



Community Listening Sessions Report Fall 2025



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Mayor
Daniel Lurie

City and County of San Francisco
Department on the Status of Women



Letter from the Executive Director

San Francisco Department on the Status of Women

Dear Community Members, Service Providers, Advocates, and Partners,

On behalf of the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women, I want to extend my deepest appreciation to all who joined us for the Fall 2025 Community Listening Sessions. Your insights, expertise, and lived experiences are foundational to this report, and they will directly guide our work, our FY26-28 Strategic Plan, and the Women's Agenda for San Francisco for the next three fiscal years.

Across five sessions—held in neighborhoods throughout the City and County and online—we had the privilege of hearing from a broad cross-section of San Franciscans: community members, nonprofit leaders, advocates, service providers, and elected officials. Your contributions offered powerful reminders that the challenges our communities face—around health, safety, civic participation, and economic mobility—are not separate issues, but deeply interwoven systems that require collective, intersectional solutions.

Participants emphasized the critical importance of reproductive health and rights, called for increased support for survivors of gender-based violence, and highlighted the need for expanded childcare and early education infrastructure. We also heard compelling calls to invest in safe, culturally rooted spaces where women, girls, and non-binary people can gather, lead, and thrive. Equally urgent were the demands for more accessible leadership pathways, especially for young people, and stronger connections to civic processes and decision-makers.

These listening sessions were more than just conversations—they were a bold affirmation that the community's voice must remain central to policymaking and systems change. They were also a powerful reminder that this work cannot wait. I am especially grateful for the trust you placed in us by showing up, speaking truth to power, and holding this Department and City government accountable to the values of equity, justice, and inclusion. You gave us a mandate to act with urgency and integrity.

As we move ahead, the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women is committed to transforming what we heard into sustained action. The insights you shared will directly inform our programs, partnerships, and policy priorities. Together, we will continue building a city where every woman, girl, and non-binary person can live safely, with autonomy, dignity, and with opportunity.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Diana Aroche". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath.

Dr. Diana Aroche

Executive Director

San Francisco Department on the Status of Women

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Acknowledgements

The San Francisco Department on the Status of Women extends its sincere appreciation to the community members, advocates, service providers, and residents who participated in the Community Listening Sessions and shared their experiences, insights, and recommendations. Their willingness to engage openly and thoughtfully was essential to informing this work and elevating the voices of women, girls, and non-binary people across San Francisco.

The Department expresses deep gratitude to the Commission on the Status of Women for its leadership, guidance, and oversight throughout this engagement. The Commission's continued commitment to centering community voice and advancing gender equity was instrumental in shaping the purpose and direction of the listening sessions and the Department's broader strategic planning efforts.

The Department also thanks Mayor Daniel Lurie for his leadership and support of a renewed strategic planning process aligned with the City's current priorities. The Mayor's emphasis on safety, affordability, effective governance, and public trust provides important context for this work. It reinforces the City's commitment to equitable outcomes for women, girls, and non-binary people.

Additionally, we are grateful for the Board of Supervisors' broad support. Specifically, we would like to thank Shamann Walton for his support of the Department's Community Listening Sessions within his district.

Special thanks are extended to the Department's community-based partners and host organizations, including Sentro Filipino, and the Southeast Community Center, for their support in hosting the Community Listening Sessions and helping to create welcoming spaces for dialogue. The Department also appreciates the support of community partners who assisted with outreach and participation.

The Department further acknowledges the Members of the San Francisco Board of Supervisors who attended listening sessions and supported outreach to their constituents, contributing to broader awareness and engagement across districts.

Finally, the Department recognizes the dedication and collaboration of the Department on the Status of Women staff, whose efforts supported all phases of this engagement, from planning and facilitation to documentation and synthesis. Their commitment ensured that

community input was gathered thoughtfully and integrated into the Department's ongoing strategic planning work.

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Executive Summary

Five Community Listening Sessions were held between December 1 and December 15, 2025, utilizing both in-person and virtual formats to maximize accessibility. Participants included residents, community leaders, advocates, service providers, and local elected officials. Discussions focused on four core service areas that guide the Department's work: health, safety, civic and community engagement, and economic mobility.

Across sessions, participants emphasized the interconnected nature of these issue areas. They highlighted how challenges related to safety, economic stability, healthcare access, and civic participation often overlap and compound one another. Community members consistently underscored the importance of culturally responsive, trauma-informed, and prevention-oriented approaches, as well as the need for sustained engagement and visible action by City and County institutions.

Participants emphasized a holistic understanding of health that extends beyond clinical care to include mental well-being, reproductive autonomy, safety, and supportive environments. Community members advocated for systemic approaches to address gender-based violence and sexual harassment—particularly on public transit and in digital spaces. Childcare costs, wage inequities, and limited career pathways were consistently described as drivers of economic vulnerability for participants. Support for accessible leadership pathways within local government and stronger connections to civic processes and decision-makers were underscored throughout the sessions. Together, these insights underscore the Department's critical role in advancing gender equity through coordinated, community-informed strategies.

