

Commission and Other Public Bodies Questionnaire Response

Mandate and Purpose

1. 1. Original Purpose or Rationale

The San Francisco Commission on the Status of Women (COSW) was formally established on September 3, 1975, by the Board of Supervisors through Resolution No. 780-75. The Commission was created to advise the Mayor and Board of Supervisors on policies affecting the welfare and civil rights of women and girls in San Francisco. Its mandate was to eliminate discrimination and promote equal economic, social, political, and educational opportunities, modeled after the 1963 Presidential Commission on the Status of Women.

2. Changes in Role Over Time

Over the decades, COSW has evolved from a primarily advisory body to a proactive, policy-influencing institution. It has broadened its focus to include intersectional gender equity, direct advocacy, data gathering, and systems change. COSW played a pivotal role in the adoption of San Francisco's local ordinance implementing the principles of the UN Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) in 1998. This human rights framework now guides its strategies, programs, and funding, especially in areas like gender-based violence prevention, civic empowerment, and economic justice.

2.A ANTI SEXUAL HARRASSMENT POLICY

Since 2018, (COSW) has played a formal oversight role in reviewing citywide sexual harassment complaint data, following the passage of Ordinance No. 175-18, which amended the Administrative Code (§16.9-27). This ordinance mandates that the Department of Human Resources (DHR) provide COSW with quarterly and annual de-identified reports detailing harassment complaints across City departments, including breakdowns by protected class, departmental origin, and case outcomes. While COSW had previously engaged in informal oversight, this law codified its authority to monitor patterns, identify problem areas, and recommend policy reforms. Since 2019, COSW has consistently received and reviewed these reports, using them to inform hearings, policy recommendations, and gender equity initiatives. The data oversight has become a cornerstone of COSW's role in holding City departments accountable and advancing survivor-centered, inclusive harassment prevention strategies.

Potential Cost Savings — Based on Public Sector Benchmarks

While San Francisco has not published a direct financial impact assessment, similar analyses from other jurisdictions and legal studies suggest:

a. Lawsuit and Settlement Avoidance

- The average cost of settling a sexual harassment claim in the public sector is estimated at \$160,000–\$250,000, not including legal fees or internal investigation costs.
- In 2022, a single high-profile harassment lawsuit against the SFMTA cost the City \$400,000 in settlement alone—not including productivity loss or reputational damage.
- Even avoiding 3–5 serious cases per year through early intervention and policy enforcement could save \$1M+ annually.

b. Litigation and Legal Costs

- Internal investigations cost an estimated \$25,000–\$50,000 per complaint. Prevention through training and early reporting systems dramatically reduces escalated claims.
- Proactive oversight by COSW and data review ensures patterns are flagged early, reducing the chance of systemic liability.

c. Productivity and Turnover

- Workplace harassment increases employee turnover, absenteeism, and mental health claims.
- A 2018 Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) study found U.S. employers lose an estimated \$22,500 in productivity per incident of unaddressed harassment.
- If COSW's role helps prevent even 20 such incidents annually across the City's ~35,000 employees, that's \$450,000 in avoided productivity losses.

2. B SEXUAL ASSAULT

COSW has played a pivotal and sustained role in addressing sexual assault, particularly through a systems-change and policy lens. Its work in this area has significantly shaped how San Francisco responds to survivors and works to prevent gender-based violence.

In its early years, the Commission worked to:

- Increase public awareness of sexual assault as a systemic, rather than individual, issue.

- Support the development and funding of community-based services for survivors, such as crisis hotlines, shelters, and counseling programs.
- Advocate for the recognition of sexual assault as a public health and safety issue, not just a criminal matter.

As the Commission gained influence, it became a policy driver and convener in improving the city's response to sexual assault:

- **Coordinated City Response:** The COSW was instrumental in creating the Violence Against Women Prevention and Intervention (VAWPI) Strategic Plan, a cross-departmental initiative that aligned city services around the needs of survivors.
- **Sexual Assault Response Team (SART):** The Commission supported the establishment and refinement of San Francisco's SART model, which coordinates the work of police, hospitals, and advocacy groups in responding to sexual assault cases.
- **Training and Accountability:** The Commission has pushed for trauma-informed training across city departments, especially in the SFPD, to improve how first responders treat survivors. It has also advocated for data collection and accountability in the handling of cases.
- **Funding for Survivor Services:** COSW oversees and administers significant portions of the city's funding for community-based organizations working on sexual assault prevention and survivor support, including culturally competent services for BIPOC and LGBTQ+ communities.

In more recent years, the Commission has:

- **Addressed the Backlog of Rape Kits:** Advocated for timely processing of sexual assault forensic evidence and transparency in reporting.
- **Worked on Survivor-Centered Justice Models:** Pushed for expanding restorative and transformative justice approaches for survivors who do not wish to go through the criminal legal system.
- **Led Public Engagement Campaigns:** Including initiatives during Sexual Assault Awareness Month and citywide education campaigns on consent and prevention.
- **Supported Legislation:** Locally and statewide, to strengthen survivor protections and institutional accountability, including workplace protections against harassment and assault.

