



**Feminists for a Just and Equitable Public Policy:
A Study of the Experiences of a Coalition of Nova Scotian
Community-based Women's Groups in the Public Policy
Process**

by

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Executive Summary

Feminists for Equitable and Just Public Policy (FemJEPP) is a coalition of Nova Scotian community-based, equality-seeking women's organizations. Its purpose is to ensure that a broad diversity of women participate effectively, and consistently, in the process of creating more equitable public policies. FemJEPP is, therefore, among the groups working to promote social and economic inclusion in the province. The two major organizational threads in FemJEPP's history are the Women's Action Coalition (WAC), formed in the late 1980s, and the Women's Reference Group (WRG) established early in 1992 to support the Women's Representative to the Nova Scotia Labour Force Development Board (NSLFDB). In 1997, WAC and the WRG collaborated to hold a consultation called "Standing Up and Speaking (SUSO): Women Shaping the Public Policy Agenda", attended by diverse Nova Scotian women's groups and representatives of the provincial government. In May 1998, a Policy Forum organized by the SUSO Follow-Up Committee established Feminists for a Just and Equitable Public Policy to continue to ensure women's meaningful and effective participation in creating public policy.

Activities

FemJEPP and its predecessor organizations have developed a variety of structures, processes, and strategies. Throughout its history, FemJEPP has worked continuously to broaden its membership and to establish effective feminist internal processes for consultation and decision making among diverse equality-seeking community-based women's organizations. It has participated in policy consultations initiated by both the government and FemJEPP. In 1999, FemJEPP and Women's Centres CONNECT! conducted research on Nova Scotian women's participation in the policy process, prepared a workshop based on its findings, and co-ordinated the participation of diverse community-based women's groups from across Canada for Made to Measure, in a national gender equity symposium sponsored by the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health (MCEWH). In June 2000 that research led to the publication of *Steps: Toward a Credible and Inclusive Public Policy Process*. In the fall of 2000, FemJEPP received funding from Status of Women Canada and Health Canada to continue its work of promoting policies designed to improve the economic status of women in Nova Scotia. Through the gender equity symposium and other initiatives, FemJEPP has also begun to develop relationships with academic researchers and has worked to strengthen its relationship with the Nova Scotia Advisory Committee on the Status of Women.

Learning from Experience

Participants in FemJEPP and the organizations that preceded it have developed a body of knowledge and a set of skills that has increased their effectiveness in the policy process. FemJEPP has found constant recruitment of new participants, the development of effective and feminist decision-making processes, and internal communication to be vital to their effective participation in the wider policy arenas. FemJEPP has also recognized the importance of carrying feminist practices and decision-making processes into its relationships with other organizations and institutions such as government

officials and academics. Building personal relationships is regarded as important both inside and outside FemJEPP.

While FemJEPP has learned several lessons for improving women's opportunities for effective participation in the policy process, it has also constantly been reminded that there are barriers that may continue to make participation difficult for women. A variety of factors cause isolation and marginalization including the overwhelming workload of many Nova Scotian women and their lack of access to resources such as transportation and communication technology. Their sense of isolation and marginalization is increased by the government ignoring the advice and information presented by women's groups, even when the government initiated consultation with them. Finally, the 1999 election in Nova Scotia has taught FemJEPP that it must understand all spheres of influence in the policy process and that action must occur in all of these spheres.

Introduction

Feminists for Just and Equitable Public Policy (FemJEPP) is a coalition of about twenty community-based, equality-seeking women's organizations in Nova Scotia formed in June 1998 to ensure ongoing effective consultation on public policy. FemJEPP is, therefore, among the groups working to promote social and economic inclusion in the province. The history of the involvement of most of FemJEPP's member organization is much longer. In May 1997, the Women's Action Coalition (WAC) and the Women's Reference Group (WRG) for the Nova Scotia Labour Development Board, and the YWCA of Halifax, with the support of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and Status of Women Canada, worked together to hold "Standing Up and Speaking Out (SUSO): Women Reshaping the Public Policy Agenda". The next year, the SUSO Follow-Up Committee and others concerned with ensuring Nova Scotian women had an effective role in the policy process established Feminists for a Just and Equitable Public Policy to continue the work. This paper will briefly trace the organizational history of FemJEPP, describe its activities over the past two years, and conclude with a discussion of what members have learned from their experiences with the public policy process.

