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Background

Infinity Women Secretariat (IWS) is a non-profit organization that connects Red River Métis women throughout the Province of Manitoba, and beyond, with a mandate to promote, empower, and enhance their social, cultural, economic, and political well-being. Incorporated on April 23, 2013, IWS has already become well known in our Red River Métis communities, in our national Red River Métis Government, and all throughout the Homeland. IWS is a proud Affiliate of the Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF).

The key objectives of Infinity Women Secretariat are:

- **Promote, Empower and Enhance our social, economic, and political well-being;**
- **Preserve and Safeguard our history, values, culture, language and traditions;**
- **Foster grassroots initiatives;**
- **Advocate and Facilitate effective means of addressing Métis women's issues, either individually or as a collective; and**
- **Encourage and Support the full participation of all Métis women within and outside the Red River Métis Homeland**

IWS engages with Red River Métis women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals through meaningful Métis-centric programs, services, supports, and resources. We currently have over 1600 members with new membership forms received daily. IWS fosters a sense of community through cultural, social, and economic programs, community engagement, leadership, and governance development.

IWS is comprised of a Board of Directors: Spokeswoman (elected Province-wide), seven voting Regional Directors (elected regionally), and an appointed provincial Youth Representative (non-voting member), in addition to staff and consultants. Its leadership has decades of experience in the issues and needs of Red River Métis women, families, and communities.



Context

The strategic plan for Infinity Women Secretariat (IWS) is an essential component of the "Enhancing Governance & Advocacy Capacity" project. This four-year project was designed to enhance the participation of Red River Métis women in governance. The aim was to improve the capacity of IWS (at provincial, regional and local levels) and its organizational strategic planning methods to better serve IWS members and their communities in Manitoba, and beyond. Throughout the project, IWS was able to provide training and facilitated sessions to the IWS Board of Directors, Regional and Local Representatives, and Métis women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals who were interested in learning and participating in Red River Métis governance and advocacy support services for the direct benefit of their community.

The development of the IWS Strategic Plan has been a significant effort, involving four years of collaborative work by the Board, Staff, IWS members, and key stakeholders. In 2019, at the commencement of the project, the IWS Board of Directors reviewed our existing documents and planned strategically how to obtain a holistic view of our members' perspectives in the creation of the 5-year plan. Through various meetings, consultations, and engagements, the plan has been shaped to reflect the needs and priorities of our Red River Métis women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals.

On February 22 and 23, 2020, IWS held a Visioning Pathway Workshop in Winnipeg, Manitoba, with 100 IWS members in attendance from all seven MMF Regions across Manitoba, including The Pas, Thompson, Northwest, Southwest, Interlake, Southeast, and Winnipeg Regions. Our members provided key themes, ideas, and concerns that they felt IWS should incorporate into the plan that reflected our key objectives.

