QUEEN VICTORIA WOMEN'S CENTRE, MELBOURNE

24 APRIL 2026

GENVIC

Working with Women Alliance

WEAVING 20 CHANGE 26

REPORT

AN UNCONFERENCE FOR AUSTRALIA'S GENDER EQUITY PRACTITIONERS

Acknowledgement of Country

We acknowledge Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as Australia's First Peoples and the Traditional Custodians of the lands, waterways and skies where we live, work and play. We celebrate that this is the oldest continuous living culture in the world, and that sovereignty was never ceded. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal land.

Background

Weaving Change 2026 brought together gender equity practitioners from across Australia for a national unconference held on Friday 24 April 2026 at the Queen Victoria Women's Centre in Melbourne. Hosted in the heart of the city, the day was shaped around a simple but powerful premise: that the people doing this work every day are also the people best placed to lead the conversations that matter.

Organised by Gender Equity Victoria (GEN VIC) and the National Women's Equality Alliance (NWEA), the event drew practitioners spanning community, corporate, government, education, health and advocacy sectors – a reflection of just how many corners of public and professional life gender equity work touches. The unconference was held alongside *Women Deliver 2026*, a major global gathering on gender equality also taking place in Melbourne, lending the day an added sense of energy and international significance.

At the heart of *Weaving Change* was its unconference format. Rather than a program of pre-booked speakers and fixed sessions, participants themselves set the agenda on the day, proposing the conversations they most wanted and needed to have. This approach made space for the kind of honest, practice-grounded exchange that more formal conference settings can make difficult. The goal was a dynamic environment for collaborative problem-solving, peer learning, skill-sharing and strategic thinking; connection that could translate into real and lasting change.

To understand how well the day achieved these aims, attendees were invited to complete an evaluation survey at the close of the event. The survey sought to explore whether *Weaving Change* had supported participants' professional learning and helped them broaden their networks; offering an evidence base for understanding the event's impact and informing future gatherings of this kind.

Who completed the survey?

Of the 110 people who attended the unconference, 30 completed the evaluation survey. Respondents were broadly representative of the event's participant community, with the large majority identifying as women. A smaller number identified as non-binary, one person identified as a man, and one respondent described their gender identity in their own words, selecting both 'non-binary' and 'other' to reflect that they also identified as trans masculine and gender queer. The full breakdown is shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Gender Identity of Survey Respondents

Gender identity	n (%)
Woman	25 (83%)
Man	1 (3%)
Non-binary	3 (10%)
Non-binary, trans masculine, gender queer	1 (3%)

Respondents attended the unconference for a mix of reasons. Half came for both work and personal development purposes, while most of the remainder were there in a professional capacity. A small number attended purely for their own development, and one person noted they had come with a particular interest in exploring the unconference methodology itself.

Findings

Overall value of the *Weaving Change*

Respondents were overwhelmingly positive about the overall value of *Weaving Change*. As can be seen in Figure 1, half of all survey respondents (n=15) rated the day as 'very valuable', and a further 23% (n=7) found it 'somewhat valuable', meaning nearly three quarters of respondents placed the event in the upper two categories. The remaining 27% (n=8) rated it as 'a little valuable'. Notably, no respondent indicated that the day had been without value, suggesting that the unconference format and content resonated across the group.

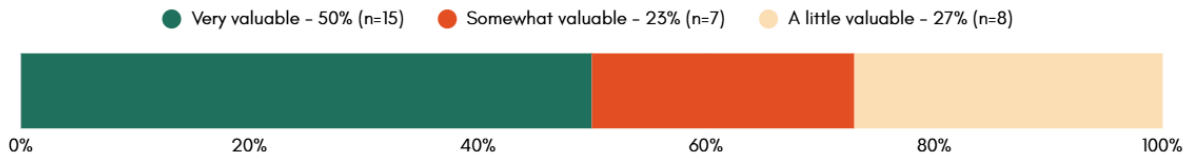

Figure 1. Respondents' ratings of the overall value of Weaving Change.

Learning and engagement

Figures 2 and 3 present respondents' ratings for whether the format supported their learning and development, and whether they felt able to contribute meaningfully to the discussions.