The Organizational History of FemJEPP

FemJEPP has drawn on the strengths – and learned from the weaknesses – of both WAC and the WRG. The differences in membership, structure, and the issues addressed by these groups shaped FemJEPP's internal processes, political analysis, and strategies. Therefore, a brief history of WAC and the WRG will help us to understand the new organization.

The Women's Action Coalition

The Women's Action Coalition (WAC) was formed following a public forum attended by more than 400 women in October 1986. The forum, held at Henson College, Dalhousie University, was a response to the resignation of Francine Cosman, President of the Advisory Council on the Status of Women. Cosman publicly stated that the government was not committed to women's issues. After meetings between an ad hoc committee of women and Brian Young, Minister Responsible for the Status of Women, failed to achieve significant change, the women at the public forum agreed to establish a province-wide coalition of women's groups, independent of government. In February 1987, when representatives met in Truro, they decided their major function would be to lobby government to promote action on women's concerns. To ensure the effective participation of community-based women's groups throughout Nova Scotia, WAC created an Executive Council selected from member groups in each region. It met monthly in different locations. This structure was both a strength and a weakness for WAC, and administrative difficulties eventually emerged.

WAC's policies and direction were decided at the Annual General Assembly, held each spring in Halifax. Sometimes mid-year meetings were held in other areas of the province. The highlight of each year's Assembly was the lobby of the provincial government and provincial political parties.

From 1988 until the mid-1990s, WAC pursued policy issues concerning women ranging from pay equity to violence against women. By the mid-1990s, in a climate of severe funding cuts for government programs, many members of WAC were preoccupied with keeping community programs afloat, and energy and attention were diverted from the work of the Coalition. In 1996, concerns about the impact of the merger of the Nova Scotia Advisory Council on the Status of Women and the provincial Women's Directorate briefly invigorated WAC. By late 1996, members of the coalition were very receptive to working collaboratively with others who shared their objectives.¹

The Formation of the Women's Reference Group

The Women's Reference Group for the Nova Scotia Labour Force Development Board (NSLFDB) was established early in 1992 after a meeting of the Canadian Congress on Learning Opportunities for Women (CCLOW) in the fall of 1991. CCLOW members, most of whom were involved in training and employment programs for women, were deeply concerned about the cutbacks in federal funding for training and employment programs for women. In early 1992, a year in advance of the first meeting of the NSLFDB, 65 women met in Halifax and drew up plans for a 16-member Women's Reference Group to support the women's representative to the Board.² The WRG also established a Halifax-based steering committee and agreed to hold a series of consultations with women's groups throughout the province.

Despite careful preparation and strong support, the Women's Representative on the Board faced barriers to her effective participation. In fact, the decision-making processes the Board adopted placed considerable power in the hands of the Executive Committee and created difficulties for all the equity representatives. Despite these problems, the Women's Reference Group developed a life of its own. It initiated a series of consultations and programs with the very limited funding from the Human Resources Development Canada (HRDC) to support its work. For example, in 1997, the WRG received funding for the "Counting Women In" economic development project.³

The NSLFDB was short-lived. It first met in 1993, and by 1994 there were already questions about its future. By the fall of 1996, it had become clear that the federal government was planning to withdraw funding for regional boards across the country. In Nova Scotia, the provincial government was unwilling to support its continuation. In March 1997, the Board held its last meeting.

In November 1996, in preparation for the end of the NSLFDB, the WRG held a meeting which made several important decisions. The Women's Representative on the NSLFDB submitted her resignation, noting her dissatisfaction with the way the Board operated, especially the lack of involvement by equity groups in the Board's decision-making process. The Alternate Women's Representative agreed to fill the position for the remaining months of the operation of the NSLFDB. Finally, and most important for the history of FemJEPP, an Ad Hoc Planning Committee was established to determine future action.

Standing Up and Speaking Out

By the end of 1996, several women's organizations and agencies were very concerned about changes in government policies affecting women. With the support of Stella Lord from the Nova Scotia Advisory Committee on the Status of Women (NSACSW) and Pat McInnis, Status of Women Canada, representatives of the WRG Ad Hoc Committee and WAC, met to discuss pooling their resources to hold a provincial meeting to discuss government policy in three areas: social welfare reform, education and training, and funding to women's community-based agencies.

