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# **NAC Organizational Review:**

## ***The Next Steps***

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Also available on cassette  
and in large print.

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***"It is only in unity that women can affect change."***

## **A Feminist Process to Organizational Review**

The process of the organizational review is intended to enable each woman to have a voice in the future of NAC. This is your report.

NAC is an organization with a vision of a future where barriers to equality, be they economic, social, legal, or any other kind, do not exist. More than 550 women's groups from across the country have joined NAC over the last 15 years because they want to be part of a unified national feminist movement to eliminate those barriers.

Two years ago, NAC made a decision to engage in an open process of organizational review, on the assumption that members would give clear insightful feminist responses to the political and organizational questions that confront the organization.

Some women chose to be part of this review process, by filling out a questionnaire, attending a regional meeting or conference call or meeting with us individually. We thank these women for their contribution to this report.

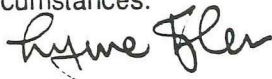
If you have not yet participated then there will be many other opportunities in the future including:

- \* phone or write us with your comments on this report before the AGM
- \* participate in the discussion at the AGM
- \* participate in the next stage of the review after the AGM

Throughout the organizational review we found that there is overwhelming support for NAC, combined with many constructive concerns. The organizational review is a process of building on each other's voices. How we respond to each other's ideas and thoughts is as crucial as the thoughts we are trying to convey. We believe that all of our voices are valid. No woman need be silenced for another woman to be heard. If there are barriers to your participation, speak out. We need to eliminate them.

As much as possible, we want the organizational review to be a feminist process, based on a mutual trust and respect each woman's wisdom. Throughout the country we witnessed this process of building and enabling each other's participation. It is an exciting and challenging time for us as feminists to be part of NAC as she takes the next step in her evolution.

Over the last year we have worked with the NAC's Organizational Review Committee. For us, these women represent the best qualities of NAC and the feminist movement today - their openness, willingness to risk and their clarity. We thank them for their support and respect them for their courage and integrity: Palma Anderson, Maria Barile, Donna Cameron, Judy Campbell, Louise Dulude, Jane Evans, Sandi Kirby, Lorraine Greaves, Rabab Naqui and Nöelle-Dominique Willems. Special thanks to Denise Veilleux who translated the report under extraordinary circumstances.



Lynne Tyler



Joan Riggs

## Why are we talking about Organizational Review?

What will be NAC's role in the women's movement of the 1990's? NAC began in 1972 as a coalition of 42 national groups, most based in Central Canada. Today, after more than 15 years of operation, there are over 550 member groups, most locally based and spread throughout the country. Originally NAC defined itself as a non-partisan lobby group, adopting an umbrella structure and focussing on federal lobbying. Through its lobbying and its growth in membership, NAC has come to be identified as the voice of feminist women in Canada.

To some extent NAC's momentum has outstripped its resources. Women across the country more committed to a strong national women's movement and a national women's organization, NAC. The rapid growth of the women's movement, the incredible complexity of the issues and the concerted right wing attack on women has made it even more urgent to remain strong as an organization and a movement.

NAC has been stretched to its limits over the past few years, due to growing demands and expectations, increased public scrutiny, but no corresponding growth of resources. Due to the pressures on NAC as a lobby group serving women, NAC has had little time to develop appropriate structures and processes to meet the demands of its rapid growth. The result has been overworked and burnout elected representatives and staff, an increasingly concerned membership and a direct challenge to the legitimacy of NAC as the lobby for women by the federal government and right wing forces.

At this stage in the organizational review there must be a fundamental acknowledgement that there is an unequal equation between the amount and utilization of resources and the expectations within NAC. We must begin by accepting what we have: an annual budget of \$800,000 (60- 70% government funding), 550 member groups, 7 1/2 staff and a 25 member volunteer executive committee. We need to clarify expectations - what is the primary function of NAC and identify how resources can best be used. At the same time, we need to add to the resources of the organization.

To be a successful lobby, NAC must simultaneously lead and mirror the women's movement in Canada, be both diverse and cohesive. To do this, the organizational changes must maintain the goodwill and confidence of member groups, and yet open NAC to more diversity and ground itself more thoroughly in the grassroots women's movement.

NAC needs to address the fact that some women feel excluded from and lack ownership of NAC. It is viewed and experienced as elitist, racist, classist and not addressing the needs of many women ( eg., women with disabilities, lesbians, rural women, francophone women outside of Quebec and many women outside of Central Canada). The best qualities of the organization will be maintained and built on to enable the further participation of other women.

The essence of a feminist organization is the women. They are the raw material - the ultimate resource of the organization. At NAC presently we have three human resources to draw upon, the staff, executive and the member groups. The heaviest utilized resource of the organization is the executive. The least utilized and largest are the member groups. Poorly utilized are the staff. We want to put the three into balance and make use of the present structure already in place, namely the AGM, the committees and the regional structure.

We can all attest to the fact that vision, sheer determination, fire and commitment have brought women far. We need now to combine that with strategy, foresight and good management of our limited resources.

This is a proposed blueprint for the next few years; a focusing of energies and resources to strengthen and solidify our organization, NAC.

"By it's very nature NAC has a responsibility to fight for equality for all Canadian women." (member group from Newfoundland)

## What has been the process so far?

This is the second year of the organizational review process. Last year, a Committee struck by the Executive had discussions with member groups in different centres across Canada, and presented a progress report to the AGM.

This year's Organizational Review Committee called for tenders from feminist consultants to help with the process. The consultants hired used the following sources of information and input to develop this report:

### National Groups

- \* 5 out of 69 groups returned the questionnaire
- 7.2 % return rate
- \* Ottawa meeting with national groups - 15 reps from 14 groups

### Northern BC/Yukon

- \* 10 women from 7 groups on conference call
- \* no questionnaires returned from the Yukon

### NWT

- \* 2 out of 5 groups returned the questionnaire.
- 40% return rate
- \* meeting with 4 out of 5 member groups

### Manitoba

- \* 1 out of 10 groups returned the questionnaire
- 10 % return rate

### New Brunswick

- \* Fredrecton meeting - 4 reps from 4 groups
- \* no questionnaires returned
- \* 11 member groups in NB

### British Columbia

- \* 30 out of 67 groups returned the questionnaire
- 45% return rate
- \* Vancouver meeting had 32 representatives for 22 member groups
- \* five interviews with past and present executive members.

### Alberta

- \* 9 out of 36 groups returned the questionnaire
- 25 % return rate
- \* Edmonton meeting - 7 reps from 6 member groups and 2 executive members
- \* Calgary meeting - 9 reps from 7 groups
- \* 5 supplementary interviews with non-member groups.

