

**30TH COMMONWEALTH WOMEN PARLIAMENTARIANS
(CWP) BUSINESS STEERING COMMITTEE MEETING**

**Room C4.5
International Convention Centre Sydney
Sydney, New South Wales, Australia**

**4 NOVEMBER 2024
Time: 14:00 – 17:00 (AEDT)**

**Regional Strengthening Funds: Updated modalities for
2026**

(I) EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This paper provides the CWP Membership with an overview of improvements to the method and application of CWP Regional Strengthening Funds for 2026 approved by the Committee at its meeting on 30 July 2024. The proposed changes were approved with the intention of better serving the interest of the CWP network.

(II) BACKGROUND

Following a request made by the Steering Committee at its meeting in September 2019 for the immediate evaluation of CWP finances to be undertaken, the CPA Headquarters assessed the use of Regional Strengthening Funds (RSF) from 2013. This led to the approval of the current model by the CWP Steering Committee at its meeting in November 2020. The CWP Membership is invited to note the method for the current model:

- A total of £90,000 is provided for CWP Regional Strengthening Funds. Each CPA Region will be allocated £10,000 to advance the CWP's mission "*to promote the representation of women in CPA Branches and women's full and equal participation in political and parliamentary leadership at all levels*".
- Invitations to submit bids for the funds for the following year are released early in the month of November giving Regions more time to apply for the Funds and consider best and practical approaches to take within their Region. Prior to November 2020, Regions were informed of the availability of Funds in January, 2 months before the deadline for submissions.
- Regions have until the end of the first quarter (end of March) to submit proposals and a draft budget to the CWP Coordinator on the project or activity the Region intends to deliver.

- Proposals received after the deadline will not be considered and each Region benefits from having until 31 December to spend their allocation.
- Regions can request a *one-month extension* to the deadline for submission of proposals.
- Any funding that has not been allocated to a Region within the set date outlined above is retained by the CWP Coordinator to be redeployed for the CWP. This underspend is ringfenced and used for programmes that are aligned with the CWP's other activities. Specifically, the majority of the underspend is reallocated to strengthen the work CWP is delivering on the gender sensitisation of parliaments

The CWP Steering Committee also agreed to regularly review the model on an annual basis. Reports of the progress, expenditure and impact of the Funds were shared with the CWP Steering Committee at its mid-year meeting in September 2021 and in the margins of its annual meetings held in 2022 and 2023.

(III) CWP STEERING COMMITTEE DISCUSSIONS AND DECISIONS

With respect to the CWP Steering Committee's request to regularly review the application of Regional Strengthening Funds, at its meeting held on 28 May 2024, Members were presented with a discussion paper by the CPA Headquarters Secretariat that intended to assist Members of the Steering Committee with considering improvements to the existing model. The paper sought to provide an initial framework for further discussions and consultation to strengthen the impact of the network's activities.

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat identified the following persistent and detrimental issues with the existing CWP Regional Strengthening Funds:

- Since the establishment of Regional Strengthening Funds in 2013, there has been a continuous underspend of an average of 50% per year. As funds cannot be carried over, the CWP currently loses out on approximately £40,000 per year.
- The same CPA Regions, which are arguably in greatest need, do not access the funds, despite proactive mitigation strategies from the CPA Headquarters Secretariat. As such, no more than five CPA Regions access their full allocation in a financial year.
- Many Regional Secretariats struggle to engage with jurisdictions within their Region to identify and organise activities and projects aligned with the Regional Strengthening Funds, and because of this, they tend to prioritise their own jurisdictions for funding.
- Whereas there is a recognition and appreciation of the hard work and commitment of Regional Secretariats, sometimes it has proved difficult to develop projects that can be for the full benefit of women Parliamentarians across a Region. This is in part due to a lack of capacity. Consequently, Regional Strengthening Funds can occasionally be allocated to less impact-oriented activities. The CPA and CWP's increasing desire to be more outward-oriented requires a greater record of impact to secure external funding sources which in turn could strengthen CWP's programmatic work.

- Many Regional Secretariats also frequently struggle to undertake worthwhile activities within the £10,000 per CPA Region cap under the existing model.
- Issues with CPA Regions submitting applications late retrospectively generates inaccurate budgeting across the entire CPA Programmes team which habitually results in unhelpful underspends by year-end.
- Despite continuous efforts around communication, there is a general lack of awareness of the CWP Regional Strengthening Funds by CPA Branches and wider stakeholders.

It was agreed at the Steering Committee that a Sub-Committee would be created to consider the challenges and proposed solutions presented by the CPA Headquarters. The Sub-Committee was also tasked with the responsibility of reporting back its decision to the CWP wider Steering Committee.