The conference "Standing Up and Speaking Out (SUSO): Women Reshaping the Public Policy Agenda Meeting" was held in Halifax 2-4 May 1997. SUSO produced recommendations for action in all three areas, and established a Follow-Up Committee, chaired by Judy Hughes, to plan further action. In the fall of 1997, Stella Lord arranged a meeting with Hughes, Pat McInnis, Margaret Conrad, who occupied Nancy's Chair in Women's Studies at Mount Saint Vincent University, and representatives from the Women, Work and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax research project (based at Dalhousie University) to discuss the participation of the SUSO Follow-Up Committee in the "Women Work and Well Being Workshop", planned for May 1998. The SUSO Follow-Up Committee decided to hold a Public Policy Strategy Forum in conjunction with the "Women Work and Well Being Workshop". Status of Women Canada provided funding for participants.

Feminists for a Just and Equitable Public Policy

At the SUSO Public Policy Strategy Forum, participants decided to continue their policy work. In June 1998, the SUSO Follow-Up Committee and representatives from other membership organizations established Feminists for a Just and Equitable Public Policy (FemJEPP) to provide a more permanent coalition. Since that time, FemJEPP has met regularly, continued to broaden its membership, identify allies, and develop relationships with government officials, politicians, and academics. It has also embarked on an ambitious series of research and consultation projects.⁴

Gender Equity Project

In the fall of 1998, FemJEPP received funding from Status of Women Canada (SWC) for the development phase of a proposed "Gender Equity Project". The Project was designed to engage a department of the provincial government in creating a framework for effective consultation between government and community groups to ensure that the government would design policies to improve women's lives.

During the development phase, FemJEPP responded to the Department of Community Services plan for reform, *Rebuilding the System*. It also initiated a series of meetings between FemJEPP, other equality-seeking community group representatives and senior staff of the department. Because both FemJEPP and the Department of Community Services regarded these meetings as useful, FemJEPP asked the Department to become a participant in the next phase of the "Gender Equity Project".

Representatives of FemJEPP and the Department of Community Services worked collaboratively to develop a proposal for the second phase. The objectives of this phase were to “identify and remove unnecessary administrative barriers between community agencies and the Department; to explore opportunities to make the Department of Community Services’ policy formulation more inclusive; to demonstrate recognition and support the community sector; and to strengthen relationships with Community Agencies”. Once again, the NSACSW supported FemJEPP’s initiative and SWC provided funding for this phase of the work in the fall of 1999. As a result of the relationships developed between FemJEPP and the Department of Community Services, FemJEPP was invited to participate in a proposed Community Services Reference Group, which by the end of 2000 had not been convened.

Unfortunately the election of a new government in Nova Scotia in the summer of 1999 caused an indefinite delay in the consultation framework project, and FemJEPP had to develop new strategies to pursue its goals of ensuring effective consultation. FemJEPP has continued to strengthen its coalition of equality-seeking, community-based women’s groups in Nova Scotia as well as its relationship with the Department of Community Services, the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women’s Health, the NSACSW, and other like-minded community-based organizations identified in the “Women in Public Policy Project” discussed in the next section. FemJEPP has also made a submission to the Voluntary Planning Fiscal Management Task Force appointed by the new provincial government to justify funding cuts for provincial programs.

An important new goal is “to research, map out and compile, as a research tool, the various spheres of influence in Nova Scotia”. This initiative will survey bureaucracy, academics, politicians, and influential organizations outside government to find effective leverage points for ensuring the input of equality-seeking, community-based women’s groups in both policy formulation and program and service implementation in our province. This work resulted in the preparation of materials which identify the spheres of influence in Nova Scotia and the steps in getting public policy approved and implemented in Nova Scotia. With funding support from the Atlantic Regional Office of the Health Promotion and Programs Branch of Health Canada, FemJEPP was able to hire nine researchers to prepare *Directory: Community-Based Equality Seeking Groups Currently Involved in Public Policy Initiatives that Affect Women*, published in March 2000. FemJEPP has also consulted with two political scientists who have received funding from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council for a project called “Democracy Bytes Back? Women and Political Mobilization in the Digital Era”. Although no formal arrangement has yet been established, FemJEPP has been very interested in working with this group to identify additional communication and technological tools and practices to enhance its work.

The Women in Public Policy (WIPP) Project

In December 1998, the Maritime Centre for Excellence for Women’s Health (MCEWH) invited FemJEPP and Women’s Centres CONNECT! to co-ordinate the participation of diverse women’s groups across the country in the MCEWH’s Gender Equity Symposium, “Made to Measure”, scheduled for October 1999. After careful consideration of its requirements, FemJEPP accepted the invitation. FemJEPP, Women’s Centres CONNECT! and the MCEWH agreed that the project would

only proceed if funds could be secured from Status of Women Canada; that the work would include research on the experience of diverse community-based equality-seeking women's groups in Nova Scotia in the policy process; and finally, that this research would form the basis for a workshop held as part of the Made to Measure Symposium program. MCEWH secured funding from SWC as well as additional financial support for participants from HRDC at both the national and provincial level.

