

HACKATHON REPORT

Women in Niagara Council



The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women's employment and women's business across the country – including here in Niagara. Many policy experts and researchers have focused on this problem and it is encouraging that businesses, governments and communities are thinking about a feminist economic recovery – that will benefit everyone.

In June 2021, WIN Council hosted a hackathon to focus on solutions and get women back to work, school, and leadership here in Niagara. We started with a look at the Ontario Chamber of Commerce She-Covery strategy (<https://occ.ca/wp-content/uploads/OCC-shecovery-final.pdf>), which critical findings include recommendations for leadership and accountability, safe and affordable child care, workforce development, flexible work and entrepreneurship.

This brief lays out a path to Ontario's "she-covery" in Niagara by examining data on the gendered labour market impacts of the pandemic and offering policy solutions to confront both immediate and longer-term challenges. Throughout this, an intersectional lens is essential to ensure no women are left behind.

Leadership and Accountability

- All around support – support inclusivity and diversity, support women going into politics and moving up, across sectors
- Support for women and gender diverse folks to join municipal committees and have a voice in local policy and decision-making
- Encourage municipalities to adopt equity and inclusion policies for committees and community engagement
- Advocate for anti-harassment and anti-discrimination policies everywhere: at work, at school
- Foster intentional and organic collaboration in all levels of business, not for profit, and community work
- Highlight women-owned and operated businesses

Safe and Affordable Childcare

- Many women in Niagara continue working part-time because they cannot afford full-time childcare. With childcare, we can move women from part-time to full time employment
- Make sure Early Childhood Educators are paid a living wage
- Advocate for fully-funded childcare, as opposed to a tax credit model
- An expanded model of flexible childcare for those working non-traditional hours
- Support the identification and development of proper infrastructure to accommodate the demand for safe, affordable, quality childcare that is accessible by public transit

Workforce Development and Flexible Work

- Develop policies and advocate for flexible work hours, practices in Niagara workplaces
- Advocacy and sponsorship – sponsor women and gender diverse folks in your workforce. See more below.
- What did we learn during the pandemic that can continue to support women at work? Things like remote work options are hugely beneficial to women and caregivers
- Support employers with resources
- Adopt flexible work policies and schedules
- Support nontraditional forms of mentorship like lateral mentorship and peer mentorship
- Engage with Brock University and Niagara College
- Engage with employment agencies
- Education - Access to microcredentials and trades programs for women and girls and gender diverse people. Encourage more women to get engaged
- Engage more women and girls to get into non-traditional sectors like trades. Start young and get parents and guardians on board

Entrepreneurship

- There is lack of support for solopreneurs and self-employed people. Improve access to grants like the Canada Ontario job grants.
- Creative incentives and programs to support people living with (dis)abilities to start their own business
- Niagara needs centralized resources. Have a master checklist for what to do when starting your business or supports as you grow your business
- Advocate for local programming that will support women-led/owned businesses
- Connect with other women's groups and share resources and best practices to provide mentorship and resources for women entrepreneurs

What's Next? What WIN will do:

- WIN Council is committed to supporting women's business and success in Niagara
- WIN will look for opportunities to expand and grow the WIN/WIN Peer Mentorship Program
- Advocate: We'll continue to share this report and the ideas from the community with elected officials and community leaders
- Continue the conversation
- Use this report to help inform WIN's strategic plan moving forward
- Work with you to get it done!

What YOU can do to support women's economic recovery:

- Share this report and the OCC She-covery strategy with your networks: your employer, your coworkers, your community
- Sponsor or mentor a woman
- Take the initiative! If there are actions in this plan that you can do, let's get to work
- Reach out to WIN and other women and allies in your network – we have to work together
- Support women's business in Niagara
- Advocate. Here are some ways how:
 - Have your voice heard - reach out to elected officials and policymakers in your community
 - Join a committee - there are options at municipal and regional levels
 - Volunteer for a political party or a politician
 - Vote to shape policy platforms directly by joining a party
 - Organize a petition
 - Participate in townhall forums

This is just the beginning. Reach out to WIN Council and women in Niagara to continue building on these ideas. We're here to work with you – because we know that a stronger, more equitable Niagara will benefit everyone.