Members should note that consisted of the following Members:

- Hon. Kate Doust MLC, CWP Vice-Chairperson and CWP Representative for the Australia Region
- Mrs Aparajita Haque MP, CWP Representative for the Asia Region
- Rhianon Passmore MS, Alternate CWP Representative for the British Island and Mediterranean Region
- Hon. Valerie Woods, CWP Representative for the Caribbean, Americas and Atlantic Region
- Hon. Lenora Qereqeretabua, CWP Representative for the Pacific Region.

The Sub-Committee met on 16 July 2024 where they focused discussions on the concerns surrounding the organisation and distribution of the existing Regional Strengthening Funds. The Subgroup also considered the paper presented by the CPA Headquarters Secretariat that provided a framework for the discussion.

The Members of the Subgroup agreed that the CPA Headquarters Secretariat's proposal was adequate, but specific elements of the proposal needed to be finetuned and appropriately communicated to the Regions. An oral report of the Sub-Committee's meeting including a recommendation was given by the CWP Vice-Chairperson at the CWP Steering Committee's third meeting of the year held on 30 July 2024.

(IV) PROPOSED SOLUTION

The CWP Business Meeting is invited to note the approved changes to the Regional Strengthening Funds that will begin with the 2026 Funding allocation:

- The Fund will be open to bids from both Branches and Regions of the CPA, aimed at regional, national, or subnational beneficiaries.
- The Fund is no longer capped at £10,000 per project/activity, instead any sum can be bid for within the total Fund amount.

- Funds can be allocated to any CPA Region and CPA Branches within the same region within a single financial year. However, when allocating funds, geographic spread will be borne in mind. Additionally, where Regions have an active programme of regional strengthening work, Branches may not be eligible to receive funding.
- Multi-year bids can now be submitted (with guaranteed funds allocated for a maximum of three years). Where funds are to form part of multi-year funding agreements with third parties, approval for the allocation of the fund may need to be sought from the CPA Coordinating Committee.
- To give more time for planning, calls for submission of funds will be brought forward by six months. For the 2026 Fund allocation the following dates will apply:
 - Call for Funds: 1 July 2025
 - Deadline for submissions: 31 October 2025
 - Deadline for review and approval of fund allocations: 1 December 2025
 - Allocation of the 2026 Fund from: 1 January 2026
 - Deadline for expenditure of the 2026 Fund: 31 December 2026
- Where Gender Sensitive Parliament Assessments were previously allocated from Regional Strengthening Funds underspends, this work will now become integrated into the new Fund.
- Once the deadline for submissions closes, and where an underspend exists, the CPA will initiate activities in jurisdictions where Regions consistently fail to undertake any projects/activities.
- To increase awareness of the Regional Strengthening Funds, an enhanced communications push will be undertaken as part of the re/launch of the Fund and name change to “**CWP Gender Strengthening Funds**”. Information will be shared across CPA Regions, CPA Branches and to external non-parliamentary entities. A change in the Fund’s name, to make it clearer as to what it is for, may also generate greater interest.
- There should be an increase in oversight of fund allocations. This shall be done through the establishment of a CWP Subcommittee, chaired by the CWP Vice-Chairperson, two additional members of the Steering Committee and include the CPA Secretary-General.
- To improve monitoring and evaluation of CWP Regional Strengthening Funds, an outcome report will be produced to coincide with reporting around the CPA Strategic Plan, with the first one undertaken in 2026.

(V) GENERAL BENEFITS

It is intended that these changes will enable more Parliaments, and importantly women Parliamentarians to utilise and consequentially benefit from the CWP Regional Strengthening Funds. Also importantly, the changes will seek to ensure no existing entity who receives the Funds will be penalised.

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat appreciates and recognises the hard work and commitment of all Regional Secretariats, but equally recognises that too high a burden is being placed on them alone and this can, for many of them, make it very difficult to successfully access and utilise the existing model. As such, Branches can pursue such applications as well. This change will also enable CPA Regions and Branches to undertake larger and more impactful projects and activities over multiple years, which in turn will reduce the administrative burden of annual bidding on resource-poor Secretariats.

(VI) ACTIONS TO BE TAKEN AFTER CPC

Following the CPC, the CPA Headquarters Secretariat will work to finalise changes to the application criteria for the new model with specific attention to how the proposed impact of a project would be assessed, the role of the CWP sub-committee who will be tasked to review the funding allocations, the methodology of approving long term funding, and the facilitation of partnerships with external Civil Society Organisations and Non-Governmental organisations needed to be finetuned and adequately communicated to the Regions.

The CPA Headquarters Secretariat will work to develop a comprehensive set of guidelines on the rules, process and scope in which the funds can be used. It is anticipated that this will be completed and approved by the CWP Steering Committee by the end of March 2025.

Additionally, a list of activities that have been proposed in the CWP Work Plan for 2025 under the objective *“To raise awareness of Regional Strengthening Funds including the introduction of the new for the 2026 CWP Gender Strengthening Funds”* will be delivered to ensure that the above mentioned timelines for the launch of the new Funds are met and effectively communicated to Parliaments within the CPA’s membership.