Known as the Women in Public Policy Project (WIPP), this initiative developed a complex structure that included national and local advisory committees, research co-ordinators and community-based researchers. The WIPP research report, *"Never Give Up": Women Making Policy Change. Lessons from the Community, Nova Scotia*, prepared by Anne Webb, documents the experiences, questions, and recommendations of diverse Nova Scotia women who have tried, in some way, to make public policy-related changes in their communities. One hundred and twenty-six women from community-based equality-seeking groups around Nova Scotia volunteered to take part in focus groups or individual interviews with researchers from their communities. The WIPP report provided the basis for "Sharing Our Strengths", a three-part workshop designed to develop a framework for collaboration between community groups, academics, and bureaucrats conducted by FemJEPP at the Symposium. In June 2000, the Women in Public Policy Project published *Steps: Toward a Credible and Inclusive Public Policy Process*. This publication was developed by combining the WIPP research project results and "Sharing Our Strengths" workshop outcomes, both coordinated by FemJEPP and Women's Centres CONNECT!

Women in Transition 2000

In June 2000, FemJEPP and Women's Centres CONNECT! collaborated again to develop "Women in Transition (WIT) 2000", "a provincial forum about women's poverty – why women are poor, how the system keeps women poor, and what government needs to do to end poverty." The forum, a follow-up to a Women's Centres CONNECT! community research project on women's poverty, brought together low income women and their allies to spend two and a half days sharing information, identifying provincial priorities for action, and developing strategies to change public policies that affect women's economic well-being. Funding for this event, attended by about 200 women, was provided by Human Resources Development Canada and the Women's Program of Status of Women Canada.

Women's Economic Independence: An Integrative Policy Approach

In the fall of 2000, FemJEPP received funding from Status of Women Canada for an 18-month project called "Women's Economic Independence: An Integrative Policy Approach". The goal of the initiative is to enable community-based, equality-seeking women's organizations in Nova Scotia to participate pro-actively in the development of public policy which would lead to women's economic independence in this province. The design of the project reflects FemJEPP's ongoing commitment to a collaborative, grassroots, bottom-up process. The first step in the process will be to develop an impact assessment tool to provide a clear analysis of current provincial public policies and the resultant programs and services that directly impact on the social and economic well-being of women and their families. The Atlantic Regional Office of the Health Promotion and Programs

Branch of Health Canada has provided support for this aspect of the work. This work continues to build on the foundation FemJEPP has laid during its first two years, and ensures that work will continue to be adequately supported until at least 2002.

The Legacy of FemJEPP's Work: Learning from the Experience

FemJEPP, and the organizations that preceded it, have pursued a broad range of policy issues of particular concern to women in Nova Scotia, and have worked with a variety of organizational structures. They have learned from these experiences about creating organizational structures and processes, and about building collaborative relationships with government officials and academics. This learning process has led to the creation of new and effective strategies for change, but it has also identified barriers that continue to make women's effective participation in the policy process very difficult. Recently, those working to develop public policy that improves the economic and social well-being of women have begun to use the language of social and economic inclusion to describe their work. FemJEPP's work promotes social and economic inclusion. Attention to the barriers that create social and economic exclusion is a vital part of that work.

Within Women's Community-based Organizations

The most important lessons learned from FemJEPP's experience are in the area of internal relationships. Effective participation in shaping the public policy agenda and ensuring meaningful and ongoing consultation depends on having a strong and broadly-based coalition with effective decision-making processes based on feminist principles, a corps of committed members with the time to support the organization, and the financial resources to sustain the organization and enable it to act quickly on new initiatives. The building of broader coalitions among equality-seeking community-based women's groups is a difficult and time-consuming process. It requires excellent organization and communication, and a commitment to building and fostering personal relationships based on trust. It also requires the financial resources to hire capable staff to implement decisions. Effective action also requires a shared political analysis, which in the case of FemJEPP has been a broad and integrated approach to policy issues that includes an equally important role for economic development and excellent social programs.