This report synthesizes the key themes, concerns, and priorities raised during the Community Listening Sessions. While it is not a verbatim record of the discussions, this report reflects participants' collective perspectives and shared insights. Moreover, it is important to consider these summaries as a snapshot of feedback within a dynamic strategic planning process, and some of the feedback may or may not be reflected in the final strategic plan. The findings presented here will complement the Department's Community Needs Assessment Report. Both products will directly inform the Department's FY26-28 Strategic Plan, policy advocacy, and coordination with City partners, supporting the Department's ongoing work to advance gender equity for women, girls, and non-binary people in alignment with the Commission's direction and the City's broader priorities under Mayor Lurie's leadership.

Introduction

In the fall of 2025, following the expiration of the Department's prior strategic planning document, the Commission on the Status of Women directed the Department to initiate a renewed strategic planning process aligned with Mayor Lurie's leadership and the City's current priorities. In line with this directive, the strategic plan is led by Executive Director Dr. Diana Aroche and carried out in collaboration with Department staff. The directive reflects the Commission's commitment to ensuring that the Department on the Status of Women remains responsive to evolving City leadership, community needs, and policy priorities.

This strategic plan is undertaken at a time when the rights and well-being of women, girls, and non-binary people are experiencing significant change and uncertainty at the local, state, and national levels. Ongoing challenges related to access to healthcare, economic security, personal safety, and civic participation continue to disproportionately affect these communities, particularly those who experience intersecting forms of marginalization. In this context, the role of local government in advancing gender equity and protecting access to essential services has become increasingly critical.

As a foundational step in the strategic planning effort, the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women convened a series of Community Listening Sessions in Fall 2025. These sessions were designed to center community voice, elevate lived experience, and ensure that the development of the Department's FY26-28 Strategic Plan is informed directly by the perspectives of those most impacted by gender inequities across San Francisco.

The San Francisco Department on the Status of Women convened the Community Listening Sessions as part of a renewed strategic planning effort. The sessions were convened in response to a federal political climate hostile to the women, girls, and non-binary people in San Francisco. Remaining current on community sentiment and soliciting feedback from San Franciscans not only updates the Department's existing Community Needs Assessment (CNA) Report (DOSW 2024) but also ensures our strategic planning process includes more recent community feedback. The Department's work is rooted in the City's governance framework for the Commission on the Status of Women and the Department on the Status of Women, as established in the San Francisco Charter (City and County of San Francisco, n.d.-c) and Administrative Code (City and County of San Francisco, n.d.-a), respectively.

The San Francisco Administrative Code, Chapter 33, assigns specific powers and duties to the Commission and the Department (City and County of San Francisco, n.d.-a). These include conducting public education and outreach, reviewing legislation affecting the status of women and girls, coordinating the City's response to violence against women and girls, advancing economic equity, and supporting compliance with the City's local implementation of the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) through Chapter 33A (City and County of San Francisco, n.d.-b).

Of particular relevance to this report, Administrative Code Section 33.4(p) charges the Department to coordinate with other City departments, policy bodies, and community groups to develop an integrated services plan for women and girls (City and County of San Francisco, n.d.-a). The Community Listening Sessions were designed to advance this mandate by elevating community priorities, identifying cross-sectional needs, and surfacing opportunities for coordination and integrated service planning across City systems.

Methodological Approach

The Community Listening Sessions were conceptualized as an extension of and complement to the Department's CNA Report (DOSW, 2025c). The CNA Report provided a wealth of insight into where San Franciscans stood across various policy areas, including health, safety, economic security, and civic engagement. However, recognizing the sudden increase of federal policies targeting vulnerable communities and the deepening economic instability for these populations, the listening sessions were identified as the best format to supplement existing research with additional insight into the challenges community members face in the current political and economic climate. Conducting these sessions at this phase of the strategic planning process was intentional to integrate the most community feedback.

The Community Listening Sessions were designed as a qualitative engagement process to collect lived-experience insight and to identify recurring themes relevant to strategic planning. A qualitative methodology was intentionally selected to center community voice, capture nuance, and surface complex social dynamics that cannot be easily quantified through survey instruments alone. Qualitative approaches are particularly well-suited to equity-focused policy work, as they allow participants to describe experiences in their own words and to articulate how structural conditions shape outcomes across multiple domains of life (Fung, 2015; Quick & Feldman, 2011).

The methodology emphasized accessibility, inclusiveness, and trauma-informed facilitation. Listening sessions were structured to create space for participants to share experiences related to health, safety, civic participation, and economic mobility in a manner that recognized the impact of trauma, systemic inequities, and historical marginalization. Qualitative community engagement practices are widely recognized as essential when working with communities affected by violence, economic instability, and institutional harm, as they prioritize safety, trust, and participant agency (Harris & Fallot, 2001; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014).

Five Community Listening Sessions were held between December 1 and December 15, 2025, at 49 South Van Ness, 25 Van Ness, Sentro Filipino, and the Southeast Community Center, as well as virtually through Zoom. Hosting sessions across City facilities, community-based spaces, and an online platform was intended to reduce barriers to participation and to reach a broad range of community members with differing schedules, mobility needs, caregiving responsibilities, and levels of comfort engaging in government spaces. Community-based locations were selected to foster familiarity and trust, while the virtual option expanded access for individuals unable to attend in person.