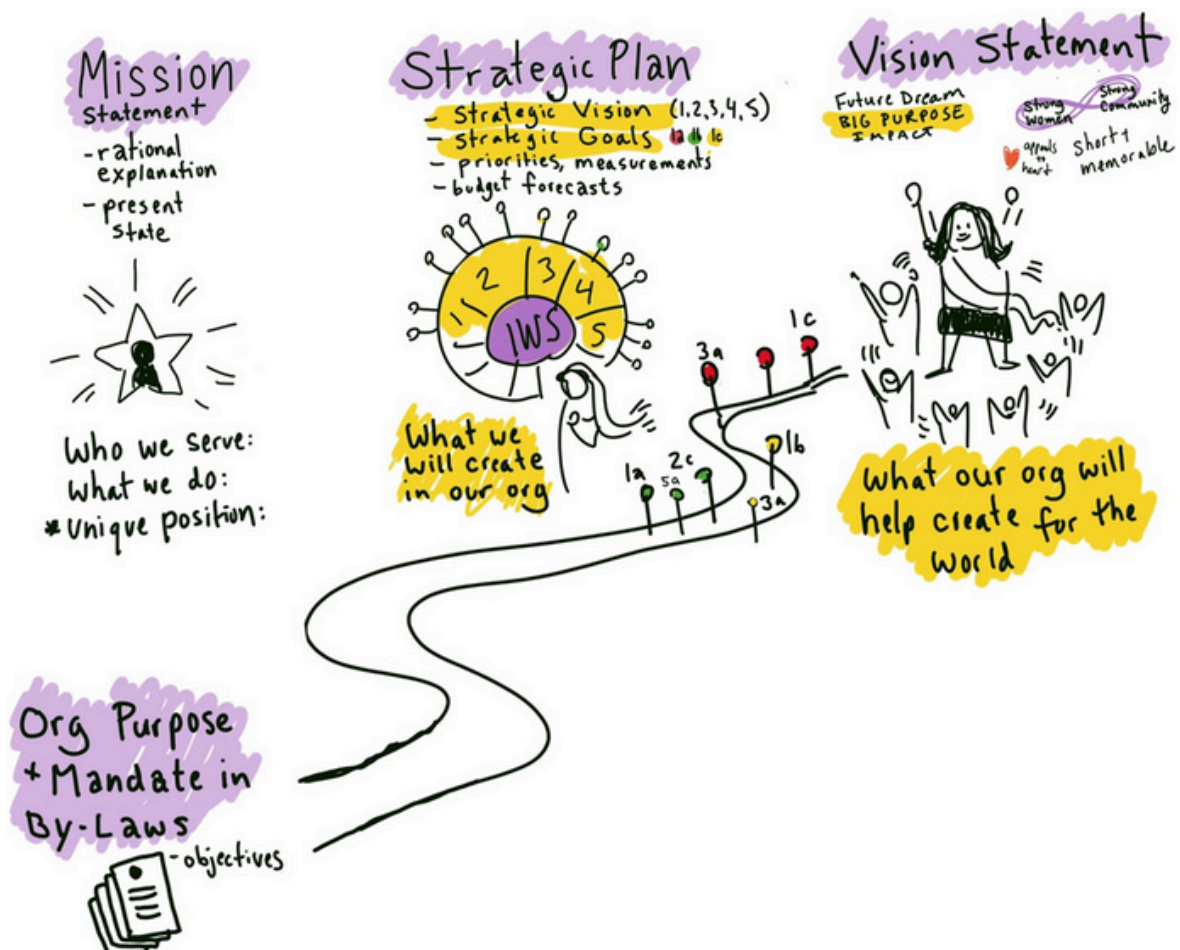
The IWS Board of Directors reflected on the community feedback and results of the Visioning Pathway Workshop. During the peak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the IWS Board of Directors and staff worked with AHA! Graphic Facilitation to facilitate several virtual workshop sessions to further develop the strategic plan. On March 23, 2021, the draft IWS Strategic Plan was presented to partners, stakeholders, and key community members in a virtual workshop. The invaluable feedback provided was incorporated into the creation of the current IWS Strategic Plan.

Despite the challenges posed by the COVID-19 Pandemic, IWS has remained committed to developing a comprehensive and inclusive strategic plan for the future growth and success that outlines our vision, mission, values, and strategic objectives.

Framework

During the Visioning Pathway workshops with the IWS Board of Directors and staff, AHA! Graphic Facilitation presented graphic illustrations that assisted with brainstorming the key aspects of the IWS Strategic Plan such as the vision and mission statements that articulates our purpose, along with values that outline our principles.

A strategic plan is a framework that provides a clear roadmap for achieving organizational goals and objectives. The IWS strategic plan includes several key components, such as mission, vision, and purpose, which provide a common language and definitions for IWS staff and board members to follow. Our mandate and organizational purpose in this context are referring to the IWS By-laws, which regulate government and operational procedures. The plan includes goals, strategies, and action plans that outline the steps needed to achieve the objectives of the organization. By developing this strategic plan, IWS will focus its resources and efforts on areas that will have the greatest impact for our members. Additionally, the strategic plan will help IWS to monitor progress, evaluate outcomes, and adjustment programs and services as needed to ensure that the organization remains responsive to the evolving needs of our members.