Broadening Consultation

FemJEPP participants have learned through their experience of the constant need to broaden the base of the coalition. FemJEPP has a philosophical commitment to include women in all their diversity in the policy process, but experience has shown there are also practical reasons for doing so. Government officials frequently raise questions about who the organization represents. Perhaps more importantly, WIPP demonstrated that joint activities require careful consultation with all participants. Some of the community researchers and focus group participants felt that more consultation at an earlier stage would have enhanced the benefits of the project to their groups.

The broadening of consultation among women's groups includes the need to develop effective consensual decision-making mechanisms. The constant need to meet new challenges and to respond to invitations from other organizations (such as MCEWH's invitation to organize community participation in the Made to Measure Symposium) means that the group must be able to effectively analyze and assess the benefits and costs of such activity in the light of its own principles and goals, and to decide on appropriate actions. FemJEPP members approach these issues with open discussion, extensive consultation at meetings, as well as by phone, fax, and e-mail. They have proven themselves able to make decisions which reflect the concerns of members and permit the group to take action.

Beyond Women's Community-based Organizations

Relationships with Government

FemJEPP has found there is a need to develop personal relationships with civil servants to identify allies and also to develop processes and structures that acknowledge the power imbalances that exist between the representatives of community groups and government. There is also an acknowledgment that these relationships take time to develop and that women's groups must be very attentive to developing processes that ensure a sense of safety and accountability for participants. The success of the collaboration between FemJEPP and the Department of Community Services is the result of the development of relationships with senior officials over several years. For example, Peter Barteaux participated in the SUSO Conference as well as in meetings with senior staff of the department in the fall of 1998.

FemJEPP has also developed relationship with staff and members of the NSACSW through a series of joint initiatives and regular meetings to share information. Often FemJEPP has found that these relationships defy simple categorization. For example, one of the reasons FemJEPP selected the Department of Community Services for the consultation project was because Francene Cosman served both as Minister Responsible for the Status of Women and Minister of Community Services.

Relationships with Academics

FemJEPP applies the same basic principles for establishing processes in its relationship with both government and academics. In both cases, FemJEPP participants have learned there is a danger of an outside group using FemJEPP to further its own agenda. In working with academics, FemJEPP looks for a compatibility of interests and constantly asks how the relationship will advance FemJEPP's interests. FemJEPP used this approach in determining whether it would accept MCEWH's invitation to participate in and contribute to the Made to Measure Symposium. FemJEPP is using the same criteria to establish the relationship with Leonard Preya and Cynthia Alexander in their "Democracy Bytes Back" research project. My own participation in FemJEPP, as the representative of another SSHRC supported research project, "Women, Work and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax", is another experiment in academic-community group relationships. Although

earlier experiences have encouraged FemJEPP to respond to relationships with academics with caution and a careful attention to the compatibility of objectives, it is an area that FemJEPP continues to explore in the hope that it will prove fruitful.

Challenges

The 1999 provincial election reminded FemJEPP members that while the process of developing relationships with government officials and academics has value, they must understand those relationships in the wider social and political context. The program review initiated by Premier John Hamm's Progressive Conservative government and the indefinite delay in the administrative review planned by FemJEPP and the Department of Community Services highlight the need to pay close attention to electoral politics in the province and to develop a thorough understanding of all the "spheres of influence" in the policy process. After years of experience within the policy process, FemJEPP could change course very quickly and adopt new strategies to meet the changed circumstances. Within weeks of the election, FemJEPP drew up new plans to address the changing conditions. It prepared a brief to present to the Voluntary Task Force and developed plans for a new tool to find effective leverage points in the policy process. The importance of some lessons comes through again and again: having a strong coalition with effective decision-making processes and a full-time paid co-ordinator were all essential to FemJEPP's ability to act quickly.

Some problems have proved difficult to solve, and the WIPP report, *"Never Give Up"*, forcefully brought home this lesson. The women who participated in the focus groups spoke of their sense of isolation and the difficulties they faced in participating in the policy process. They also spoke of their frustration that even when they did present briefs, write letters, and participate in consultations with government officials, their ideas, concerns and experiences were not reflected in better policies or better regulations. These are long-standing concerns among community-based equality-seeking women's groups. It was discouraging to hear them re-stated in the late 1990s after women had been working hard and persistently for decades to create just and equitable public policies.