### Northern Ontario

- \* 3 out of 28 groups returned the questionnaire
- 11% return rate
- \* Sudbury meeting - 6 reps from 5 member groups
- \* Regional call around and meeting with member group from Thunder Bay

### Nova Scotia

- \* Bedford meeting - 6 reps from 6 groups
- \* Antigonish meeting - 19 reps from 19 groups
- \* Executive member letter
- \* no questionnaires returned
- \* 26 member groups in NS

### Southern Ontario

- \* 32 out of 208 groups returned the questionnaire
- 15% return rate
- \* Toronto meeting - 17 reps from 17 groups

### Prince Edward Island

- \* regional meeting - all 4 member groups attended
- \* 3 interviews with member and non-member groups
- \* 1 interview with executive member
- \* no questionnaires returned

### Additional information

- \* meeting with present executive 22 out of 26 members
- \* interviews or letters of 3 past and present Presidents
- \* 41 out of 900 Friends of NAC returned the questionnaire
- 4.6% return rate
- \* meetings with Ottawa and Toronto staff
- \* background material from the past years about organizational review.

### Saskatchewan

- \* 2 out of 15 groups returned the questionnaire
- 13 % return rate
- \* Regina meeting 7 reps from 5 member groups
- \* 2 interviews with member groups
- \* 2 interviews with past and present executive members

### Quebec

- \* 2 out of 51 groups returned the questionnaire
- 4% return rate
- \* independent study conducted in Quebec
- \* 1 meeting with executive member

### Newfoundland

- \* 3 out of 21 groups returned the questionnaire
- 14% return rate
- \* 3 calls to member groups

### Principles / Working Assumptions

All of our recommendations and suggested options are based on the five principles cited below:

**Accessibility and representation of the diversity** of women's experience in Canada: All barriers to women's participation in NAC would be identified and dismantled. Women would be equally validated and made visible, including women with disabilities, women of colour, lesbians, women at home and women who have not been viewed as being traditionally part of the movement.

"We yearn to belong to a strong democratic national feminist organization."  
(member group, Saskatchewan)

**Democracy:** Everyone would have an equal opportunity to influence and make decisions should they so choose, regardless of geographical or other factors.

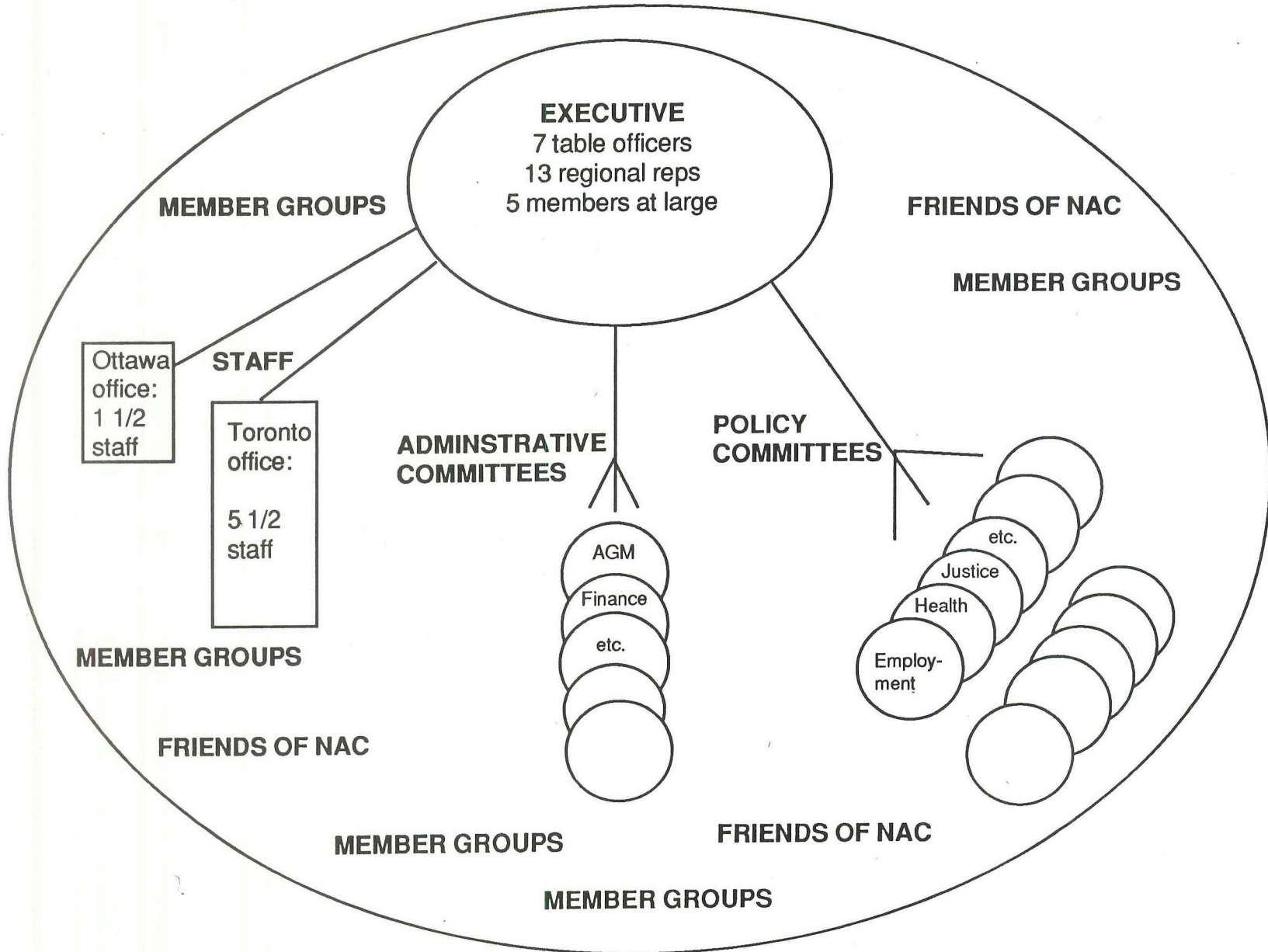
**Accountability:** It would be clear who makes what decisions. Everyone would be able to ask the decision-maker questions about the decision. Lines of decision-making, implementation and accountability should be clear.

**Ownership by member groups:** Member groups would take more responsibility and participate more in decisions and their implementation.

**Empowerment:** NAC's processes and structures would be based on the strength that comes from women finding their own voices, and being enabled to create their lives as they choose.

# ORGANIZATION CHART

## ORGANIZATION CHART OF NAC



## What Should NAC Do?

### Lobbying

NAC's primary function is lobbying the federal government, and it spends most of its time and resources doing that. The need to have a unified voice speaking for all women is the major reason for many member groups joining and staying with NAC.

How does NAC carry out this role? Presently, through the **annual lobby at the AGM**, and **ongoing lobbying**, including briefs and meetings with the Prime Minister, Ministers, Committees, MP's, and others in the federal government.

The key to an effective lobby group is to externally appear to have the consensus voice of all groups, while internally managing and developing the diversity of voices of members. How effective is NAC at doing this? What factors are influencing NAC's effectiveness?

**Externally**, NAC's credibility as the unified voice of concerned women in Canada has been undermined by:

- 1) the right-wing attack against NAC, trying to paint the organization as extremist and fringe
- 2) the 1987 lobby, in which NAC was no longer an equal negotiator with politicians. (government scheduled constitutional debate during lobby, NAC delegates demonstrated at Prime Minister's house and at the House of Commons)
- 3) the increasing perception that NAC is politically partisan, and linked to one political party.