Impact

The Commission's leadership has helped make San Francisco a national model in coordinated sexual assault response. It has bridged gaps between city agencies, law enforcement, and community-based providers, and consistently centered equity, trauma-informed care, and survivor agency in its work.

2C. DOMESTIC VIOLENCE

COSW has been a national leader in shaping policy, funding, and systems coordination to address domestic violence (DV). Since its inception, the Commission has evolved from raising awareness to driving institutional reform and funding a comprehensive network of survivor services.

a. Foundational Role in Citywide Domestic Violence Response

- In the 1990s, the Commission helped launch San Francisco's first coordinated response to domestic violence, aligning efforts across city departments and community-based organizations.
- It established a model that centered survivor safety, cultural responsiveness, and interagency collaboration, well before such models became widespread.

b. Creation and Oversight of the Family Violence Council

- The COSW co-founded the Family Violence Council, which brings together representatives from the courts, law enforcement, city agencies, and nonprofits to track and improve responses to domestic violence, child abuse, and elder abuse.
- The Council produces annual data reports and makes policy recommendations, often driven by COSW research and staff coordination.

c. Grantmaking and Investment in Community-Based DV Services

- The Commission administered and oversaw millions of dollars in annual funding to community organizations serving survivors of domestic violence, especially women, immigrants, LGBTQ+ individuals, and communities of color.
- These grants support services including:
 - Emergency shelter and transitional housing
 - Legal assistance
 - Mental health counseling
 - Crisis hotlines
 - Community education and prevention

- Notably, COSW funding was often the core or anchor funding that enables nonprofits to sustain and scale their work. This includes organizations like:
 - Asian Women’s Shelter
 - La Casa de las Madres
 - W.O.M.A.N., Inc.
 - API Legal Outreach
 - Riley Center (Compass Family Services)

d. Policy Leadership and Systems Change

- COSW led the development of the city’s Violence Against Women Prevention and Intervention (VAWPI) Strategic Plan, which integrates city efforts to address domestic violence alongside sexual assault and human trafficking.
- It pushed for and implemented citywide training on trauma-informed and survivor-centered practices, especially for law enforcement, court staff, and healthcare providers.
- COSW played a role in shaping legislation and budget priorities, such as:
 - Advocating for language access policies
 - Supporting paid safe leave policies for survivors
 - Expanding housing protections for those fleeing domestic violence

e. Pandemic-Era Innovation and Crisis Response

- During the COVID-19 pandemic, COSW helped establish emergency shelter-in-place domestic violence hotels, recognizing the sharp increase in domestic violence and the dangers of isolation.
- It also coordinated rapid-response funding and communications, working closely with the Mayor’s Office and nonprofits to ensure survivors were not left behind

f. Data, Accountability, and Cultural Equity

- COSW has consistently used data analysis and budget equity tools to ensure that services reach the most vulnerable populations, including Black women, undocumented immigrants, and survivors with disabilities.
- The Commission monitors city departments for compliance with gender equity standards, including how city funds are used to support domestic violence services.

Claire Joyce Tempongko Domestic Violence Case

- On October 22, 2000, Tari Ramirez (also known as Tari Beltran) stabbed Claire Joyce Tempongko, age 28, 21 times in her Richmond District home—in front of her two young children (ages 10 and 5) [San Francisco Chronicle+12SFGATE+12ffwn.org+12](#). Ramirez had a documented history of domestic abuse and was on probation at the time [ffwn.org](#).
- In 2008, a San Francisco jury convicted him of second-degree murder and sentenced him to 16 years to life [CBS News+1CBS News+1](#).

Failures in the System

A review commissioned by COSW, later published as the Justice and Courage Blueprint (March 2002), found multiple critical failures across city agencies:

- Police, probation, and the district attorney's office failed to communicate effectively, leading to missed protective opportunities when Tempongko had reported abuse and obtained restraining orders [San Francisco Chronicle+12SF.gov+12SFGATE+12](#).
- Ramirez had been arrested several times in 1999 for domestic violence and served four months in jail, yet probation supervision lapsed when his officer retired and no replacement was assigned [CBS News+2SFGATE+2CBS News+2](#).
- Emergency protective orders were not enforced, and critical police reports were never relayed to probation or prosecutorial staff [SFGATESFGATE](#).

Impact and Systemic Reform

- The Justice and Courage Blueprint (March 2002), produced by the Commission and Department on the Status of Women, proposed comprehensive reforms across all city agencies to better coordinate domestic violence response
- Following these reforms, San Francisco saw a dramatic reduction in domestic violence homicides, from over 10 per year to just one or two annually [SFGATE](#).
- The city established the Justice and Courage Oversight Panel, which continued monthly oversight of domestic violence systems. The Domestic Violence Response Cross-Training Institute, launched in 2006 with support from the DOSW, won national recognition and helped train hundreds of staff

across police, probation, courts, and dispatch in survivor-centered domestic violence response [SF.gov+1SFGATE+1](#).

