

WOMEN's COMMISSION

Proposed Implementation Details of Women Empowerment Fund

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' views on the proposed revisions to implementation details of the Women Empowerment Fund.

Background

2. The Government attaches great importance to the contribution of women to society and the work of supporting women. In the 2022 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced to substantially increase funding for organising activities to promote women's development by the Women's Commission (hereafter "WoC") from \$4 million to \$10 million per annum in the next three years. A Women Empowerment Fund (hereafter "WEF") would be set up to subsidise community projects that support women in juggling their jobs and family life, bringing women's awareness to their own physical and mental health and unleashing their potential.

3. The Financial Secretary later announced in the Budget to set aside \$100 million to strengthen support for women's development and the related tasks. Starting from 2023-24, the Government will use this additional provision to increase the annual funding for the WEF from \$10 million to \$20 million. The WEF will subsidise women's groups and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) for launching appropriate projects to support women. On the basis of an annual allocation of \$20 million, the relevant provision will support the operation of the WEF for six years.

4. WoC has discussed the proposed implementation details of the WEF at the last meeting, as elaborated in **Annex**. In view of the increased funding, we propose revisions to some details of the WEF.

Introduction

5. The WEF is set up to empower women irrespective of their age,

occupation and background, etc. to showcase their potential and talents on their own platforms in order to achieve the goal of promoting women's development in Hong Kong.

6. Women's groups and NGOs may submit applications for funding. They should be registered in Hong Kong under the Societies Ordinance (Cap. 151, Laws of Hong Kong); or companies incorporated under the Companies Ordinance (Cap. 622, Laws of Hong Kong or under the former Companies Ordinance as defined in Cap. 622); or statutory bodies or organisations formed by statute in Hong Kong. In addition, the concerned bodies and organisations should be of non-profit-making or charitable nature¹.

7. The themes for the first operation year include:

- (a) assisting women in accomplishing transformations in the job market through introducing interview skills, job selection and training, placement opportunities, keys to entrepreneurship, etc.;
- (b) enhancing women's physical and mental health, including promotion of work and family life balance, stress management, mental health awareness, etc.;
- (c) helping women to cope with different roles in family and society such as by providing them with trainings on child and elderly care;
- (d) motivating women to enhance their personal attributes, achieve full potential and reach out to help others in society through workshops on strengthening positive thinking, leadership skills and organisation ability, supplemented by practicing opportunities like organising volunteer activities, etc.; and
- (e) facilitating the use of new information and communication technology through trainings on the use of common office software, mobile shooting skills, video production, etc.

8. Applicant organisations may design appropriate activities with different themes. Activities should preferably cover diversified, interactive, interesting and innovative elements. The format may include workshops,

¹ Organisations registered on the list of charitable institutions or trusts of a public character exempt from tax under the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap. 112, Laws of Hong Kong).

sharing sessions, talks, competitions, visits, publications, etc. All activities under the funded projects should be of non-profit-making nature and should be carried out in Hong Kong. To facilitate women's participation in the funded projects, applicant organisations may also seek funding for providing activities and child care activities for the children under their care. Such activities should be beneficial to the physical and mental health of the children. Examples include chess and reading classes, etc.

Scopes of revision

9. The funding cap of each project was originally determined by its scale and duration: cross-district or territory-wide projects of one year duration was capped at \$400,000 while \$800,000 for two years; and single-district projects of one year and two years were capped at \$300,000 and \$600,000 respectively. With more resources now and to encourage more organisations to take part in the WEF to cater for the needs of different women groups, it is suggested that the project duration be the only criterion for setting the funding caps, i.e. \$400,000 and \$800,000 for each one-year and two-year project respectively.

10. With reference to other Government's funding schemes, we put forward the following considerations to subsidised expenditure items:

- (a) to raise the expenditure ceiling for hiring full-time / part-time staff for launching the project with direct benefits to the participants (including the overtime allowance incurred by existing staff for running the project) from not exceeding 20%² of total approved funding amount for activities under the Funding Scheme for Women's Development, to not exceeding 30% of total approved funding amount;
- (b) for projects with the total approved funding amount exceeding \$50,000, the funded organisation shall submit, in conjunction with the project final report, a financial report with the accounts audited by an independent Certified Public Accountant (hereafter "CPA") to ensure that the funding is used in accordance with the approved budget and purposes. The expenditure ceiling of hiring service

² At present, organisations can only apply funding under WoC Stream to cover staff cost directly and specifically incurred to follow through the approved project and/or for subsidising the overtime allowance for existing staff employed for running the approved project.

from a CPA will be adjusted from not exceeding 2% of the total approved funding amount for activities under the Funding Scheme for Women's Development, to a maximum of \$16,000 in order to meet the actual requirements. The relevant expenditure ceiling will be determined according to the total approved funding amount for activities. Details are tabulated as follows:

Total approved funding amount for activities	Ceiling of hiring service from a CPA
Below \$200,000	\$8,000
\$200,000 – \$499,999	\$12,000
\$500,000 – \$800,000	\$16,000

- (c) to expand the “contingency” expenditure item to cover miscellaneous items under “miscellaneous & contingency”. Its expenditure ceiling will be increased from not exceeding 5% of the total approved funding amount for activities under the Funding Scheme for Women's Development, to not exceeding 10% of the total approved funding amount in order to allow greater flexibility for the applicant organisations in using the fund and meeting expenditure for miscellaneous items such as printing charge for certificates, prizes for activities, etc. Guidelines for individual expenditure items under this category will be set out to ensure proper use of funds.