**Internally**, NAC faces a series of other challenges:

- 1) Does NAC want to highlight only women who are already articulate or also enable all women to speak? NAC, as a traditional lobby group, **speaks on behalf of member groups**, as their voice. Many member groups trust NAC to come up with a good position based on basic principles and beliefs held by all feminists.

Another role is to **empower member groups to speak with their own voices**, for example

- training NAC members in how to lobby on their own behalf,
- NAC support actions initiated at the grassroots level,
- more diverse voices in the preparation of NAC briefs, positions, etc.
- allowing member groups to speak on behalf of NAC, as long as they present the position adopted by NAC,
- facilitating direct access by member groups to federal government on an ongoing basis.

"the complex task of defining issues tends to exclude less educated and less politically involved women particularly at the point of strategy formulation and/or in the process of attempting to meet the demands of government agendas."  
(Saskatchewan member group)

- 2) A frail regional structure makes it hard for NAC to quickly mobilize massive public support for any of its positions. This limits NAC's lobbying strategies, and also undermines its credibility as representing millions of women.

- 3) Many organizations at both the local and the national level offer considerable expertise in their particular areas, eg. Canadian Congress for Learning Opportunities for Women, National Organization of Immigrant and Visible Minority Women. NAC will need to develop a reliable and consistent method of co-operation, to be able to respond to leadership by member groups.

## Annual Lobby

Presently, the annual lobby is held right after the AGM, and all delegates are urged to attend. There are two views of the annual lobby as it now stands:

- 1) it was very empowering to collectively face MP's, seeing women united when meeting the government was deeply moving and impressive,
- 2) it was a disaster: antiquated, facile, ineffective, alienated even supportive MP's, an embarrassment, must stop it, either change the lobby or admit we are doing window-dressing with no hope or intention of political change.

Although many women find it empowering. Is it still an effective tool to change policy? This raises an obvious question: What is the objective of the lobby?

- 1) to effect political change at the federal level?
- 2) to learn how to lobby?
- 3) to be empowered ?
- 4) to attract media attention?

Several member groups have suggested that the lobby should be totally re-designed in order to meet the first objective (eg, meet in small groups with key MP's, caucus committees. etc.), and that some other actions can be undertaken to achieve the others (eg, a rally, regional workshops on how to lobby, etc.) The annual lobby should be seen in the context that NAC tries to influence policy 365 days a year and what is the impact of that singular event on that lobbying function?

## Recommendations:

1. Re-examine and diversify the entire lobbying function, including the annual lobby, using
  - a) advice and expertise from NAC's Parliamentary Liaison staff and others,
  - b) input and involvement of member groups,
  - c) develop a co-operative method to respond to leadership by member groupsin order to determine the objectives of the lobby, alternative approaches and the implications of various alternatives.

**Secondary Functions:** These remaining areas of work are secondary functions to NAC, in the sense that they have developed over the years to support and enable the primary function - lobbying. However, to member groups, these functions are often more important and are certainly more real to them in their daily work.

## 2. Information Sharing and Research

Presently information and research shared in NAC primarily relates to the policies and actions of NAC and not the discussions, debates and ideas within the women's movement in general.

Presently, the primary publications of NAC are:

- 1) **Feminist Action**, a bilingual magazine published seven times a year, containing committee and regional reports and articles on current issues.
- 2) **Action Bulletins**, bilingual one-page information sheets, sent out as needed, explaining an urgent issue and asking member groups and other readers to take specific action.
- 3) special publications of various sorts: occasional pamphlets published by Committees, special kits, briefs and position papers.

Many member groups suggested that NAC's role was to lobby on issues or basic principles on which we all agree, and to stimulate information exchange and dialogue on the issues on which we do not agree. Thus NAC would provide a forum for the discussion and exchange of ideas, viewpoints, information and strategies **among** member groups, and not simply provide information about present NAC policy. Groups did not want to limit information sharing to just print material and suggested: computer links, TV and radio shows and a national women's news service.

Many member groups look to NAC to see what issues they should be concerned with, and for feminist analysis on these issues. This is particularly true of new and emerging issues, and issues



not immediately identified as "women's issues", like the Meech Lake Accord. Many member groups feel that they need NAC to tell them what the current issues are that they should be concerned about, in terms of what the federal government is up to. Other member groups feel that, although that is helpful, the current issues for the feminist movement are determined as much at the grassroots as they are by the federal government. NAC needs to clarify who carries out its policy research, how it is done and how member groups should be involved.

(Further suggestions for publications are being given to the **Feminist Action** editorial committee)

**3. Diversity and Solidarity**

Some groups join NAC as a gesture of solidarity and commitment to the unity of women, without necessarily expecting or needing any concrete benefits.

Other groups - most often those groups that are geographically isolated - join to overcome a strong sense of isolation. For them, the sense of being part of a larger, national, feminist organization, although very intangible sometimes, is extremely important to their sanity. They feel they are not alone, and they get emotional and psychological nourishment to continue their work locally.

NAC has relied on and easily attracted certain types of women, while not actively enabling other women's participation. Some women feel isolated, that their voice is not heard. They feel that networking and solidarity is going on but not with them. NAC needs to take a variety of measures, some of which are outlined in this report, to ensure the involvement of all women in the women's movement in NAC.

"There are many women's movements, but there is not yet one movement that expresses the views of all women."  
(non-member group, Alberta)