Responses to both items were very similar. For learning and development (Figure 2), nearly half of respondents 'agreed' that the format had supported them, and a further almost one in four 'strongly agreed'. A small group were neutral, and a similar small proportion 'disagreed' or 'strongly disagreed'. The picture for meaningful contribution (Figure 3) was almost identical, with slightly more respondents in the 'strongly agree' category and a marginally smaller neutral group, but the overall trend of responses was much the same.

The close alignment between these two items is noteworthy. It suggests that for most respondents, the participant-led nature of the unconference did not simply create conditions for passive learning, it also enabled active participation. Where respondents felt the format worked for their learning, they also tended to feel that they had a genuine voice in the room.

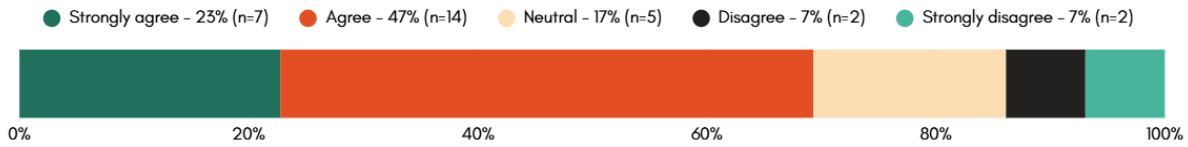

Figure 2. Respondents' ratings of agreement that the unconference format supported their learning and development.

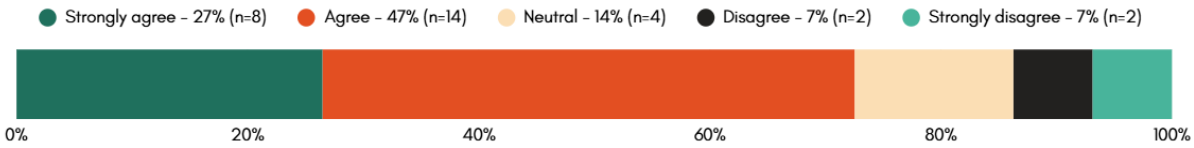

Figure 3. Respondents' ratings of agreement that they were able to contribute meaningfully to the discussions.

To better understand what drove these ratings, respondents were asked to describe in their own words what had been most significant or meaningful about their experience of *Weaving Change*. Their responses painted a rich and varied picture, with several strong themes emerging. Most notably, the value of human connection, the breadth of perspectives encountered, and the experience of being in a space where contribution felt genuinely possible.

Connection and community

For many respondents, what stood out most was the opportunity to meet and talk with others working across the gender equity space. Responses ranged from the simply stated *"feminist solidarity"* and *"the power of people,"* to more specific reflections on the professional value of those connections: *"connecting with people doing policy work in gender and employment like with super funds and research"* and *"connections for supporting our program."*

Several noted that the day had expanded their sense of who is part of this work, with one respondent observing that the experience of *"recognising that the term 'Gender Equality' captures a really broad array of organisations and roles"* was itself meaningful. For others, it was the intimacy and equality of the space that made connection feel possible, with one respondent highlighting *"the absence of perceived responsibility and authority among the women attending"* as significant, and another valuing the chance to share thoughts and opinions *"without fear of being judged."*

Breadth of perspective and cross-sector learning

Alongside connection, many respondents valued the exposure the day gave them to people and ideas beyond their usual professional circles. One described appreciating the opportunity to zoom in and out across the spectrum of gender equity work saying, *"from the individual all the way through to systems levels."* While others simply noted the pleasure of *"hearing from a broader group than I normally meet"* and gaining *"exposure to lots of people doing work in various areas."* The opening pitch session was highlighted by one respondent as particularly effective in setting this tone: *"hearing all the pitches at*

the start really gave me perspective on all the interlinking issues that we faced and it was a great way to set the scene for what everyone felt." Another found particular meaning in *"discussing digital rights and problematising xenophobia,"* which was a reminder of the breadth of issues the sector holds.

The unconference format

A number of respondents reflected specifically on the unconference methodology itself as a meaningful part of the experience. Several noted that the format had created a more equitable and inclusive dynamic than traditional conference settings, with responses pointing to the way *"the process allowed everyone to speak, learn and engage"* and *"the structure enabled voices to be heard."* One respondent valued being able to share thoughts and opinions *"without fear of being judged,"* while another found particular significance in *"the discussion during the session we pitched and delivered,"* suggesting that having genuine ownership over the content of a session deepened the experience of it.

