and as much as possible, we seek to represent the diversity within the 2SLGBTQ+ community in our content, in panel discussions and as a part of programming. In recent months, the targeted attacks on the trans and non-binary community has reaffirmed our steadfast



commitment to supporting these communities and ensuring their safety, security and success within our GE work and the larger GE ecosystem.

4. Engagement with the Equal Futures Network

An intersectional lens has been applied at all levels of the Network's programmatic work, including the GE summit, representation on the Advisory Committee to programmatic areas including speakers, panel discussion subject matter. For membership and attendance at our flagship events, we have created an inclusive and diverse environment that is welcoming and prioritizes engagement of these communities. We tracked self-identified 2SLGBTQ+ attendance at the summit for 2023 and will utilize this data that as a benchmark for future years/engagement.

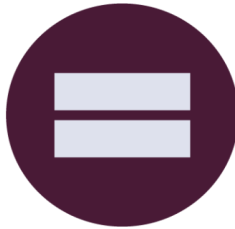
5. Constraints (if applicable):

- a. **2SLGBTQ+ Worldviews/Gender Equality Language:** There will never be complete harmony between 2SLGBTQ+ worldviews and the work of the Network, especially when it comes to concepts like gender equality. Some may not agree or feel connected to how we are advancing this work and might choose not to engage based on this especially trans, non-binary and gender diverse communities as the gender equality language is still heavily "women"-centric. We recognize the role we have to play in driving forward inclusive understandings of gender equality and feminism that give space to and for 2SLGBTQ+ communities.

Youth and Youth-Led Organizations

1. Commitment:

- The Equal Futures Network is committed to working in partnership with the Youth, in particular to connect with youth-led organizations and organizations who work in youth programming at the local, regional and global levels and amplify their gender equality work;
- Connect with like-minded organizations who share Equal Futures Network values of partnership, collaboration and relationship building ensuring that the diversity of organizations working to advance gender equality from coast-to-coast-to-coast is represented;
- To incorporate an intersectional lens in all levels of our work and ensure that stories from all equity deserving groups are shared to shape the national narrative of gender equality.
- Ensure that all activities undertaken by the Network use a youth focused lens to ensure that everyone is able to access and participate in our work (for example, opportunities for youth to engage at all stages of the project, bursary opportunities to ensure their active participation and engagement, etc.). This is an on-going commitment that will require frequent assessment and shifts.



2. Objective(s):

- a. **Amplify** the stories, perspectives and issues of the youth with the Network and broader GE community with our members across the country with an overarching goal to create a deeper understanding of the interconnectedness of issues and barriers that youth faces, specifically those that women and gender diverse individuals experience in the GE movement;
- b. **Connect** with the youth-led grassroots, local, regional and national organizations who are committed to achieving gender equality in their local and regional areas to listen and learn from their experiences;
- c. **Share expertise** with like-minded organizations who share Equal Futures Network values of partnership, collaboration and relationship building ensuring that the diversity of organizations working to advance gender equality from coast-to-coast-to-coast is represented.

3. Engagement Strategy (includes approach, actions, initiatives, etc.):

- a. Joining the Equal Futures Network

By continually reflecting and assessing the growing membership of the Network identifies the gap areas and critically reflects on whose perspectives/representation is absent from the membership. With this in mind we strive to achieve proportional representation of youth-led organizations and organizations whose programming has a specific youth-focused lens.

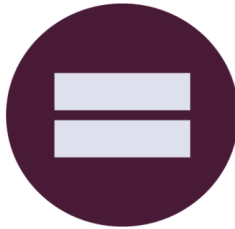
Currently we have 66 self-identified you-led organizations within the Network which represent 12% of the Network's membership.

- b. Outreach - Establishing Early Relationships

In our approach to establishing early relationships, an individual, personal outreach approach has been taken. Emails will not be sent to a generic address, where possible emails should be sent to CEO/ED/Org head and clearly articulate the values and commitments of Equal Futures Network without overwhelming the recipient with too much detail. An invitation for a phone call will always accompany the email and in cases where it is appropriate a call will be used as the first method of contact.

- c. Strengthening Commitments: Seek Experts and Information

In order to strengthen our commitments we will seek experts and information to holistically develop a Network that supports relationship building with youth. We demonstrate our commitments and work through policy formation like our [Equal Futures Network Values](#), a public statement in which we affirm our commitment to feminist values and equity. We engage with partners and share content and knowledge so that youth see themselves reflected in our Network. Additionally, we amplify the knowledge, information



and youth-developed content as part of the status quo on Equal Futures Network social media channels, engaging with youth-led orgs/content creators for international days. Finally, we ensure that youth are present and able to actively participate, engage and share their expertise in our event spaces by hosting a youth bursary program alongside all of our flagship events and prioritize bringing youth with intersectional identities and who face financial barriers access to these important spaces.

d. Sustaining Relationships

In order to sustain these new relationships we endeavor to create meaningful partnerships, knowledge sharing and capacity strengthening opportunities that are designed by and for youth in our Network and in the broader GE ecosystem. An intersectional lens is incorporated into all activities of the Network and as much as possible, the diversity within the youth community will be represented in our content, in panel discussions and as a part of programming.

4. Engagement with the Equal Futures Network

An intersectional lens will be applied at all levels of the Network's programmatic work, including the GE summit, representation on the Advisory Committee to programmatic areas including speakers, panel discussion subject matter. For membership and attendance at our flagship events, we strive to create an inclusive and diverse environment that is welcoming and prioritizes engagement and bursary opportunities for youth. We track self-identified youth attendance at the summit for 2023 and utilize this data as a benchmark for future years.

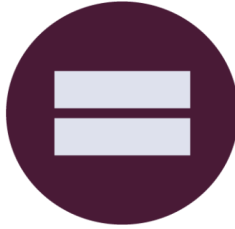
5. Constraints (if applicable):

- a. **Priority Alignment:** Currently, the work being driven by youth-led organizations is not given the priority focus it deserves and oftentimes youth are left outside of the higher-level discussions and work being done to drive progress for GE that directly impacts their community. As such, there are a multitude of youth-led organizations and initiatives that we do not know of or have access to and who are focused on driving progress forward in their own ways. We will support and uplift this work and the work happening inside the Network in order to be a supportive partner and ally to youth GE-led work.

Our Commitment:

As we move forward, we are actively working to build reciprocal relationships with all the communities identified in the *Strategic Engagement Plan* to actively build a Network that represents the breadth of organizations working to advance gender equality and social justice in communities across the country. This plan will help us to create a space that includes their voices, experiences and expertise at our Gender Equality Summits and periodic idea incubator sessions and prioritize their engagement at all levels of the Network. This *Strategic Engagement Strategy* is an evergreen document, albeit always

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rooted in principles of inclusivity and intersectionality, that we will continue to revisit, edit and update as circumstances require.