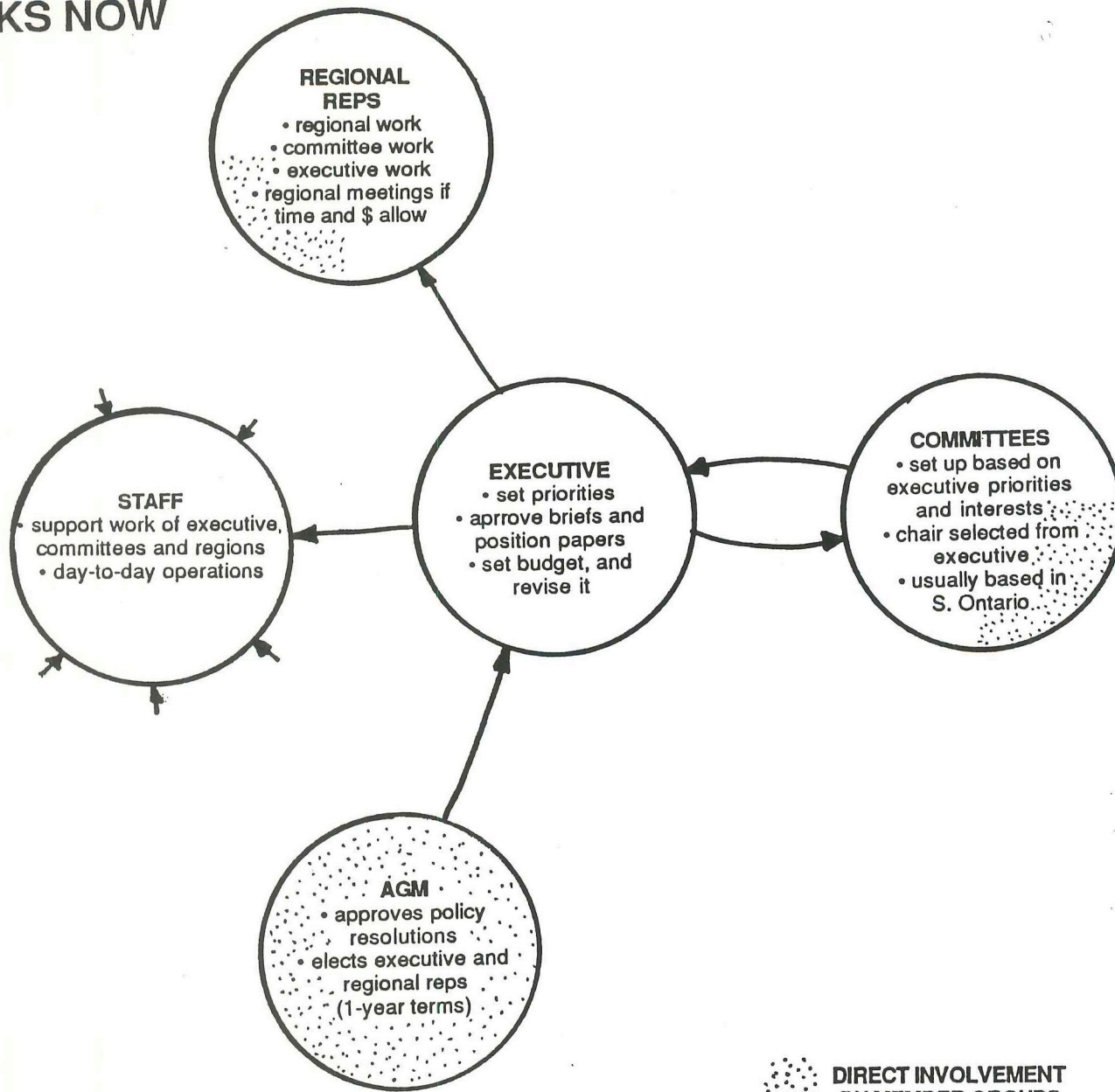
There is a incorrect assumption throughout Canada and particularly among the executive that Quebec women are synonymous with francophone women. In fact there is a clear constituency that can be called Quebec women but it excludes francophone women from outside of Quebec. It will be important to recognize and serve both groups.

**4. Management and Administration of the Organization**

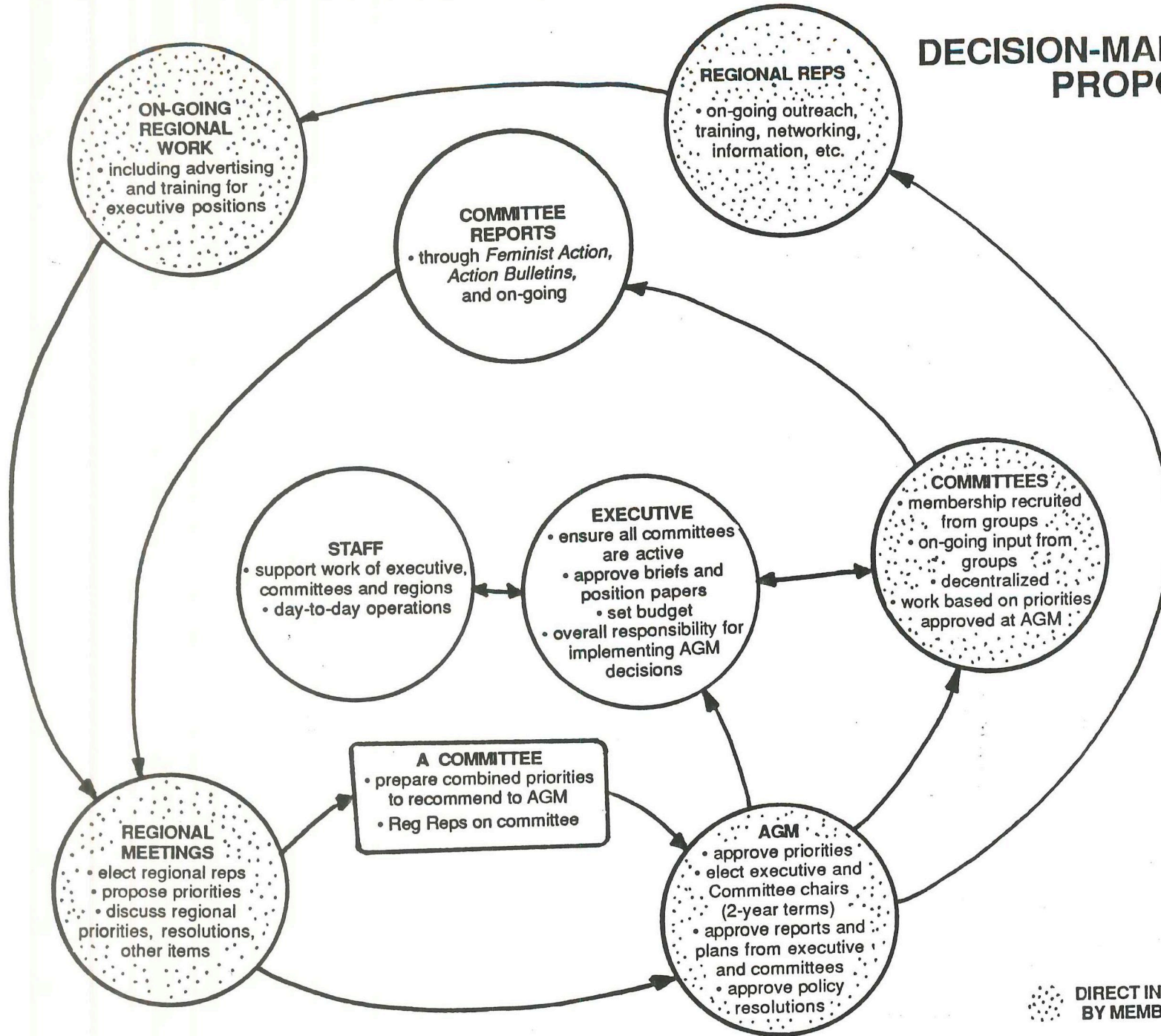
Although this was not a function mentioned by any member group, it is clear that as with all households, all organizations require someone or some group to do the housework: the administrative support work of the organization. Presently, there is no clearly identified group or individual responsible for management, thus making administrative work both invisible and confusing. Management functions of setting priorities, deciding on how limited resources will be used and other decision-making has been done in an ad hoc fashion, in part by executive, committees and staff. As a democratic organization, management functions need to be at least minimally directed by the members and implemented and maintained by the elected members. Administrative tasks need to be defined, delegated and acknowledged.