At the same time, the Department recognized that relying solely on government spaces can unintentionally exclude individuals who experience historical mistrust of public institutions or face barriers related to immigration status, trauma, or prior involvement with the justice system (Hankivsky et al., 2014). To address these concerns, community-based locations such as Sentro Filipino and the Southeast Community Center were selected to anchor engagement in trusted, culturally rooted spaces. Community-based settings foster familiarity, cultural safety, and a sense of belonging, which support more open and authentic dialogue, particularly among women, girls, and non-binary people from historically marginalized communities (Low, 2017).

Practical considerations, including time constraints, space availability, and access to reservations also shaped location selection. Session sites were identified based on the feasibility of securing meeting spaces within the project timeline, the availability of rooms during evenings or outside standard working hours, and the ability to confirm reservations within required timeframes. These logistical considerations are common in public-sector engagement efforts and were carefully balanced with the Department's commitment to community-centered outreach and meaningful participation (Fung, 2015).

The inclusion of a virtual session via Zoom further expanded geographic and logistical access. Virtual participation reduced barriers related to transportation, mobility limitations, caregiving responsibilities, and work schedules, while allowing engagement by

individuals who may otherwise be unable or unwilling to attend in-person sessions. Hybrid engagement models that combine in-person and virtual options are increasingly recognized as effective strategies for inclusive civic participation in diverse urban contexts (Fung, 2015).

Participants in the Community Listening Sessions included residents, community leaders, advocates, service providers, and local elected officials. Participants contributed perspectives shaped by caregiving responsibilities, economic insecurity, immigration concerns, experiences with violence or harassment, and interactions with public systems. The diversity of roles and lived experiences contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of how gender inequities are experienced across communities and institutional contexts. The sessions also provided an opportunity for the Department to reconnect with communities and partners it serves and to reinforce its commitment to maintaining a visible and active presence in community spaces.

Session notes were reviewed and synthesized to identify recurring themes and areas of convergence. While the findings are not statistically representative, qualitative synthesis is widely recognized as an effective approach for informing strategic planning and policy decisions, particularly when the goal is to understand lived experience, identify systemic barriers, and inform responsive, equity-driven action (Quick & Feldman, 2011). The insights generated through this process provide critical context and guidance for the Department's FY26-28 Strategic Plan and its ongoing coordination with City partners.

Limitations

The findings presented in this report are informed by a qualitative community engagement process and should be interpreted within the context of several limitations. The Community Listening Sessions were designed to elevate lived experience and identify recurring themes rather than to produce statistically representative results. Participation was voluntary and shaped by factors such as time availability, location, outreach reach, and awareness of the sessions, which may have influenced whose perspectives were captured.

The number of listening sessions and the timeframe in which they were conducted necessarily constrained the breadth of engagement. While sessions were intentionally held across multiple geographic locations and formats to reduce barriers to participation, not all communities or lived experiences may be fully reflected in the findings. Additionally, qualitative synthesis prioritizes depth, context, and meaning over frequency. It therefore

does not quantify the prevalence of specific concerns across the broader population of women, girls, and non-binary people in San Francisco.

The listening sessions were also conducted during a period marked by broader social, economic, and political uncertainty, including heightened concerns about safety, financial stability, and protections for reproductive rights. These conditions may have shaped the urgency and framing of participant input. As such, the findings should be understood as a snapshot of community perspectives during this period, rather than as a comprehensive or static assessment.

Despite these limitations, qualitative community listening is a well-established and appropriate methodology for informing strategic planning, particularly in equity-focused policy contexts. The insights captured through this process provide critical context for understanding lived experiences, identifying systemic barriers, and guiding responsive, community-informed action.

Community Feedback

The following sections provide summaries of the five Community Listening Sessions. They are organized into five sections: Purpose and Vision, Health, Safety, Civic Advancement and Community Engagement, and Economic Mobility and Security. Importantly, the core policy areas defined here are expanded and redefined from those articulated in the CNA Report. The Department's strategic planning process is ongoing, so the feedback summarized here may or may not be reflected in the final strategic plan.

Purpose and Vision

During the listening sessions, participants raised a clear and urgent call to revisit the foundational language used to describe the work of the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women. In particular, participants stated that the term “*mission*” is deeply harmful. Community members expressed that the word glorifies histories of colonization, genocide, forced conversion, and cultural erasure, and the continued use of the term by a city department charged with advancing gender equity is not only misaligned but also offensive. Participants emphasized that language is not neutral, and that institutional language can either reproduce harm or actively challenge it.

In response to this feedback, the Department replaced the previous “*mission*” language with a Purpose Statement. This shift reflects a community-directed reframing grounded in relational accountability, collective responsibility, and respect for community sovereignty, rather than institutional dominance or conquest. Participants underscored that this change

in language is not symbolic but structural. These changes influence how the Department perceives its role, power, and responsibilities within the City and County of San Francisco. This reframing is also aligned with the Department's responsibility to honor the original stewards of the land on which the City and County of San Francisco exists—the Ohlone people—and to reject institutional frameworks rooted in settler colonialism and erasure.

Participants emphasized that honoring Indigenous sovereignty requires more than ceremonial acknowledgment; it requires intentional shifts in governance, language, and accountability practices. By moving away from colonial, mission-based language, the Department affirms a commitment to public service grounded in respect for Indigenous presence, self-determination, dignity, and community-led futures.