Shifts in thinking and practice

While the responses in the previous section highlighted the value of connection and exposure to new perspectives, this question invited respondents to reflect more personally on whether those experiences had translated into changed thinking. The responses revealed a spectrum of experience from those who left with genuinely new perspectives, to those whose existing thinking had been affirmed rather than changed, to a small number who felt the day had not moved them at all.

For some respondents, the shift was concrete and specific. One noted a clearer sense of the need to work more collaboratively with the research sector, while another left with a sharper awareness of gaps in their own knowledge: *"more work to do on my knowledge of the experience of migrant and refugee women."* Others described shifts that were more about practice than content with one respondent reflecting on *"letting go of control and allowing communication to happen"* as something that had resonated with them, while another spoke of gaining *"a better sense of meeting people where they're at in effective change making."* One respondent found themselves newly curious about the intersection of gender equality and AI, noting they wanted to think more about *"what this means in my personal practice, as well as thinking forward as a workforce."* Another offered a more critical insight, describing intersectionality as *"a minimising strategy in Australia that whitewashes racism and power."* This statement suggests the day surfaced some genuinely challenging ideas alongside more affirming ones.

For a number of respondents, the day had not so much shifted their thinking as deepened or confirmed it. Several noted that existing views had been reinforced which is a distinction worth noting, as consolidation of practice is itself a meaningful outcome. Others spoke of feeling energised or inspired to continue: *"it has given me the inspiration to keep learning in this space"* and *"just encourages me to keep going."* One respondent captured this sentiment powerfully: *"I've always been open to new ways of thinking and practice – this was a new way to learn."*

A small number of respondents indicated that their thinking had not shifted, in some cases because the content had not felt relevant to their work.

Networking and connections

As shown in Figure 4, over 80% of respondents either 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that they had formed connections at the unconference that will be valuable for their professional or personal practice. Only a small proportion did not agree in some way or felt neutral. This suggests that networking was one of the clearest and most consistent strengths of the day.

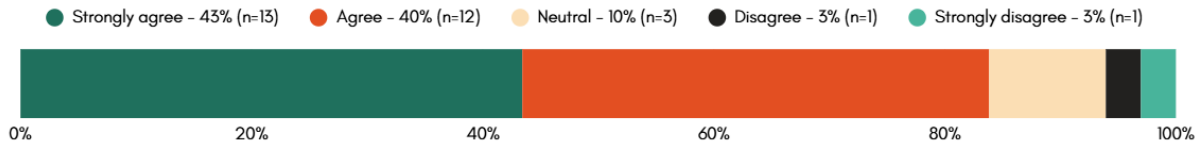

Figure 4. Respondents' ratings of agreement that they made valuable connections.

This was reinforced in the qualitative responses which gave a sense of both the nature and the anticipated impact of the connections made. The large majority of respondents described connections that were immediately purposeful. One respondent made *"a new connection with a research body to do future work together,"* while another spoke of connecting with people outside of sessions in ways that felt organically relevant: *"hearing what people did for work and connecting with relevant people outside of the sessions."* For some, the value lay in deepening existing relationships rather than forging entirely new ones. As one person stated, *"I definitely connected with a few people I'd only met briefly before."* Others, however, described a broader expansion of their professional network and access to expertise: *"network broadened – additional expertise to connect with for further conversations."*

Several responses pointed to the particular significance of being in a room with people who shared a common commitment but brought different perspectives and approaches. One respondent reflected that meeting people *"with similar interests who had slightly different approaches or perspectives"* had been both broadening and strengthening, while another was inspired enough to want to bring the voices of those they met directly into their teaching: *"I would like to borrow the words and intellect of members in the room and put them in front of my students."* A sense of mutual support also came through strongly, with one respondent noting they felt *"inspired and knew I could turn to people for support"* going forward, and another describing an expansive sense of possibility: *"it was really nice to meet so many interesting people who both informed my thinking and shared insights into new ways of thinking and acting."*

Sector priorities and future action

Respondents were asked to look outward: first to what work should continue or deepen as a result of the day, and then to what the sector most needs to focus its attention and resources on. Together, the responses offer a forward-looking picture of where practitioners see both momentum and gaps.