<b>Decision -Making within NAC</b>	
<b>Presently</b>	<b>Proposed</b>
<p>The decision-making structure of NAC is top-heavy, over utilizes executive members, and under-utilizes its greatest resource, the member groups. Overall the decision making process is inconsistent and unclear and does not make the best use of the women in the organization.</p>	<p>The approach proposed is based on the four principles outlined earlier: accessibility, accountability, democracy and ownership. It also tries to make better use of the human resources in NAC and the existing structures: AGM, regions, executive, staff, committees.</p>
<p><b>Setting Priorities:</b> Currently there is no formal priority setting process. In the past the executive committee set priorities on an ad hoc basis. This year the executive formed a Priorities Committee to temporarily remedy this problem. As a democratic organization NAC must take priority direction from the membership.</p>	<p><b>Setting Priorities:</b> Member groups would provide the primary direction through regional meetings and a formal approval of priorities for the upcoming year at the AGM. Executive and committees would be guided by the priority setting process.</p>
<p><b>Setting Policy:</b> There are two parts to the policy setting process in NAC.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) Resolutions passed at the AGM form the basis for policy papers and positions.</li> <li>2) Briefs and position papers are developed by committees and approved by the executive</li> <li>3) Because of time constraints at the AGM and too many resolutions, some policy resolutions are passed referred to the Executive for approval.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Setting Policy:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) fewer resolutions at the AGM to focus discussion and avoid leaving the executive with resolutions to be considered after the AGM,</li> <li>2) more involvement of member groups in policy research, briefs, etc. by committees,</li> <li>3) set criteria which executive must meet in order to overturn a committee's decision/brief/etc.</li> <li>4) guidelines for committees</li> </ol>
<p><b>Resource Allocation:</b> The executive makes all budget decisions. It approves and frequently revises the annual budget. Presently, there are few budgetary guidelines and financial decisions are based on lobbying and unequal information and not on objective criteria or priorities set by member groups. Secretary of State through its financial guidelines places some restraints on which areas of NAC's work can receive funding.</p>	<p><b>Resource Allocation:</b> Establish clear financial guidelines for executive, committees, and staff so everyone's authority and accountability is clear. Establish annual budget process, so financial decisions are linked to well-thought and clearly established workplans. Link allocation of human and financial resources to priorities set by member groups.</p>

# DECISION-MAKING IN NAC: HOW IT WORKS NOW



# DECISION-MAKING IN NAC: PROPOSED



 DIRECT INVOLVEMENT BY MEMBER GROUPS

The following seven key recommendations summarize the changes presented in the previous diagram and are the common threads that unite all of the recommendations in the rest of the report. Each section in the remainder of the report contains a description of the current structure, its strengths and weaknesses, and detailed recommendations that elaborate the seven below.

## Key Recommendations

The overall purpose of all recommended changes is to create an integrated, accessible and accountable decision-making process in NAC.

1. Establish a process for setting annual priorities for NAC.
2. Develop comprehensive guidelines for executive and committees for financial and policy decisions.
3. Develop a more effective approach to the lobby function.
4. Strengthen the regional structure of NAC.
5. Increase member participation by ensuring more avenues of participation and by ensuring all avenues are equally accessible to all members.
  - reworking of the committee structure
  - changes to the Annual General Meeting
  - other related changes
6. Clarify the management function of NAC. Develop clear job descriptions for staff, executive and committee members.
7. The functions of the executive needs to be defined including; managing staff, priority setting, policy making and resource allocation. The role of the executive would be balanced between a leadership in policy (defining and representing issues) and leadership in process (enabling full participation of members in all aspects of the organization and ensuring clear, responsible processes)

### Implementation Strategy

Key recommendations	Year 1	Year 2 +
<p>Overall</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Establish a process for setting annual priorities.</li> <li>2. Develop comprehensive guidelines for executive and committees for financial and policy decisions.</li> <li>3. Develop a more effective approach to the lobby function.</li> <li>4. Strengthen the regional structure.</li> <li>5. Increase member participation by ensuring more avenues of participation and ensuring all avenues are equally accessible to all members.</li> <li>6. Clarify the management function of NAC. Develop clear job descriptions.</li> <li>7. The primary role of the executive at this time should be to provide leadership on process and the members would provide leadership on policy.</li> </ol>	<p>Develop detailed implementation strategy (Organizational Review Committee)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• regional meetings set regional priorities.</li> <li>• consolidate regional priorities.</li> <li>• Finance Committee develops financial guidelines</li> <li>• set up committee with Parliamentary Liaison examine lobby function, options, etc.</li> <li>• investigate costs and other implications of options for regional structure</li> <li>• at least one regional meeting per region</li> <li>• relieve regional reps of committee responsibilities</li> </ul> <p>Re: AGM</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• prepare detailed study and recommendations re: travel costs</li> <li>• prepare procedural changes</li> <li>• AGM Committee to review other suggestions and recommendations</li> </ul> <p>Re: Committees, executive</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• investigate options for committee structure</li> <li>• begin to implement measures to make committees and executive more accessible.</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Executive to study management options</li> <li>• write job descriptions for executive, regional reps, staff, and committee members</li> <li>• develop clear description of all aspects of role of executive</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1989 AGM: present and approve national priorities.</li> <li>• establish policy guidelines for of executive and committees.</li> <li>• 1989 AGM: interim report of the committee, decisions as needed</li> <li>• 1990: continue work report to AGM as needed</li> <li>• 1989 AGM: constitutional changes</li> <li>• choose an option for regional structure</li> <li>• 1990: constitutional changes</li> <li>• 1989 AGM: decision on travel, constitutional changes, election of committee chairs</li> <li>• choose committee structure</li> <li>• report to 1989 AGM on model, continue work</li> <li>• begin to develop personnel manual</li> </ul>

IMPLEMENTATION

# Rationale and Detailed Recommendations

## Regional Structure

**Presently** The regional structure is totally dependent on the regional representative and her ability to carry out a multi-faceted job with little or no direction or support.

### REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVES

There are 13 regional representatives on the NAC executive. They are women who are elected for one year terms at the AGM by their region. The job description for regional reps includes:

- 1) to make regional concerns heard nationally and
- 2) to make national concerns heard regionally

"Essentially you are an unpaid MP for women in your region of Canada. You are expected to do this without much local office support, with a small budget and in addition to your paid work and/ or homemaking responsibilities." (Orientation package for new executive members, 1987-88 executive)

In addition to her regional responsibilities, the regional rep has other responsibilities related to her duties as an executive member, (see Executive section) including attending 8 executive meetings a year, for a minimum of a sixteen day commitment, not counting days for travel.

### Concerns

1) lack of contact between regional representatives and groups, due to lack of money or time. Some regional reps have found it impossible to have even one contact with each group in their year in office. Communication is especially difficult in geographically large regions such as Northern Ontario which spans across the width of the three prairie provinces.

2) unrealistic expectations of the regional rep, and no support structure. The regional rep clearly has to have, at least, a minimum of good communication and media skills, a strong knowledge of the groups in her region and outreach and organizing skills. She is also expected to be able to prepare and manage a budget, chair a meeting, lobby, research and write briefs and letters and anything else that people can think of.