Participants also emphasized that the Department on the Status of Women occupies a role within City government that is distinct from most other departments. In their view, most City departments are designed primarily to deliver services or administer discrete programs. In contrast, the Department functions as a policy-shaping, advocacy, and accountability entity operating across systems to improve institutions that serve women, girls, and non-binary people. Participants described the Department's work within the broader City and County structure as ambiguous. They called for more precise articulation of how the Department advances equity through policy leadership, interdepartmental coordination, and accountability mechanisms, rather than solely through service delivery.

Community members further raised concerns about the vagueness of prior foundational language. Phrases included within initial drafts of the statements, such as “advancement of women” and “across all measures,” were described as broad and insufficiently accountable. Participants questioned what advancement means in a moment when many women and families are focused on survival, and whose needs are prioritized when resources are limited. Participants called for language that is specific, measurable, and clearly tied to the Department's statutory authority and core policy focus areas.

Participants also stressed that accountability must be understood as more than symbolic oversight or a passive “watchdog” role. They raised concerns that accountability for women—particularly incarcerated women—has diminished over time and questioned how the Commission and Department on the Status of Women can effectively hold City agencies accountable. These questions specifically cited the Proposition E Commission Streamlining Task Force's recommendation to redefine the Commission's current decision-making status into an advisory function. Participants noted that a change to the Commission's existing authority threatened resources, clear governance pathways, and accountability.

Throughout the listening sessions, participants highlighted the urgency of the Department’s work, alongside its limited staffing and budgetary constraints. Rising harm to women, girls, and non-binary people—particularly related to safety, immigration enforcement, incarceration, homelessness, and economic instability—was described as occurring alongside shrinking public infrastructure. Participants emphasized the importance of relational pathways, including Cultural Heritage Districts and community-based organizations, as essential partners that can extend the Department’s reach while maintaining public accountability and government responsibility.

Participants consistently framed gender equity within the context of family and household dynamics. They emphasized that policies related to immigration, foster care, economic security, housing, and public safety cannot be separated from women’s roles as caregivers, cultural anchors, and stabilizers of family systems. Survival, safety, and dignity were described as prerequisites for advancement, not outcomes that follow it.

Prior to community input, the initial Department statement read as follows:

Mission

The San Francisco Department on the Status of Women champions the advancement of women, girls, and non-binary individuals across all measures through advocacy, policies, and programs in the City and County of San Francisco.

Informed by the collective input from listening sessions, the Department has reframed its foundational language as follows:

Purpose Statement

The purpose of the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women is to advance gender equity by shaping policy, holding City systems accountable, and strengthening community-anchored pathways that support the safety, dignity, health, and economic security of women, girls, and non-binary people in San Francisco.

This purpose reflects the Department’s unique role within the City and County of San Francisco as an advocacy and accountability entity working across systems that have historically underserved women and families, particularly those impacted by racism, immigration enforcement, incarceration, poverty, disability, gender discrimination, and

gender-based violence. The Department centers survival alongside opportunity, recognizing that equity cannot be achieved without safety, agency, and material support.

Prior to community input, the initial Department statement read as follows:

Vision

We envision a world where opportunities for women, girls, and non-binary people to thrive are woven into every fabric of our society. Everyone has full agency over their body and the power to shape and control their future in San Francisco.

Informed by the collective input from listening sessions, the Department has reframed the vision statement to read as follows:

Vision

The San Francisco Department on the Status of Women envisions a city where women, girls, and non-binary people are safe, supported, thrive, and where public systems are accountable to those most impacted by gender-based inequities.

In a moment defined by regressive national policy, threats to bodily autonomy, weakened accountability structures, and increasing harm to women and families, this vision affirms the necessity of local leadership that protects agency, dignity, and sovereignty. The Department envisions a San Francisco where cultural and community-rooted spaces are recognized as essential infrastructure; where family unity is protected; and where equity is measured not only by access, but by lived safety, civic voice, and sustained well-being.

This purpose and vision are advanced through four integrated core policy areas—Health, Safety, Civic Advancement and Engagement, and Economic Mobility and Security—which together reflect the conditions required for women, girls, and non-binary people to survive, lead, and shape the future of the City.

Health

Participants described health as a holistic and multidimensional concept encompassing physical health, mental and emotional well-being, personal safety, bodily autonomy, and access to supportive and affirming environments. Community members consistently emphasized that health outcomes are shaped not only by access to medical care, but also by social conditions, environmental safety, and structural factors that influence daily life. As a result, discussions of health frequently overlapped with other service areas, particularly safety, economic stability, and civic participation. This framing aligns with

public health research recognizing the social determinants of health as critical drivers of well-being and health equity (Braveman & Gottlieb, 2014; World Health Organization [WHO], 2008).

The concerns raised during the Community Listening Sessions reflect broader and ongoing challenges affecting women, girls, and non-binary people at the local, state, and national levels. In recent years, access to comprehensive healthcare has become increasingly uneven due to shifts in federal and state policy, rising healthcare costs, workforce shortages, and persistent inequities rooted in race, income, immigration status, and gender identity. These dynamics have heightened the importance of local government leadership in advancing health equity and safeguarding access to essential services (National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine [NASEM], 2023).