Collaboration and coalition-building

The need for greater collaboration across the sector emerged as one of the most consistent themes across both questions. Many respondents felt that while the day had demonstrated the energy and goodwill that exists across the field, it had also surfaced a tendency toward siloed working. One respondent noted that the day had *"a strong sense of people pushing their own agenda/research rather than connecting and listening with others,"* while another called simply for practitioners to *"better share resources with each other and stop trying to compromise on projects."* The aspiration for more meaningful coalition-building was echoed in calls for *"resourcing the coalitions and community," "more interdisciplinarity, more coalitions and collaboration,"* and a desire to *"work together to showcase our stories to the broader community at all levels, from grassroots to policy makers to corporates."* For several respondents, the unconference itself had modelled something worth replicating – the value of *"collaborative spaces"* and *"more dialogue and space for conversation."*

Though some felt the breadth of the audience had limited how far those conversations could go, with one suggesting the format might work better *"with a more focused group."*

Intersectionality and whose voices are centred

Intersectionality surfaced repeatedly across both questions, both as an area requiring deeper conceptual engagement and as a lens through which to interrogate the sector's own practice. Respondents called for a *"deep dive"* into intersectionality in practice – not just as a framework but as a question of *"the how to"* in everyday practice. One respondent offered a pointed critique, describing intersectionality as having become *"a minimising strategy in Australia that whitewashes racism and power,"* while another highlighted the absence of certain voices from the room itself as a significant reflection point: *"recognising which voices were not present – for genuine solidarity, activism must follow the leadership of First Nations people."* The need to balance attention across genders was also raised, with one respondent calling for more nuanced consideration of *"men, boys, trans and gender expansive and non-binary folks"* alongside the continued focus on women and girls, and a recognition of *"the different impacts among different genders."*

Emerging and underserved issue areas

Several respondents pointed to issue areas they felt had not received sufficient attention. The intersection of climate and gender was the most frequently mentioned, with one respondent noting the striking contrast between how prominently it featured at *Women Deliver 2026* and how little traction it gained in the local unconference setting: *"it was insightful to see this is not yet seen as an important issue in a more local setting."* Another was more direct: *"this is the biggest threat of our generation and not a lot of people understand how it impacts women more."* Gender-based violence, AI and gender, economic inclusion, and the needs of migrant and refugee women were also raised, alongside calls for *"more emphasis on AI, GBV, cultural awareness"* and attention to *"full legal rights and protection in law, particularly for victims of assault."*

Structural issues and sustainability

Beneath the thematic priorities, a number of respondents pointed to structural challenges facing the sector itself. Short-term funding was identified as a significant barrier, with one respondent noting that *"advocating for sustained resources – short term grants is not going to create equality."* Sector burnout was named explicitly as an area needing attention. The limited space for reflection and learning within the sector's day-to-day work was also flagged, with one respondent noting simply that *"space for reflection and learning is too limited for most of us."* One respondent captured the broader ambition well: *"creating action from solidarity,"* a phrase that felt, for them, like the animating theme of the day.

Conclusion

Weaving Change brought together a diverse and committed community of gender equity practitioners at a moment of genuine significance, held alongside a major global conference, in a city energised by the presence of advocates and change-makers from around the world. The evaluation findings suggest that, for the majority of attendees who completed the survey, the day delivered on its core intentions.

Across the scaled items, respondents rated the event positively on all four dimensions – overall value, learning and engagement, meaningful contribution, and professional connection – with networking emerging as the standout strength. The qualitative responses gave texture and depth to these ratings, revealing a strong appetite for exactly what the unconference format was designed to offer: genuine

exchange, peer learning, and the kind of lateral connection across sectors and roles that more formal conference settings rarely make possible. For many respondents, simply being in a room with others who shared their commitment, and discovering the breadth and diversity of what gender equity work looks like across Australia, was itself a meaningful outcome.

Looking ahead, the responses painted a picture of a sector that is energised but stretched – rich in ideas and relationships, but constrained by short-term funding, limited space for reflection, and a persistent tendency toward siloed working. The themes that emerged most strongly – deeper collaboration, sustained resourcing, genuine intersectional practice, and attention to underserved issue areas such as climate and gender – are not new to the field. What *Weaving Change* offered was a rare opportunity to name them together, in community, and to begin to imagine what collective action might look like. Whether that potential is realised will depend, in large part, on what happens next in individual practices, in organisational priorities, and in the ongoing work of building a sector that is as connected and collaborative as its values demand.