### Recommendations:

1. Clarify the job description of regional reps, including tasks, responsibilities, hours expected to work, accountability, etc. and enable regional reps to focus on their work in the regions by:
  - a) allowing job-sharing of the regional rep position, or creating a support structure around the regional rep, such as an advisory committee to keep her updated on regional issues
  - c) relieving regional reps of the obligation to chair committees
  - c) reducing the number of executive meetings regional reps are expected to attend.
2. When NAC publicizes for regional rep positions, potential candidates should be informed of the job description and hours required, and should be advised to view NAC as their primary volunteer commitment for that time frame.
3. Regional reps should be nominated and elected at regional meetings, ensuring greater participation from member groups. ( Another method may be needed for NWT, Yukon/Northern BC, Nfld/Labrador and Northern Ontario)

**REGIONAL SUPPORT STRUCTURE:**

Little to no regional structure presently exists in NAC. Some regional representatives rely on an organizational base in their regions, such as Saskatchewan where the regional representative has made use of the Saskatchewan Action Committee as a resource base for holding meetings, photocopying, typing, or use of computer and volunteers. Other regions, such as Nova Scotia, have attempted to create or link into a provincial coalition of women's groups. There is one 1/2 time staff position in the Toronto office which is supposed to provide special assistance to the twenty-two committees and 13 regions.

Below are three options for a regional structure. All have the same functions:

- 1) **meet member groups' present needs** - responding to local initiatives and needs and relating them to national campaigns
- 2) **discuss and develop priorities** for upcoming year for their region and for the AGM national discussion
- 3) **outreach** to potential new member groups
- 4) provide **training**- development and encouragement of potential future leadership. All women require some training before stepping into an executive position at NAC.

<p><b>OPTION 1. Enable participation in a centralized structure</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) one regional meeting or conference call per year.</li> <li>2) greater personal or telephone contact between regional rep. and each member group</li> <li>3) regional reps spend less time at committees and executive meetings and more time in the regions.</li> <li>4) increase the budget to the region             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) travel cost to regional meetings covered for all groups</li> <li>b) childcare costs</li> <li>c) groups can call regional reps collect</li> </ol> </li> <li>5) national committee structure would include             <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) some committees based in regions for one or two years</li> <li>b) telecommunications - women from all regions can participate in a committee*</li> </ol> </li> </ol>	<p><b>OPTION 2 Partially decentralized</b></p> <p>All of the proposals in Option 1 plus</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) more than one regional meeting or conference call</li> <li>2) local meetings</li> <li>3) increase number of regions eg. split Northern Ontario into two regions)</li> <li>4) sponsor regional conferences, speakers and other events</li> <li>5) each city would have access to a computer link</li> <li>6) housed with and linked with presently existing provincial coalitions or councils</li> <li>7) related increases in regional budgets</li> </ol>	<p><b>OPTION 3 Capacity to work at regional level</b></p> <p>All of the proposals in Options 1 and 2, with the following additions and changes</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1) regionally based staff and regionally based offices</li> <li>2) research, production of material (eg. regional newsletter)</li> <li>3) direct lobbying at provincial level</li> <li>4) all groups can be connected by computers</li> <li>5) regional meetings be allowed to submit resolutions</li> <li>6) regional constituency offices - regional representatives operate as "MP's" in constituency office.</li> <li>7) national committees would have sub-committees in every region, and a mechanism for them to work together</li> </ol>
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**Recommendation:** Adopt one of the three options for a regional structure.

\* Whenever teleconferences are mentioned in this report, consideration must be given to women who are hearing impaired and who will need interpreters or other measures to have equal access to teleconferences.



### Annual General Meeting

**Presently:** AGM is essentially the **only** opportunity for member groups to decide policy or influence decisions/actions by the Executive. The AGM is always held in Ottawa, and travel costs prevent most member groups outside central Canada from participating on a regular basis, although there is a travel subsidy available from NAC.

AGM consists of workshops (usually about 1/4 of the agenda time) and the business meeting, primarily resolutions.

The annual lobby takes place immediately after the AGM, but is treated separately in this report (see "Lobby").

It is always exhilarating to gather 500 women. The AGM is just such an opportunity, enabling women to network, find out information, learn and have fun. Member groups greatly appreciate this opportunity but also have concerns.

### Concerns

- AGM is not accessible to most women in Canada: women outside Ontario, francophones, poor women, women of colour, first time delegates etc., etc., etc.
- procedures are unclear and to some extent inappropriate for consensus-building in a feminist organization. Although the parliamentarian last year did a wonderful job in the view of many delegates, there was also a strong feeling that Roberts Rules, are "rules for civilized war"

"The AGM was a total misuse of the democratic process." (member group, Newfoundland)

"NAC is a feminist organization that does not have a feminist process" (member group, Ontario)

"Feeling that there is no place for people who are less than powerful at NAC."

- many members called for a shorter, more focussed business meeting (with emphasis on setting priorities for the coming year), and more time for workshops and small groups

"We feel turned off by the business meeting, too big, too much we don't know, end up feeling stupid". (member group, British Columbia)

- physical set up and location excludes some women with disabilities, older women and anyone who is not an Olympic athlete.
- format of meetings excludes women who are not familiar and comfortable with parliamentary procedure, long speeches, adversarial debating style, and public speaking in front of 500 women

"First time delegates have absolutely no idea what is going on!" (member group, Ontario)

### Recommendations

1. Ensure that the AGM is accessible to all member groups

- a) **develop ways to reduce travel cost as a barrier to participation:**

OPTION 1: Partial subsidy (this option closest to present practise)

- every group pays a flat rate portion of their travel (eg, \$100) and NAC covers the rest
- funds to cover this (approx. \$100,000) would come from the existing Secretary of State travel subsidy and re-allocation from elsewhere in the NAC budget, and permission would need to be negotiated from Secretary of State

**OPTION 2: Regional travel allocations**

- each region would be given a sum of money proportional to the number of groups in their region and their travel costs to attend the AGM, but less than the total amount required to get all their groups to the AGM
- each region would determine the allocation of funds among their groups
- funds to cover this would be the same as Option 1

**OPTION 3: Travel pool**

- the travel cost of all delegates would be paid out of a travel pool, and all delegates would contribute equally to the pool
- delegates would have to pay the travel pool - they would not be allowed to attend if they did not.
- the cost each delegate would have to pay needs to be worked out, but would be approximately \$200-\$300
- A variation on this would be to develop a sliding scale where some groups pay more than the set travel pool fee while others pay less.

**b) Develop a more democratic process and a consensus process**

- provide more background information on resolutions
- offer workshops to discuss resolutions, so more delegates can speak on the issues
- introduce procedures to eliminate repetitious debate on resolutions and "grandstanding" (eg. eliminate yes/no mikes which imply adversarial positions)
- consider requiring a 75% or 2/3 majority vote for policy resolutions.
- limit the number of times executive committee members speak.
- reduce the number of resolutions

**c) Reflect the diversity of women's experience including race, class, sexual orientation, urban, rural, region, disability, etc. through various measures including:**

- selection of resource people, workshop topics, language, agenda, resolutions, priorities
- some of the procedural changes above
- executive and committees and chairs of the plenary and workshops must set an example of facilitating participation by all women
- have more caucuses (regions, women of colour, etc.) as a means for various groups of women to develop their views, voices, and then articulate these to the overall group

**d) ensure physical location and set-up is accessible to all women, building on what is already done:**

- sign language interpreters work at the AGM, and the women who are hearing impaired be allowed to sit where they can see them;
- all of the location be wheelchair accessible
- all printed material be available in big print and on audio tape

**e) make the AGM accessible to francophone women through improved translation and other measures (see Quebec report)**

2. Approve priorities for NAC at the AGM, based on a regional process enabling input from all member groups (see "Decision-Making in NAC: Proposed").