Reproductive health access emerged as a particularly salient issue. Following changes to federal constitutional protections, access to abortion, contraception, and related reproductive health services has become more fragmented nationwide, placing increased responsibility on states and local jurisdictions to ensure continuity of care. Even in jurisdictions where reproductive rights are protected, barriers such as cost, clinic availability, fear of surveillance, and concerns about data privacy can impede access, especially for low-income individuals, immigrants, and survivors of violence (Forouzan, 2024; NASEM, 2023). Participants viewed the Department as a critical advocate in this landscape and encouraged continued leadership on reproductive health policy and access.

Across sessions, participants discussed the importance of increasing girls' participation in sports and other activities and programs as a strategy to promote physical health, mental well-being, self-confidence, and social connection. Many noted that few programs exist for girls, and that there are often waitlists and other barriers to enrolling girls and non-binary youth in these programs. Research demonstrates that participation in sports is associated with improved mental health outcomes, reduced stress, and increased self-esteem among girls and adolescents (Eime et al., 2013). At the same time, community members raised concerns about injury prevention and safety, particularly in settings where adequate medical oversight may be limited. Participants emphasized the need for trained sports medicine staff, clear safety protocols, and equitable access to safe facilities and parks to ensure that expanded participation does not introduce additional risk.

Mental and emotional health were also central to discussions. Participants noted rising levels of anxiety, depression, and stress among women, girls, and non-binary individuals, often linked to economic insecurity, caregiving burdens, exposure to violence or

harassment, and social isolation. Adolescents and young women were described as facing particularly acute mental health challenges, reflecting national trends documented in recent public health data (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention [CDC], 2023). Participants emphasized that safe, supportive environments—including community spaces and extracurricular activities—can serve as protective factors for mental health when designed with safety and inclusion in mind. They reaffirmed the importance of programs for girls, young women, and non-binary youth that provide stability, social and community connections, and healthy outlets.

Participants further emphasized the need for safe, low-barrier spaces where women, girls, and non-binary people can find respite from violence, harassment, and chronic stress. These spaces were intentionally distinguished from formal programs or services and were described as essential environments where individuals can rest, feel safe, and exist without expectations or performance requirements. Research on trauma and recovery underscores the importance of safe, predictable environments in supporting healing, resilience, and overall well-being, particularly for individuals exposed to violence or prolonged stress (Herman, 1997; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration [SAMHSA], 2014).

The Department was widely viewed as an important advocate for women’s health beyond clinical care. Participants cited the Department’s role in supporting access to reproductive healthcare and encouraged continued advocacy on issues affecting survivors of violence, including expanding access to timely, trauma-informed forensic medical examinations. Access to forensic exams is widely recognized as a critical component of survivor-centered care, public health response, and accountability (Campbell et al., 2011).

Participants also raised concerns about how fear related to federal immigration policies can deter individuals from seeking healthcare, even when services are legally available. Community members described how uncertainty and fear of system involvement can lead to delayed care, untreated health conditions, and increased stress for women and families. Research has shown that immigration-related fear is associated with reduced healthcare utilization and poorer health outcomes, particularly among women and mixed-status households (Hacker et al., 2015). Participants emphasized the importance of trusted messengers, clear communication, and local advocacy to mitigate these barriers and ensure that all community members can safely access care.

Taken together, participant input underscores the need to address health as an integrated and intersectional issue, inseparable from safety, economic stability, and access to trusted community spaces. The perspectives shared during the listening sessions highlight the

critical role of local government in advancing health equity through policy leadership, cross-sector coordination, and community-informed approaches that promote dignity, autonomy, and well-being for women, girls, and non-binary people.

Safety

Safety emerged as one of the most urgent and pervasive concerns across all Community Listening Sessions. Participants described safety as a multidimensional issue encompassing physical safety in public and private spaces, protection from institutional harm, and freedom from harassment and violence in digital environments. Community members emphasized that threats to safety are closely intertwined with economic insecurity, social isolation, and unequal access to protective resources, underscoring the need for comprehensive and prevention-oriented responses.

Participant concerns reflect broader trends in San Francisco, where public safety challenges have evolved in recent years. While overall violent crime rates have fluctuated, reported incidents of certain gender-based harms—particularly sexual assault, domestic violence, and harassment—remain persistent concerns (San Francisco Police Department, 2024). Research consistently shows that women, girls, and non-binary people experience distinct patterns of victimization, often in everyday environments such as transit systems, workplaces, and online spaces, which can significantly limit mobility and participation in public life (CDC, 2023b).

Federal immigration policies and enforcement practices were described as a source of fear and instability for many families, particularly concerning the potential loss of household breadwinners. Participants shared that immigration-related fear can discourage individuals from reporting crimes, seeking assistance, or engaging with public institutions, thereby increasing vulnerability to exploitation and violence. Studies have shown that fear of immigration enforcement is associated with lower reporting of crime and reduced access to protective services, particularly for women in mixed-status households (Hacker et al., 2015; Messing et al., 2017). Participants emphasized that safety strategies must account for these dynamics to ensure that protections are accessible regardless of immigration status.