11. As mentioned at the last meeting, to maximize the use of resources, training courses overlapping with the “Capacity Building Mileage Programme” will not be subsidised. Besides, the proposed project should not be subsidised by other funding under the Government to avoid duplication of resources. However, applicant organisations may use their own resources or apply for funding sources outside the Government to implement the projects.

Work Plan

12. There will be two rounds of applications each year. The first round of applications will open in June 2023. We will consult the Working Group on Collaboration and Promotion on the application guidelines shortly. As regards publicity, a thematic website with the application form and guidelines of WEF is under preparation. We also plan to conduct a briefing to introduce the WEF to the organisations and promote WEF through WoC's social media channels. A practical workshop on how to formulate

proposals will also be arranged for interested applicant organisations.

Advice Sought

13. Members are invited to give views on the above proposed revisions to the implementation details.

Women's Commission Secretariat
April 2023

WoC 02/23
(For discussion)

WOMEN's COMMISSION
Proposed Implementation Details of Women Empowerment Fund

Purpose

This paper seeks Members' views on the proposed implementation details of the Women Empowerment Fund.

Background

2. The Government attaches great importance to the contribution of women to society and the work of supporting women. In the 2022 Policy Address, the Chief Executive announced to substantially increase funding for organising activities to promote women development by the Women's Commission (hereafter "WoC") from \$4 million to \$10 million per annum in the next three years. A Women Empowerment Fund (hereafter "WEF") would be set up to subsidise community projects that support women in juggling their jobs and family life, bringing women's awareness to their own physical and mental health and unleashing their potential.

3. We plan to roll out WEF in the second quarter of 2023 and invite eligible organisations to apply for funding to organise activities. The existing Funding Scheme for Women's Development will be wrapped up upon the completion of all approved activities.

Objectives

4. WEF seeks to subsidise non-profit-making and worthwhile women-related activities which accomplish the following objectives:

- (a) to enable women's development at full strength for assuming different roles in the community;
- (b) to enhance the well-being of women; and

- (c) to raise women's due status, rights and opportunities.

Proposed Implementation Details

Eligibility for application

5. With reference to the existing Funding Scheme for Women's Development and other Government's funding schemes, it is proposed that WEF largely follows the prevailing eligibility criteria. Women's groups and non-governmental organisations meeting the following criteria may apply:

- (a) (i) Registered organisations
 - (1) organisations registered in Hong Kong under the Societies Ordinance (Cap.151, Laws of Hong Kong), or
 - (2) companies incorporated under the Companies Ordinance (Cap.622, Laws of Hong Kong or under the former Companies Ordinance as defined in Cap. 622); or
- (ii) Statutory bodies or organisations formed by statute in Hong Kong; or
- (iii) Recognised community organisations, i.e. organisations registered on the list of charitable institutions or trusts of a public character exempt from tax under the Inland Revenue Ordinance (Cap.112, Laws of Hong Kong); **and**
- (b) the concerned organisations / bodies should be of non-profit-making nature.

Funding cap

6. Noting that the applicant organisations are of varied experience, strengths, abilities and support in organising activities, WEF welcomes project proposals on small or large scales. Projects may cover different districts or the whole territory to create more significant and ongoing impacts, or may focus on a single district. The funding caps for each one-year and two-year large-scale cross-district or territory-wide project are \$400,000 and \$800,000 respectively. For smaller scale projects specializing in a single district, the funding caps of each one-year and two-year project are \$300,000 and \$600,000 respectively.

Themes

7. Themes are set for the projects to be more responsive to the prevailing needs of the communities and more target-oriented. WoC would designate the specific themes each year. For the first year of operation, the following are possible themes :

- (a) assisting women in accomplishing transformations in the job market;
- (b) enhancing women's physical and mental health;
- (c) helping women to cope with different roles in family and society;
- (d) motivating women to enhance their personal attributes, achieve full potential and reach out to help others in society; and
- (e) facilitating the use of new information and communication technology.

Format

8. Applicant organisations can design activities as appropriate for achieving the objective of enabling women to empower themselves. Activities should preferably cover innovative and a wide variety of elements. They could be workshops, sharing sessions, talks, competitions, etc. (visits and publications may also be considered). To facilitate women's attendance in the projects, applicant organisations may seek funding for providing child care services during such activities.

9. All activities under the funded projects should be of non-profit-making nature and should be carried out in Hong Kong.