Further detailed suggestions for the AGM have been referred to the AGM committee. (eg. Orientation session, social activities, workshop process and topics, etc.) One suggestion was to move the location of the AGM each year, thus providing greater visibility in all regions, potentially higher media profile and an opportunity for outreach. This suggestion should be seriously considered once the future of the annual lobby has been determined.

**The Mid year meeting**

The mid-year meeting is much appreciated by member groups. In particular:

- the smaller size
- more personal contact with executive members
- no business meetings

Once other changes, namely to the regional structure and the AGM have been implemented, it will be time to examine the function of the mid-year meeting.

### Committee Structure

Presently:

<p><b>What staff support is there for committee work?</b> There is one 1/2 time staff position in Toronto who is responsible for providing special support to committees and regions. The parliamentary liaison in Ottawa is an integral part of the lobby aspect of committee work.</p>	<p>There are <b>22 committees</b>.</p> <p>Committees have no guidelines for developing workplan, budget, position papers.</p>	<p><b>How are committees formed?</b> By the direction of the membership at the AGM or by the direction of the executive.</p>
	<p><b>Who chairs committees?</b> Under current practice, every committee must be chaired by a member of the executive; however committees can appoint co-chairs who are not executive members.</p>	<p><b>Who can be a member of a NAC committee?</b> Theoretically, anyone can sit on a committee. However, due to limited budgets and the present centralized structure of committees, many women are excluded from participation.</p>
<p><b>Deciding the committee budget.</b> The budget is based in part on Secretary of State guidelines and in part the ability of an executive member to lobby the executive for funds. This has become an unfair process because of the unequal information shared among executive members.</p>	<p><b>Where are committee meetings held?</b> Most committees are based in Toronto, although some committees have been based in other cities, or have relied on conference calls in lieu of face to face meetings.</p>	<p><b>Accountability :</b> Operates on the basis that an executive committee member will chair the committee thus ensuring that the budget is spent based on an approved workplan. This has not consistently happened. Committees report at the AGM.</p>

Committees have been based on volunteer labour which has produced invaluable reports for the development and implementation of policy for NAC.

**Recommendations:**

**1) Rework the entire committee structure and connect committees to the priorities set at AGM**

OPTION 1 - priority setting

a) Priorities should be discussed regionally and decided on at the AGM, and should inform which committees are formed.

OPTION 2 - A three tiered committee structure

a) The establishment of five standing committees (eg, economic, social, etc) that would perform the reactive function responding to the government's demands for briefs and position papers.

b) the establishment of priority committees with the task of in-depth policy development according to the priorities set at the AGM. Not reactive but based on one or two year workplan.

c) the establishment of a standing committee on feminist political process to develop, encourage and model feminist principles in all aspects of the organization.

**2. Make Committees accountable**

- a) There needs to be guidelines provided for all committees.
- b) Executive could only overturn committee report if
  - 1) factually inaccurate
  - 2) inconsistent with AGM direction/present policy.
- c) Committee chairs should be elected at the AGM based on their expertise in the area and their proposed workplan.
- d) Executive members should function in committees but not necessarily as chairs, but as co-chairs or liason between committee and executive.

**3. Make committees accessible:**

- a) Membership for all committees be solicited through advertising in **Feminist Action** and at the AGM
- b) regional participation from interested member groups through:
  - conference calls
  - corresponding members
  - regionally based committees
  - sub-committees in different regions with a mechanism for them to communicate.

**4. Maximize Resources of Committees:**

- a) If a committee is in a region, use member group resources to get committee work done.
- b) rely on expertise of member groups in developing position papers and research.

**5. Recognize the diversity of the women's movement in policy issues.**

- a) constituency representation on committees. (eg. women of colour are represented)
- b) if a consensus position cannot be reached, then the various positions be prepared and shared with member groups
- c) minority reports be written on some issues

## Staff

### Presently

There are two NAC offices, the national office in Toronto with 5 1/2 staff and the office in Ottawa with 2 staff.

Presently, no one is clearly identified as management in the NAC organizational structure, thus leading to a number of recurring problems. There are disjointed, incomplete and contradictory personnel policies and unclear job descriptions. The direction given to the staff comes from many sources, and consequently is often confusing, contradictory and highly changeable. Staff work is invisible and under-valued and the skills and expertise of staff are often under-used.

The staff reported to the organizational review consultants that they expect to shortly receive interim certification as a bargaining unit affiliated with CUPE (Canadian Union of Public Employees). The staff intends to address, through negotiating a collective agreement, such issues as workload, job descriptions and staffing requirements. The staff believe that such action is necessary to maximize use of staff resources in attaining organizational goals while at the same time providing for staff satisfaction and minimizing staff turnover.

### Recommendations

1. Develop clear job descriptions for all staff positions.
2. Develop a comprehensive, clear personnel manual covering all personnel policies and practices.
3. After the NAC membership has determined the organization's primary purpose, **determine the staff roles in relation to that purpose**, and consider the need for more staff, for
  - a) administrative support
  - b) responding to members' needs - a service organization
  - c) policy research for committees and executive
  - d) lobbying
  - e) a combination of the above.

STAFF

## Executive

### Presently:

The executive committee consists of 25 women: 7 table officers (president, 3 vice-presidents, secretary, treasurer, past-president) 13 regional representatives, and 5 members at large. All, except the past-president are elected annually at the AGM.

The executive is the decision-making body that operates between the AGMs. They meet eight times a year, chair committees and perform various other functions. Their policy role includes approving briefs and position papers and dealing with politicians and the media. They have become the most over-utilized resource of the organization.

Many women across the country voiced their admiration for the executive and their level of expertise and knowledge of the issues. The reality of being on the executive is an experience of simultaneously being around powerful and intelligent women and a feeling of an incredible sense of personal powerlessness and lack of collective strength.

The top heavy structure of NAC and the increased demands have made the executive committee dysfunctional because of unclear job descriptions, inadequate orientation/training, unrealistic expectations and limited resources. The dedication of NAC executive members is obvious as they have been the primary implementors of action in the organization.

### Inside the Executive

#### Workload

At the present time executive members are expected to be: managers, public speakers, community organizers, chairpersons for committees, well-informed on a wide variety of issues and have the ability to develop and manage a budget for a region or committee. This creates a heavy workload and can lead to frustration, disappointment and burnout.

The lack of clarity of the management function and the absence of job descriptions for executive have led to the misuse of executive meetings. For example, the same decision gets made repeatedly and detailed administrative decisions are being made without sufficient information.

#### Training

The way NAC presently operates favors certain women being part of the leadership positions, specifically professionally skilled women.