Public transit safety was one of the most frequently raised issues across sessions. Participants described repeated experiences of sexual harassment on buses, trains, and platforms, noting that these incidents restrict access to education, employment, and community activities. Some participants shared that harassment on public transit has led them to alter travel patterns, rely on more costly transportation options, or avoid certain

activities altogether. Young women especially reported not being able to take transit safely to school or work. The current process for reporting harassment was viewed as structurally flawed and threatened to expose victims to greater harm. Without rapid responses from the enforcement agencies, victims are exposed to extended periods of harassment or risk being followed away from the transit areas. These concerns align with findings from regional and international studies indicating that women—including transwomen—disproportionately experience harassment on public transportation, with significant impacts on mobility, mental health, and economic opportunity (Kany, et.al., 2024; SFMTA, 2023).

Concerns were also raised about safety in institutional settings, including for incarcerated women. Participants referenced reports of harassment and abuse as indicators of systemic gaps in oversight and accountability. National research underscores that incarcerated women face elevated risks of sexual victimization and trauma, with long-term consequences for physical and mental health (Beck, 2015; Human Rights Watch, 2020). Participants emphasized the importance of transparency, independent oversight, and survivor-centered accountability mechanisms in institutional environments.

Digital spaces were increasingly identified as sites of harm, particularly for women, girls, and non-binary people. Participants described experiences of online harassment, stalking, and threats, noting that digital violence often mirrors and amplifies offline harms. Research indicates that women and gender-diverse individuals are disproportionately targeted for online abuse, which can lead to psychological distress, withdrawal from public discourse, and heightened safety concerns (Pew Research Center, 2021).

At the same time, participants consistently identified community-based spaces rooted in culture, shared identity, and gender-centered support as places where they feel safest and most supported. These spaces were described as protective environments that foster trust, collective care, and resilience. Research on community safety highlights the importance of culturally grounded, community-led spaces in preventing violence and promoting well-being, particularly for populations that experience systemic marginalization (Klevens et al., 2016).

Taken together, participant input emphasizes that safety for women, girls, and non-binary people must be understood as both an individual and a structural issue. Addressing safety requires coordinated approaches that span public space design, transportation systems, institutional accountability, digital protections, and community-based prevention strategies. The perspectives shared during the listening sessions highlight the critical role

of local government in advancing safety through cross-sector collaboration, trauma-informed practices, and policies that prioritize dignity, trust, and accessibility.

Civic Advancement and Community Engagement

Community members consistently framed civic advancement as both an individual opportunity and a structural condition shaped by time, caregiving, language access, and proximity to decision-making. Participants described civic engagement as more than voting or attending public meetings; it included the everyday ability to access reliable information, navigate City systems, and influence policy decisions that affect safety, health, and economic mobility. This framing aligns with the Department’s mandate to coordinate with policy bodies and community groups to advance an integrated approach to services and equity outcomes for women, girls, and non-binary people.

Participants emphasized that meaningful civic participation is often constrained by the practical realities of caregiving. While various forms of caregiving were discussed, childcare was salient across the listening sessions. Childcare was repeatedly described as essential civic infrastructure: without safe, affordable, and flexible childcare, many caregivers cannot attend meetings, participate in leadership development, or pursue civic pathways. Participants also described a “time-poverty” barrier in which long commutes, inflexible work schedules, and the rising cost of living combine to reduce the ability to engage in public life. These constraints were not presented as personal shortcomings, but as predictable outcomes of structural conditions that shape whose voices are heard and whose needs are prioritized.

In addition, participants underscored that civic engagement depends on accurate, accessible information. Many described experiences of encountering outdated outreach materials, inconsistent guidance across agencies, and difficulty identifying the right point of contact within government. When information is unreliable, the cost of participation rises—requiring additional time, familiarity with bureaucratic processes, and social networks that are unevenly distributed. Participants linked these information barriers to a broader sense that City leadership can feel “out of reach,” particularly for residents who do not already have institutional relationships or prior experience navigating public systems.

Participants also highlighted the importance of culturally rooted community ecosystems—particularly Cultural Heritage Districts and community-based organizations—as trusted intermediaries that strengthen civic belonging and leadership development. These local institutions were described as places where residents develop confidence, shared identity, and a sense of community protection, which, in turn, supports civic voice and public

participation. Consistent with this theme, the Department’s prior reporting has emphasized that representation within public decision-making bodies matters for governance legitimacy and equity, including through analyses of Boards and Commissions that are conducted pursuant to City requirements and intended to assess how communities are represented in oversight and policy structures (San Francisco Department on the Status of Women [DOSW], 2025a; San Francisco Board of Supervisors, 2025).

Finally, participants called for expanded and visible pathways for women, girls, and non-binary people into leadership—within neighborhood governance, City commissions, youth advisory structures, and paid public service pipelines. Participants viewed leadership development as inseparable from material supports (childcare, transportation affordability, safe public spaces, and credible information). This perspective closely mirrors the Department’s CNA Report framing that civic engagement and political empowerment must be addressed alongside health, safety, and economic security—because barriers in one domain reduce participation in the others (DOSW, 2025a).