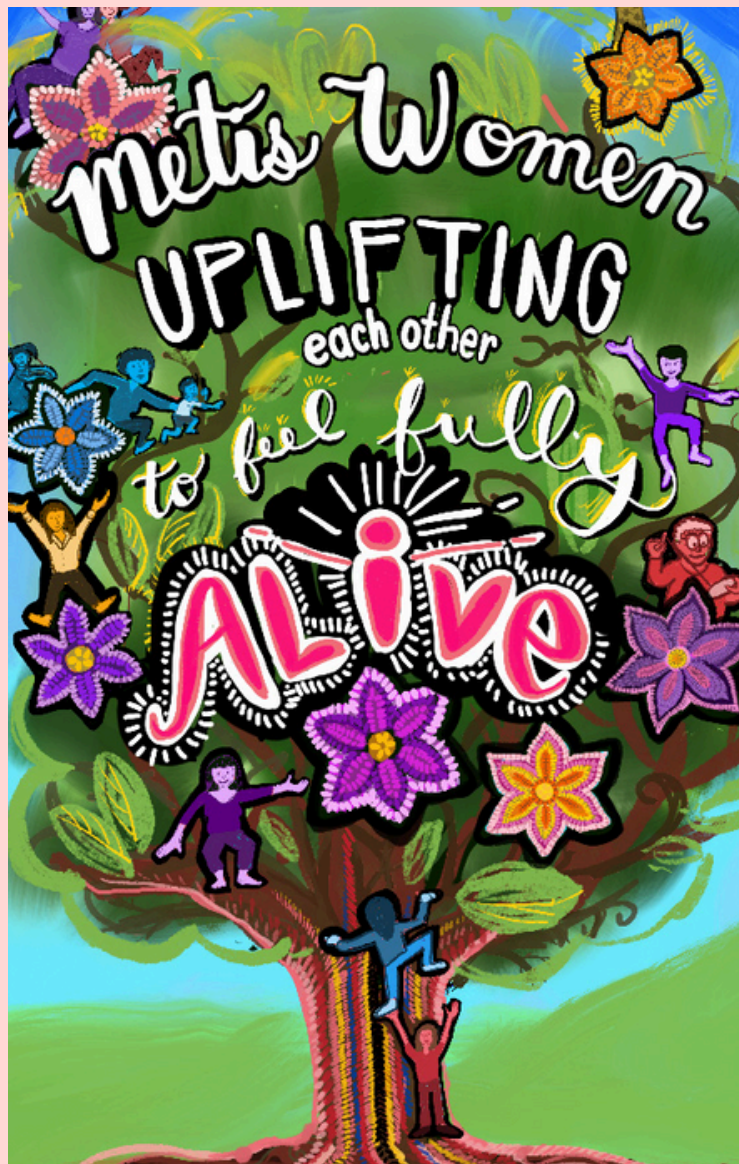


Vision Statement

A vision is a statement about the desired state of the organization and demonstrates what the organization wants to accomplish. The Vision Statement is about the future and appeals to the heart. It answers the question, “What is our dream?” It is short, memorable, and aspirational.

Our deep desire is that all Red River Métis women feel safe and loved in a sisterhood that empowers and supports us through the generations. From this place, we realize our dreams, share our voices, and lead our communities in wholeness.

A great vision statement is easily and naturally repeated from memory. The IWS Board and Staff created this vision statement to uplifts and motivate our members.



Mission Statement

The mission is the articulation of the role of the organization with respect to achieving the vision. It clarifies what the organization will do to make the vision become a reality. The Mission statement answers the question, “Who are we?” It helps explain who we are, what we do, and the unique value to our field.

The Mission statement will be displayed on the IWS and MMF website, in grant proposals, as well as in our presentations to the community. In our efforts to be inclusive to all IWS member, the inclusion of all women (i.e. girls, youth, Elders, and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals) was discussed at length. After a great deal of deliberation and feedback from our partners, it was decided that all individuals who identify as women have already been included in our mandate, actions, and values. We shared stories of how our work impacts the lives of the women we serve, and it became clear that a feeling of belonging was at the core of the value we offer. After discussion among the IWS Board and staff, including feedback from community partners we accepted this mission statement.

IWS MISSION

Infinity Women Secretariat (IWS) is a non-profit organization that connects and empowers Métis women by providing culturally specific programs, services, and support. We foster a sense of belonging and sisterhood for all Métis women and our communities.