" One problem maybe that to operate effectively, at the national level responding to government policies and programs, NAC implicitly recruits/attracts people with certain know-how and organizational skills. This mode of operation may exclude women of colour, women from other countries, working class women, who haven't developed the skills and know-how to participate effectively in NAC."  
(New Brunswick member group)

Orientation and training would assist every executive member in understanding and being able to work effectively in the organisation. If NAC does not make a commitment to training, then only certain women will benefit from the traditional methods of training outside of the organization and therefore be prepared to run for executive offices. It is no coincidence that five presidents of NAC were members of the Ontario Committee on the Status of Women and presented briefs, met with provincial Cabinet ministers and lobbied the Ontario legislature prior to serving on the executive of NAC.

**Who is a member of the NAC executive?**

"the ideal executive member is one who has no children, no personal life and is a tenured professor who has no ambition to advance her academic career. "  
(executive member)

There was repeated concern that the NAC executive, particularly the President's position is inaccessible to the majority of women in the country. The result is that the executive of NAC is not an accurate reflection of the diversity of the women's movement in Canada.

The type of person attracted to run for the executive depends, in part, on the rewards. What are the rewards? Many of the executive members mentioned the visibility and status in the women's community, the media and the government as well as the opportunity to work with women who are perceived as leaders of the women's movement. A substantial reward is the opportunity to work on issues you are concerned about. Yet, the executive committee also needs women who have process skills, community organizing skills and representatives of a wide range of constituencies.

Presently, poor advertising insures that nominations for executive committee members is ad hoc, based on individual women or groups pursuing likely candidates. The result has been that last year 9 positions were acclaimed, including the President.

**The culture of the executive**

The lack of structure has evoked certain kinds of behaviour in the executive, which have become obstacles to making sound decisions. Ex-executive and present members described the executive culture in a number of ways - all divisive and harmful to women. Some described it as internalized sexism, others as addictive behaviour, and others simply described it but didn't have a name for it. Some executive members felt that problems arose from ideological/political differences or simply the large size of the executive made sound decision making impossible. Some evidence of this culture includes:

- \* Contradictory behaviour in the executive. They delegate responsibilities, particularly to committees and to staff, and then they overturn, or remake the decisions.
- \* Executive does not recognize or use the staff's skills, does not assume responsibility for the management function of the organization.
- \* Some decisions are made through a process of backroom politics and intimidation instead of enabling all positions to be heard and an informed decision taken. Result is that new executive members feel pressured to choose "sides".
- \* Information sharing is inconsistent and selective and largely outside of established and equally accessible communication channels.
- \* Lack of common basic courtesy. For example, requests from executive members to other executive members at the orientation included remembering to greet people arriving and leaving meetings, and eliminating side discussions during meetings.

It would be easy to blame individual women for these problems. The intense commitment to working with and for women leads many of us to tolerate unhealthy working situations. This culture is not a reflection of the women but rather the magnitude of the job they have assumed and the lack of appropriate structures and processes.

**The Management/Administration function**

The executive is responsible for eleven administrative committees. (eg. Finance, Personnel, AGM) Executive members often stated that the considerable administrative workload limited the

time they could spend on policy and other responsibilities. To relieve the workload it is important that NAC

- clearly distinguish between administrative decisions that have to be made at the executive level and decisions that can be made at the committee level,
- clarify who is responsible for insuring that there are open, clear and effective processes for all the functions of the organization,
- clarify who is responsible for the definition, allocation and accountability of the administrative work (eg. answering requests for information from member groups)

An essential element of a healthy organization is long term financial planning, including taking account of dependency on government funding.

**President's role**

There has never been a president in NAC's history who has come from outside of Ontario. In fact, Louise Dulude is the first president to be from outside of Toronto. There is a sense that it would be impossible for the president to be from any other place than Ontario. In actual practice the president's function has varied considerable with each president.

In discussion with ex-presidents there was a sense that the presidents have total freedom to define their job with the outside world. They can spend all of their time getting their ideas heard, talking to the media or groups or lobbying with the government. Yet inside the organization, particularly in the executive their leadership is sometimes ignored and undermined.

Many women suggested the president be paid to make the position more accessible to more women and recognize the workload of the President. This should be considered in more detail once there has been a clarification of the executive members' roles and the type of leadership that NAC wants to have.

**Recommendations:**

**1. Make the Executive more accessible to women, through:**

- a) staggered two year terms
- b) bilingual executive meetings
- c) training provided at the regional level for the development of future executive members of NAC
- d) thorough orientation and training offered to all new elected executive committee members
- e) publication of the job descriptions for executive members in Feminist Action each January.

**2. Ensure that the executive represent the diversity of the women's movement in the country, for example:**

- a) table officers guarantee regional representation - vice-presidents (one east, west and central)
- b) co-presidents ( French, English)
- c) election of a 'regional representative' for national groups
- d) Women be appointed and/or elected to sit on the committee to represent a specific constituency

**3. There is an urgent need to view executive members as people, and create an appropriate system to define and monitor workload, recognition, accountability, job performance, and support systems.**

- Beginning with: clearly outlined job descriptions of each position: including:
- a) numbers of hours expected per week



- 2) type of skills expected of specific executive position
  - 3) minimum expectations of skills and knowledge
  - 4) pre-requisite of having worked on a committee or in some capacity at NAC.
4. The **functions of the executive needs to be defined** including; managing staff, priority setting, policy making and resource allocation. The role of the executive would be balanced between leadership in policy (defining and representing issues) and leadership in process (enabling full participation of members in all aspects of the organization and ensuring clear, responsible processes)
5. **Establish a clear management role** to provide consistent direction to staff functions:  
OPTIONS
1. staff-based: an Executive Director or collective management function
  2. table officers
  3. Toronto-based management committee, with 1 or 2 Executive members and 2 or 3 non-Executive members
  4. President, which would need to be a full-time position
6. The Executive should have a **clear accountability line** and should report at the business meeting of the AGM on
- a) the work they accomplished during the year, including their budget, compared to what they planned,
  - b) their plans for the coming year.
7. **Develop an annual budget** based on two tiers of expenditures:
- a) base budget, including operational costs (core staff, executive meetings, etc.), regional budgets (based on equivalent expenditures in each region), and standing committees,
  - b) discretionary budget, to be allocated among special committees set up to work on the priorities chosen at the AGM.
8. **Develop financial guidelines for committees and the executive.**
9. **Investigate alternative funding sources**, to reduce dependency on Secretary of State, and increase NAC budget.

## Conclusion

NAC has accomplished an enormous amount of work in its almost 16 years, and has had considerable impact on the lives of women in Canada. If it has done all this with a structure in need of major changes, just think what it could do with if its full potential were released! Imagine the strength, the scope and the impact if some of the changes envisioned by members groups came to be! The expertise, the energy, and the vision of the women in NAC can make it possible.

The process is just as important as the ideas. In the next step of the organizational process we need to be caring of each other. Change is hard. The kind of change needed for NAC to reach its full potential will involve all of us in a restatement of our commitment to each other, the organization, the feminist movement and a process where all women can be heard.