Economic Mobility and Security

Economic mobility emerged as a foundational concern that participants linked to safety, health, and civic participation. Participants repeatedly described economic insecurity as a condition that increases vulnerability to violence and harassment, limits choices about where to live and how to travel and reduces the capacity to engage in public life. In this sense, economic mobility was not treated as a stand-alone policy area; it was discussed as a cross-cutting driver of well-being for women, girls, and non-binary people.

Participants identified the lack of clear career pathways—particularly for justice-impacted youth—as a major barrier to long-term stability. They described a need for structured routes into paid work with advancement potential, including City internships and pipeline programs that translate early exposure into sustainable careers. Participants also emphasized that youth programming must operate outside standard business hours to reflect the realities of working families, long commutes, and non-traditional schedules. In their view, expanded after-hours programming and safe spaces are both workforce support (helping caregivers maintain employment) and safety interventions (reducing isolation and exposure to harm).

Childcare and early childhood education surfaced as central workforce and equity issues. Participants described childcare as both a prerequisite for caregivers’ employment and a sector whose workforce—predominantly women—requires improved compensation and

advancement opportunities. Across the board, participants cited childcare costs as an economic burden. Participants advocated for upskilling, professional development, and wage increases for early childhood and daycare workers, noting that strengthening this sector would stabilize families and improve the economic security of workers who provide essential care labor.

Many families wrangle with the decision to enroll a child in childcare or to have a parent stay home, out of the workforce, and face pressure from the high cost of housing, inflation, and other economic pressures. This impact is predominant in working- and middle-class households. Participants noted that immigration enforcement activities have increased the demand for childcare, especially before and after school hours, while forcing many childcare providers to cease offering care, adding to the economic burden of caregivers, childcare providers, and their families.

Participants' concerns about wage equity were consistent with San Francisco's long-standing policy attention to pay disparities. The City's Parity in Pay findings explicitly document persistent wage gaps in San Francisco and their disproportionate impact on women of color, citing that women were paid 84 cents for every dollar paid to men (with substantially lower ratios reported for African American women and Latinas in the cited findings) (San Francisco Labor and Employment Code, 2025). San Francisco's policy framework also includes the Equal Pay Ordinance (requiring pay reporting in covered City contracting contexts) and the Parity in Pay Ordinance's restrictions on salary history practices, both aimed at interrupting mechanisms that reproduce inequities over time (DOSW, 2025b). Participants' calls to "close the wage gap" therefore reflect not only present-day pressures—such as affordability and caregiving costs—but also an ongoing equity challenge recognized in the City's legislative and administrative record (DOSW, 2025b; San Francisco Labor and Employment Code, 2025).

Participants also situated economic mobility within San Francisco's high-cost environment, describing housing and basic necessities as stressors that intensify economic precarity and constrain choices. In this context, participants' recommendations—expanding internship pipelines, increasing access to after-hours youth programming, strengthening childcare systems, and supporting wage growth in care sectors—function as a connected set of economic and equity strategies. These priorities align with the Department's broader direction, including its CNA Report emphasis on using community-informed evidence to guide funding, advocacy, and cross-departmental coordination in economic security and related domains (DOSW, 2025a).

Conclusion and Strategic Direction

The Community Listening Sessions reaffirmed the importance of centering community voices in the work of the San Francisco Department on the Status of Women. The insights documented in this report reflect both the complexity of the challenges facing women, girls, and non-binary people in San Francisco and the collective commitment to addressing them through coordinated, equity-driven action. Across all sessions, participants articulated how issues of safety, health, civic participation, and economic mobility are deeply interconnected and shaped by broader structural conditions beyond any single program or department.

The findings from these sessions will directly inform the Department’s forthcoming FY26-FY28 Strategic Plan and guide its policy advocacy, interdepartmental coordination, and engagement with community partners. This work is being advanced in alignment with Mayor Daniel Lurie’s 2026 direction for the City and County of San Francisco, which emphasizes improving public safety and perceptions of safety, strengthening health and social service systems, making San Francisco more affordable and livable for families, supporting neighborhood economic vitality, and modernizing City government to deliver measurable results. Viewed through a gender-equity lens, community input underscores how these Citywide priorities must account for the distinct ways women, girls, and non-binary people experience public systems, public space, and economic pressure.

Community perspectives also reflect broader conditions across California, where rising housing costs, persistent wage gaps, childcare shortages, and uneven access to healthcare continue to place disproportionate burdens on women and caregivers. While California has maintained strong statutory protection for reproductive rights and gender equity, participants’ concerns highlight that legal protections alone do not eliminate barriers related to affordability, access, and safety. In this context, local governments play a critical role in translating statewide policy commitments into lived realities through coordinated service delivery, community-based partnerships, and responsive local planning.

Participants’ concerns must also be understood within a national climate marked by heightened political polarization, increased public discourse around gender and identity, and ongoing challenges to LGBTQ+ rights in many parts of the country. Even in jurisdictions such as San Francisco—where overall crime has declined (Echeverria, 2025), and many protections remain in place—national rhetoric and widely publicized incidents of violence contribute to fear, stress, and uncertainty for women, girls, and non-binary people. These broader dynamics shape how residents experience safety, access care, and engage in

public life, reinforcing the importance of local leadership that centers dignity, inclusion, and trust.