Public Engagement

3. Public Comment Participation

Public engagement varies by agenda topic but often includes a diverse range of voices from community-based organizations, survivors, advocates, and policy experts. While some regular attendees provide ongoing input, the Commission actively seeks broad participation, particularly during funding deliberations and special reports.

Commission Business

4. Topics Brought to Meetings

Typical agenda items include grant approvals, policy briefings, strategic reports (e.g., on human trafficking, domestic violence, and gender representation in public spaces), legislative updates, and program evaluations aligned with departmental priorities.

5. Input on Policies, Plans, or Budgets

The Commission provides input and approval on the Department on the Status of Women's (DOSW) strategic plan, grantmaking priorities, public reports, and budget requests. It serves as the governing and oversight body for DOSW.

6. Recent Decisions and Reviews

In the past year, COSW approved the allocation of a \$9.3 million CDSS grant to the SOL Collaborative for anti-trafficking services, reviewed the Human Trafficking Report (2022–2023), approved the Gender Representation Analysis of public spaces, and adopted recommendations from the Community Needs Assessment Report (2024).

7. Follow-Up on Recommendations

Recommendations are tracked by DOSW staff, incorporated into strategic planning or grant guidelines, and reported back at subsequent Commission meetings. Major policy initiatives are followed through via memos to City leadership or inter-agency collaboration.

Contracts

8. Contract Volume

COSW typically reviews and approves a limited number of large-scale grants and contracts annually—approximately 6 to 10 major grant packages, often involving multi-year funding cycles.

9. Types of Contracts Reviewed

Grants reviewed include funding for domestic violence shelters, sexual assault prevention programs, anti-human trafficking services, and culturally specific services for marginalized populations.

10. Approval Timelines

Contracts are typically reviewed and approved within one to two commission meetings, assuming timely internal processing and calendaring.

11. Meeting Frequency for Timely Approvals

COSW meets monthly and holds special meetings as needed to ensure timely contract approvals and public oversight.

Outcomes and Impact

12. Measurable Outcomes in 2024–2025

- Released the 2024 Human Trafficking Report, documenting 2,501 cases with data from 18 agencies (up from 8 in the previous cycle).
 - Launched San Francisco's first Community Needs Assessment Report with a survey that exceeded the 700-response goal—topping 1,000 confidential responses—to inform future programming in health, economic security, and civic empowerment.
 - Advanced the Gender Representation Analysis of public art, streets, buildings, and parks.
 - Received a \$9.3 million CDSS grant to support the SOL Collaborative, providing trauma-informed wraparound services to youth vulnerable to sexual exploitation.
- Approximately \$2.7 million invoiced through mid-2024, with annual subcontracting around \$2 million to community partners.

13. Alignment with Departmental Goals

The Commission's work directly supports DOSW's strategic pillars: Health & Safety, Economic Security, and Civic Engagement. Its activities are aligned with the Mayor's policy priorities, especially in public safety and equity.

14. Overlapping Processes with Other Bodies

COSW collaborates with bodies like the Mayor's Task Force on Anti-Human Trafficking, the Family Violence Council, and the Human Rights Commission. DOSW coordinates cross-agency efforts and shares reporting obligations across multiple forums.

15. Other Bodies with Similar Functions

While other agencies such as the Department of Public Health, SFPD, and the Human Rights Commission work on related issues, COSW uniquely focuses on gender-based violence prevention, gender equity, and culturally competent policy development.

16. Examples of Influence

- Led the development of the Justice and Courage Blueprint, resulting in systemic reforms in domestic violence response.
- Helped establish the Family Violence Council and the Domestic Violence Response Cross-Training Institute.
- Informed citywide equity and safety initiatives through the Community Needs Assessment and Human Trafficking Reports.
- Directed funding and programming that have become anchor resources for vulnerable populations.

Optional Comments

17. Additional Feedback

Amid San Francisco's \$782 million deficit, dismantling or weakening the Commission and Department on the Status of Women would be a costly and short-sighted mistake. Public safety—central to Mayor Lurie's administration—must be understood not only as the reduction of retail theft, car break-ins, and home burglaries, but as the City's capacity to prevent all forms of violence, particularly gender-based violence. Instead of cutting proven programs, the City should continue to invest in prevention strategies that reduce harm before it occurs. True efficiency lies in the ability to coordinate across agencies—including police, courts, and community-based providers—and in developing policy grounded in subject-matter expertise.

Gender-based violence alone costs the City an estimated \$1.7 billion annually in direct and indirect expenses. COSW's oversight role—particularly in anti-harassment, domestic violence, and trafficking prevention—saves the City millions through early intervention, legal cost avoidance, and public safety improvements. The Commission is a nationally recognized leader in gender equity and provides efficient, cost-effective services that align with the Administration's goals. Its continuation is essential for effective governance, public trust, and fiscal responsibility.