FemJEPP hopes that some of the women's groups that participated in the research will join them and work with the coalition to advance their own goals. But the problems created by distance, the demands of paid work and family responsibilities, and lack of access to resources will continue to create serious obstacles to women's full participation in the policy process. These are ongoing problems, and they have been reflected in the difficulties FemJEPP has often experienced in recruiting new member organizations. Even when organizations have expressed a strong interest and commitment to the organizational and political goals of FemJEPP, it has not always been possible for their representatives to attend meetings held during the day in Halifax. FemJEPP has attempted to respond to the difficulties women face in participating in meetings through teleconference calls, e-mail consultations, and by faxing and mailing information to those who become, in effect, "virtual" members. FemJEPP must continue to address these problems. We hope that the experience of long-standing coalitions will provide practical support and encouragement to new participants.

Conclusion

I have written this report from my perspective as a historian as well as a participant in FemJEPP since its first meeting in June 1998. As a historian, I think that history is important, and my work with and about FemJEPP confirms the importance of understanding what has gone before. Long experience with both the organization of coalitions and trying to influence public policy is part of the collective history of those who came to FemJEPP from WAC and WRG. Before the decision to collaborate in the "Standing Up and Speaking Out" conference, both organizations had experimented with structures and decision-making processes. Coming from a more academic setting where decision making is often hierarchical and unwieldy, I was impressed with how quickly participants in FemJEPP were able to develop a feminist style of consensual decision making and a simple effective organizational structure. This was obviously the result of long experience in working with diverse women's groups. FemJEPP also benefitted from the knowledge of women's organizations and their leadership, government departments and their personnel, and policies and procedures, that members brought to the new organization.

It takes time to develop the skills and knowledge required for effective participation in the policy process. There are no shortcuts to building strong organizations and vital and useful relationships beyond the organization. FemJEPP participants learned from both the internal problems faced by earlier efforts but, equally important, they learned from their dissatisfaction with earlier attempts at consultation with government. It is this history that led FemJEPP to move quickly to develop a consultation project in which community groups would assume a strong role in planning the structure and agenda of consultation with government and to persist in opening new paths when they have been needed. Remarkably, FemJEPP has struck a balance between cynicism at having been frustrated so often, and optimism that persistence, experience and careful research and planning increase the effectiveness of diverse community-based women's groups in creating a just and equitable public policy. It is through this combination of persistence and knowledge that we will begin to develop policies to promote social and economic inclusion.

Report prepared by Janet Guildford, Researcher, "Women, Work and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax Project", funded by SSHRC. Janet Guildford has been involved with FemJEPP since the SUSO Policy Forum in May 1998.

References

1. Deborah Trask, "Women's Action Coalition of Nova Scotia," *Womenshare*, Second Story Women's Centre Newsletter, Bridgewater, N.S., 1990. I would like to thank Deborah Trask and Linda Christiansen-Ruffman for discussing their experiences of WAC with me.
2. In 1991, the Canadian Labour Force Development Board, which consisted of representatives of Human Resources Development Canada, business, labour, and equity

groups, decided to promote the establishment of regional boards. At the national level, equity groups developed reference committees to support their representatives on the Board.

3. The "Counting Women In" project originated to provide ways for women to become involved. In February 1997, three government agencies approved funding for the "Counting Women In Community Economic Development Project". The project received \$70,000 from Status of Women Canada, \$50,000 from the Economic Renewal Agency, and \$40,000 from HRDC.
4. A large number of organizations and individuals have some level of involvement in FemJEPP; and it must be stressed that membership is fluid and shifting. The Steering Committee includes representation from the Pictou County Women's Centre; Atlantic Canada Regional NAPO Representative; Women Centres CONNECT!; Antigonish Women's Resource Centre; "Women, Work, and Social Policy in Post-1945 Halifax Project"; Third Place Transition House; L'Association des Acadiennes de la Nouvelle Écosse; African United Baptist Association Women's Institute; NS Women's Fishnet; CRIAW; Family Support Centre (Bridgewater); DisAbled Women's Network, DAWN Canada; Every Women's Centre; Community Economic Development; and Planned Parenthood. There are several "virtual" or electronic members including, for example, Maggie's Place, Colchester Millbrook Family Treatment Centre; Congress of Black Women of Canada; Pictou County Let Abilities Work; NAWL; St. FX Extension Dept./WLA; the Maritime Centre of Excellence for Women's Health; Cape Breton Women's Community Economic Development Network; the YWCA of Halifax, AVHCAPC and other resources persons and organizations such as the Nova Scotia Advisory Committee on the Status of Women, People Opposed to Poverty, Pictou County; and the South Shore Anti-Poverty Coalition.