As the Department moves forward, continued engagement with communities will remain essential to translating these insights into action. The FY26-28 Strategic Plan will serve as a bridge between community-identified priorities and Citywide goals, ensuring that gender equity is embedded across public safety strategies, health systems, economic development, and civic engagement efforts. Through this alignment, the Department on the Status of Women will continue to advance its statutory mandate to promote the well-being, safety, and economic security of women, girls, and non-binary people while contributing to a more equitable, resilient, and inclusive San Francisco.

The Department anticipates presenting the final FY26-28 Strategic Plan for adoption by the Commission on the Status of Women in February 2026, following the Commission engagement, policy review, and community validation, with public release and implementation to follow in accordance with the Commission-approved timeline, ensuring that community insights directly shape City policy and programmatic priorities moving forward.

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Appendix A: Community Listening Session Summary Table: Department Principles/Roles

Purpose & Vision
<p>Community members offered suggestions across both statements, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Replacing Mission to Purpose Statement was suggested to align the language with indigenous perspectives and solidarity. • Replace vague phrases (e.g., “advancement of women,” “across all measures”) with specific language that articulates the metrics and mechanisms by which advancement would be identified and quantified. • Emphasize survival before advancement and clarify how the Department prioritizes those most vulnerable (women, girls, and non-binary people). • Make the Department’s core policy areas visible and integrated into Purpose/Vision language (graphic or short list).
Accountability
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants recognized the shift away from “Watchdog” and felt that the new term best aligned with the urgency reflected in the current political climate. • Accountability concerns included safety and dignity in custody and ensuring oversight mechanisms remain effective. • Participants flagged that governance changes (post-Prop E) may weaken enforcement power, making accountability a central strategic priority. • Strong call for clear authority pathways (how DOSW/COSW holds systems accountable, and what tools exist).
Advocate
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Participants agreed that the Advocate title and role were important for the Department to continue, and no additional feedback was provided. • Participants called for policy advocacy that centers women’s needs, especially amid federal shifts impacting families and safety. • Advocacy priorities included: continued legal funding, prevention investments, and protections from federal anti-immigrant policies. • Participants emphasized advocating for women’s safety, dignity, and rights in institutional settings (custody and related systems). • Need to elevate policies beyond general equity language to women- and gender-responsive policy outcomes.

Convener

- Participants agreed that the Convener title and role were important for the Department to continue, and no additional feedback was provided.
- Participants emphasized DOSW's role in **coordinating and aligning City departments** around a “full family dynamic” lens.
- Convening needs included cross-system alignment on: **health services, benefits access, housing stability, childcare, safety, and service navigation**, especially for mixed-status households.
- Participants lifted the value of convening **community partners** and trusted intermediaries to improve access and trust.
- Strong call for **visible coordination** so community sees follow-through (not fragmented efforts).

Appendix B: Community Listening Session Summary Table: Department Core Policy Areas

Health	Safety	Civic Advancement & Community Engagement	Economic Mobility & Security
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Community members consistently defined health as a holistic condition shaped by physical health, mental and emotional well-being, reproductive autonomy, caregiving responsibilities, and access to supportive environments. Participants reported immigration-related fear, leading some to avoid health services they are legally entitled to. Equity concerns included birth equity (maternal outcomes, subsidy changes/replacements) and access barriers for caregivers, immigrants, and Black women. Participants emphasized expanding safe, well-supported sports and activity programs for girls and non-binary youth to improve physical and mental health 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Safety emerged as one of the most urgent concerns, encompassing harassment on public transit, nightlife safety, institutional harm, digital violence, and the ability to move freely without fear. Participants emphasized the need to move beyond reactive responses toward prevention, accountability, and culturally grounded safety strategies. Participants described barriers to reporting harm: lack of faith in the justice system and fear tied to immigration/Visa status, contributing to DV underreporting. Institutional safety priorities included safety and dignity in custody and clearer accountability mechanisms. Youth safety concerns included violence between students and safety issues connected to school transfers/Title IX. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Participants emphasized that the desire for more robust civic participation is constrained by limited access to childcare, language, and culturally relevant pathways into leadership. Participants emphasized that governance and accountability structures matter: concerns that Prop E-era changes may reduce COSW/DOSW leverage (“losing teeth without authority”). Specific civic structure ideas surfaced: reserved seats on commissions, strengthening “champions,” and protecting oversight and advisory bodies (e.g., immigrant rights, family violence, sheriff oversight). Participants asked: “What is the status of women in SF?” and stressed the need for shared metrics and public-facing accountability. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Economic insecurity was identified as a root driver of vulnerability across health, safety, and civic engagement, especially as benefits/resources shrink while needs increase. Wage inequities, childcare access, housing instability, and workforce barriers disproportionately affect caregivers, justice-impacted individuals, immigrants, and workers in care-dominated sectors. Participants tied federal shifts and immigration impacts to household destabilization, loss of eligibility, and increased basic needs pressure. Workforce priorities included paid training and pathways, including for those without work authorization, and addressing certification barriers that block justice-impacted people. Major stressors included housing costs, childcare/subsidies, and flexible funding needs, with emphasis on

			strengthening supports that stabilize family systems.
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