Values

Vision and mission statements are accompanied by explicit statements of principles and/or values. Values are the conditions that leadership considers desirable for the organization to meet in executing its mandate.

IWS has a very strong work ethic, work culture and leadership qualities. Within the Strategic Plan, it was decided that we identify our core values, and are working to ensure they remain as the foundation of the organization as we continue to grow.

IWS aims to uphold the essence of our values throughout transitions of leadership, staff and board. By reflecting on the values that are close to our hearts as well as from anecdotes from IWS Board of members, staff, MMF Caucus, colleagues, and the women we serve, IWS created these four core values.

IWS VALUES

SISTERHOOD

We belong with each other and stand for each other.

PATIENCE

Building relationships and helping others grow skills and confidence.

POSITIVE RIPPLES

Spreading beauty, joy in the spirit of helping each other.

WELCOMING

Being warmly welcoming to all our women, girls and 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, and fostering a sense of safety and belonging.

Strategic Planning - SOAR Analysis

The Strategic Plan aligns our Mission and Vision statements, and details what we are planning to create as an organization in the next 5 years. Deciding on a monitoring and evaluation process was an important way to help the IWS Board and staff follow up on its goals as a team.

A Strategic Plan considers themes such as organizational development, communications, programs, and impact. We determine the strategic vision and develop strategic goals for each theme. This “SOAR analysis” answers the questions:

- “What will we focus on in our work for the next five years?”
- “How will we know if we’ve succeeded?”



Strategic Planning - SOAR Analysis

Strengths

- Staff and programs successful with good reputation
- Adaptable and flexible
- Partnerships with education and positioning as Secretariat for Manitoba Métis Federation
- Caring and welcoming values

Opportunities

- Expanding programs across the province, interest in housing
- Increased participation in online programming
- Youth engagement, conversation circles, cultural programming
- Recognition of the MMF as the National Government of the Red River Métis.

Aspirations

- Create transitional housing with wrap-around services
- Funders approach us because we are trusted and known
- Increased organizational capacity
- Increased cultural programming, including youth

Results

- When women are asked what it means to be Métis, we are inspired by their answers and/or having a hunger to learn more
- Many women joining our events, mail, and email list
- Seeing children growing up proud and women healing and leading, being fully alive
- Increase in funding and capacity

Our Strategy

We learned four common strategies for the impacts of non-profit organizations.

1. **Surfers** — Follow the energy. Be in the know about developing opportunities and needs and position yourself with partners to catch the prevailing waves, avoiding rocks!

Most small or young non-profits survive like this.

Relevant ideas for IWS:

- Tailoring the work to the grants and funds and partners that are available that also meet the needs of our community.
- Focusing on housing when housing is necessary, or focusing on child care when child care is needed. Plans are ready in the background to catch fast-moving opportunities.
- Strategically positioned as an Affiliate of the MMF. IWS are good surfers right now!



2. **The hedgehog** — Does one thing really well that has the most impact. Super focused on a narrow target audience and/or does the same program that works year after year. Consistency creates solid results and growth over time.

Relevant ideas for IWS:

- The proposed IWS transitional Housing Unit with wrap-around services would be a great hedgehog concept to concentrate all of our efforts around creating relationships and implementing proactive solutions to address gender-based violence.

Our Strategy Continued

We learned four common strategies for the impacts of non-profit organizations.

3. **The Lever** — Attempting to make a large impact using leverage in the system, through polices, laws, and infrastructure. This type of effort is hard work and takes a long time to see results and is often difficult to fund. However, one big win can make a huge difference over time.



Example - Suffragettes winning the women's right to vote.

Relevant ideas for IWS:

- Advocating for highspeed internet and simple tablets to remote locations so women can access telehealth, online learning, and community events.
- Communications campaigns change the way people think about themselves and their relationship to important topics.
- Advocating for policies that increase gender diversity in leadership positions.
- This is not recommended for IWS for this 5-year term, but perhaps could be some background work preparing for the future.



2. **The Snowflake (Community Empowerment)** — Nurturing volunteers to lead other volunteers. Giving them enough structure and authority and motivation to keep the energy flowing.