10. Some activities are not subsidised under the current Funding Scheme for Women's Development such as one-off activities purely for entertainment purpose (e.g. banquets, picnics, etc.), projects that disburse a fixed amount of cash allowance and/or cash relief, etc. This will apply to WEF. To maximise the use of resources, it is also suggested that elements overlapping with the "Capacity Building Mileage Programme" will not be subsidised.

Operational arrangement

11. Two rounds of applications, roughly in the second and fourth quarter

each year, shall be open. Funding proposals should follow the specific themes set by WoC. An eligible applicant organisation / body may submit more than one application in a round, on the condition that it can demonstrate the ability to complete the projects.

12. The Secretariat will conduct a preliminary screening on the funding applications upon receipt and may invite applicant organisations to clarify or provide supplementary document and information so as to facilitate handling. An applicant organisation not submitting the required information within the specified timeframe will no longer be assessed.

13. The Secretariat will arrange the Working Group on Collaboration and Promotion (hereafter “WGCP”) under WoC to assess the eligible applications. WGCP will consider if a project is worth subsidization and whether the proposed items of expenditure fall within the list of permissible items of expenditure and the relevant expenditure limits.

14. As the working group plays a vital role in vetting and recommending WEF applications, it is proposed that the prevailing two-tier declaration of interest be kept. Under the tier-one declaration, members should register their personal interests to the Secretariat when they first join WGCP. Under the tier-two declaration, when an item is under consideration by WGCP, no matter prior to the meeting or at the meeting, the WGCP Convenor and members should declare their actual or perceived interest to the WoC Chairperson (or WGCP) as soon as practicable after he or she has become aware of it.

15. The decision of WoC is final and absolute. Any appeal against the outcome will not be entertained.

Financial arrangement

16. Applicant organisations should refer to the list of permissible items of expenditure and the relevant expenditure limits when making applications and implementing funded projects. The principle of prudence, economy and cost-effectiveness should be duly observed in all expenditure items. Generally speaking, expenditure items that are incurred in organising the activities under the funded projects may be subsidised. The funding allocated to the project shall not be used for recurrent expenditure (i.e. ongoing cost for running an office), purchasing durable assets (e.g. equipment and furniture, etc.), improving facilities or services of the organisations / bodies, producing items for sale and disbursing travelling allowance to participants for attending each activity, etc.

17. The funding will be disbursed on an accountable basis. The financial arrangement for funded projects largely follows the current practice, as summarized below:

(a) Advance payment

To enable the initial outlay of a project and meet cash flow requirements, WoC may, prior to the implementation of the project, allow a single advance payment of not exceeding 50% of the total approved funding amount be made to the funded organisation upon its written application.

(b) Partial reimbursement

Irrespective of whether it has received an advance payment, a funded organisation may apply for up to one partial reimbursement of the funding before completion of the project. The amount of funding to be given out for a project prior to its completion should not exceed 90% of the total approved funding amount.

(c) Final or one-off reimbursement

One-off reimbursement of funding, or the balance of funding where advance payment or partial reimbursement have been made, will be given to the funded organisation on completion of the project.

18. For projects with an approved funding exceeding \$100,000, the funded organisation should submit, in conjunction with the project final report, a financial report with the accounts audited by an independent Certified Public Accountant to certify that the funding is spent in accordance with the approved budget and purposes. Reimbursement will only be made to the funded organisations when all the reports are accepted by WoC.

19. The funded organisation may charge fees from participants to ensure the participation rate of those already enrolled for the activities. The funded organisation should utilise all income in the first instance before the funding under WEF is used to meet project expenses. The same arrangement should apply to sponsorship, cash donations and other funding sources of income. Any surplus funding identified from the project upon its completion should be returned to the WoC.

Monitoring mechanism

20. The funded organisations should exercise utmost prudence and

uphold the principles of openness, fairness, competitiveness and value for money in making procurement with the funding. In particular, they should strictly observe the quotation requirements in making procurement with the funding regardless of the value and accept the lowest conforming offer. Similarly, the funded organisation should observe the principle of openness, fairness and competitiveness on an equal basis in employing staff (if applicable) to assist in implementing the funded projects.

21. To ensure that funding is used in accordance with the approved budget and purposes, the funded organisation should submit to WoC within one month after completion of the project or by the designated date a final report, samples of promotional materials produced for the funded project, photographs of each activity conducted, a financial report of the income and expenditure (including originals of receipts), a summary report on participants' responses to questionnaires, etc. For projects that last for two years, the funded organisation is required to submit a progress report every six months apart from the report on completion of the project.

22. Members of WoC may participate in any related activities of the funded project as observers to examine progress of the project.

23. Failure to comply with any of the terms and conditions of funding or failure to meet the performance indicators of the funded projects may result in the withdrawal of funding and repayment of any advance payment/reimbursement already made to the funded organisation.

Work Plan

24. Subject to views of Members, we will finalize details of WEF with a view to rolling it out in the second quarter of 2023. The publicity plan will be released later. Initial ideas include promotions via briefing sessions and the WoC Facebook page and Instagram.

Advice Sought

25. Members are invited to give views on the above proposed implementation details.

Women's Commission Secretariat
January 2023