Relevant ideas for IWS:

- IWS members can offer jiggging or beading classes in each Region.
- Working with volunteers takes a lot of time, patience, and energy. It must be fun and personally rewarding for the individuals.
- The skills and heart of IWS match well with this model. There are further opportunities for this model since the MMF Regions and Locals already exist.

Needs Assessment

Our strategic vision is centered around ensuring that we meet the diverse needs and expectations of our IWS members and addressing the unique realities they experience. In order to do this, we need to meet their needs where they are at. IWS conducts regular assessments of the inclusiveness and effectiveness of our programs, services, supports, and resources to ensure we are engaging them appropriately, responding to their concerns and perspectives, and incorporating their insights into the governing principles, policies, and practices of IWS.

Since 2019, IWS has gained a much stronger understanding of the needs of our members. They have shown an increased interest in learning more about and participating further in governance and leadership opportunities. The largest take-away for IWS members was the self-awareness of their strengths and a stronger belief in their ability to contribute to more substantive change in their communities.



Strategic Objectives

Strategic objectives are high-level and measurable goals outlining what the organization would like to achieve. They set priorities, focus energy and resources, strengthen operations, and outline the actions and activities needed to achieve our goals.

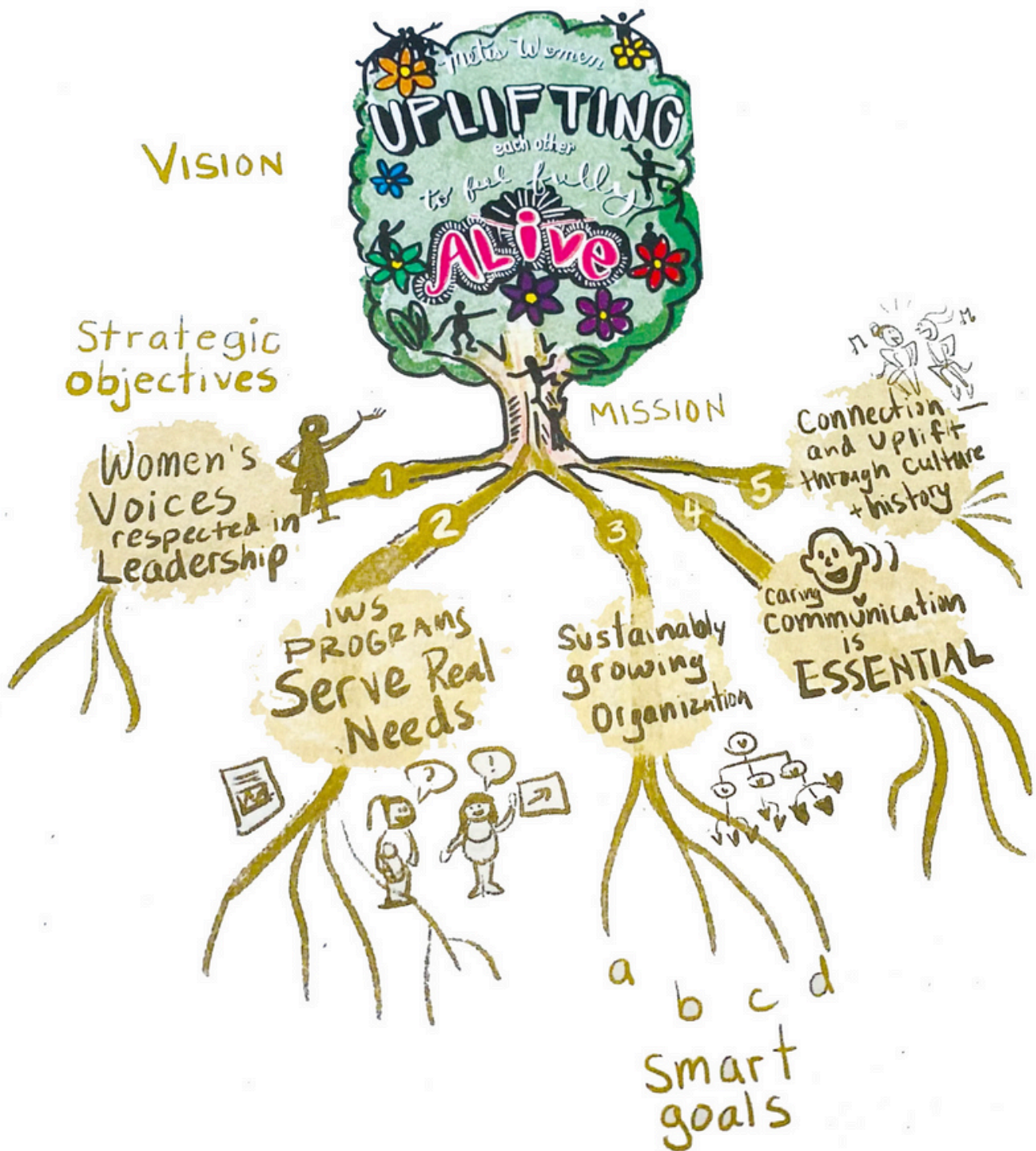
We attempted to respond to the question “Where do we want to be in 5 years” with our strategic vision, which is made up of several Strategic Objectives. Our vision statement is our end goal, our north star that we are always striving for.

Our strategic vision is zoomed in on the organization and what we want to achieve in the next five years. This strategic vision was crafted from the feedback received from our in-person governance workshop and the IWS Board of Director reflection session. This strategic plan develops an overarching strategy and metaphor that encompasses our strategic vision and makes it memorable.

1. **Strong representation** in all levels of government to promote Métis women leadership, and to ensure our **voices and needs are heard and respected.**
2. **Programs and Services** that support and serve the needs of Métis women at Provincial, Regional, and Local levels.
3. We are an organization that is **sustainably funded, accountable, transparent, and respected.**
4. **Communication is essential**, will be timely and informative between the provincial, regional, and local levels.
5. Create opportunities to maintain the **history, culture, and pride**, of Métis women, for the Métis communities.

Smart Goals

Each strategic objective is lofty and there is a number of ways we could create them. Smart goals inform us of our priorities to aid us in meeting the objectives over time, with clearly defined deadlines. People become champions of smart goals to make certain they get the attention they deserve.



Strategic Objective 1

Strong representation in all levels of government to promote Métis women leadership, and to ensure our voices and needs are heard and respected.

SMART GOALS

- 1a The voices and concerns of Métis women, youth, 2SLGBTQ+ individuals, and Elders are included and formally presented at leadership levels and in decision making, and increased by 20% by the year 2023.
- 1b Women are supported and encouraged to engage in leadership roles in civic life, especially in Métis governance structures by the year 2024.
- 1c A Métis women's circle is created by 2024 as a space to share their wisdom and knowledge.



Strategic Objective 2

Programs and Services that support and serve the needs of Métis women at Provincial, Regional, and Local levels.

SMART GOALS

- 2a IWS will increase their programs, services, and supports by 50% to address the needs of Métis women identified through the collection of research data and various initiatives, with established partnerships to reflect provincial focus by the year 2024.**
- 2b IWS will increase their human resource capacity by 20% to ensure the necessary resources and supports are available to meet the increased demand on the organization by the year 2022.**
- 2c Our programming priorities will be founded on empowering and equipping our women to lead and create economic benefit and cultural connection opportunities for their communities by the year 2024.**
- 2d IWS will increase our membership by 30% and ensure the participation of youth and 2SLGBTQ+ population, to build the next generation of strong women leaders by the year 2024.**
- 2e Bi-annual surveys to be conducted as a form of collecting IWS members' needs to provide clear direction to programming by 2024.**
- 2f Conduct demographic research to support applications for programming and core funding by 2023.**

Strategic Objective 3

We are an organization that is sustainably funded, accountable, transparent, and respected.

SMART GOALS

- 3a Increase staff and funding growth by 20% to sustain a healthy organizational capacity by the year 2024.**
- 3b Improve governance and operational capacity to become a fully functioning organization by the year 2023, in preparation to be the service delivery arm for women of the Métis self-government system.**
- 3c Develop a plan to establish diverse core funding streams that may come from core funding, government grants, innovative partnerships for resources, and social enterprise possibilities by the year 2024.**
- 3d Increase program funding to support the development and evaluation of programs and/or to expand impactful ones by the year 2023.**

Strategic Objective 4

Communication is essential, will be timely and informative between the provincial, regional, and local levels.

SMART GOALS

- 4a A communications plan is in place to clarify the role and purpose of IWS with the provincial community, including website, social media, newsletter, clear communication between Regions, and regular meetings by the year 2023.**
- 4b Community awareness of current important issues is well coordinated from the provincial to local levels of our membership by the year 2024.**
- 4c Increase community awareness of the role of IWS by 30%, including programs and services offered by the year 2024.**

Strategic Objective 5

Create opportunities to maintain the history, culture, and pride, of Métis women, for the Métis communities.

SMART GOALS

- 5a Increase women's opportunities by 25% to participate in Metis history and cultural activities by the year 2024.
- 5b Simplify connections to programs that support and are creatively brought to more people, such as Métis clubs, Little Métis Sing with Me, skills classes, sharing online etc. by the year 2024.
- 5c Celebrate women's role in our history and identity, raising awareness of their contributions and vital role by 2023.



Monitoring & Evaluation

To help us track progress on our goals and assign responsibilities, a dashboard is very helpful to have as a tool to have regular check ins of the champion, how the plan has been formulated to meet this goal, the resources allocated, and action being taken.

Below is an example of the spreadsheet that is continuously updated as the Strategic Plan evolves through the years.

GOAL	CHAMPION	MEASUREMENT	PLANNING	DOING	DONE/RESULT
1.0 Strong representation in all levels of government to promote Métis women leadership, and to ensure our voices and needs are heard and respected.					
1a: Identify a 20% increase of women, youth, two-spirit and Elder needs and voices are formally represented at decision-making tables by the year 2024.					
1b: Women are supported and encouraged to engage in leadership roles in civic life, especially in Métis governance structures by the year 2025.					
2.0 Programs and Services that support and serve the needs of Métis women at Provincial, Regional, and Local levels.					
2a: IWS will increase their programs and services by 50% to address the needs of Métis women, identified through the collection of research data with established partnerships to reflect provincial focus by the year 2025.					
2b: IWS will increase their human resource capacity by 20% to ensure the necessary resources and supports are available to meet the increased demand on the organization by the year 2022.					
2c: Our programming priorities will be founded on empowering and equipping our women to lead and create economic benefit and cultural connection opportunities for their communities by the year 2024.					
2d: IWS will increase our membership by 30% and ensure the participation of the youth and 2SLGBTQ+ population, to build the next generation of strong women leaders by the year 2024.					
2e: Bi-annual surveys to be conducted as a form of collecting IWS members' needs to provide clear direction to programming by 2024.					
2f: Conduct demographic research to support applications for programming and core funding by 2023.					

Conclusion

One of the strongest lessons learned through the process of creating this strategic plan was the increased awareness of IWS governance, leadership and the many strengths we hold as an organization. As a volunteer Board, the IWS Board of Directors have a broad understanding of the meaningful work that is done by IWS. Through the workshops, consultations and visioning exercises, there was a much deeper understanding of the organizational structure and capacity. While we have been aware of the many strengths of IWS, this process highlighted just how strong we are and the impact our work is having with our women, girls, and 2SLGBTQ+ members across the Red River Métis Homeland.

A second lesson we learned was the increasing interest and "hunger" for our programs and services by our members. By participating in the visioning pathway workshops and assisting in creating the strategic plan, they too developed a much stronger understanding of the governance and leadership of IWS, and this sparked a deeper interest in all that we do. Since this session, the engagement of our members has significantly increased and the overwhelming support we receive is much appreciated.

Finally, through these activities, we as an organization gained a deeper understanding of some of the gaps in our governance and we are invested in creating educational opportunities to address these gaps. Like all organizations, there is always room for improvement and our work on this project has certainly helped us to bring them to the forefront and problem-solve on the many strategies we can undertake to reduce them.



Contributions

**INFINITY WOMEN SECRETARIAT APPRECIATES
THE CONTRIBUTIONS FROM:**



Department of Women and Gender Equality Canada

Canada 



**INFINITY
WOMEN**

SECRETARIAT ∞

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