

# INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY WOMEN'S DAY EVENT EVALUATION



# OVERVIEW



Emergency Services Foundation's (ESF) sixth annual International Women's Day (IWD) Event was held on Thursday 5 March at the MCG. Bringing over 170 attendees from across the emergency management sector together, the event focused on driving momentum in the Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (DEI) space for women.

This year's theme, *Give to Gain*, emphasizes that active, collaborative investment of time, resources, mentorship, and opportunities in women creates a reciprocal effect, driving gender equality and societal progress regarding diversity and inclusion. Speakers and panelists covered important conversation topics such as the impact of culture and gender on the workplace, life after emergency services, and practical ways to create truly inclusive workplaces.

Since inclusion is undoubtedly a protective factor for psychological safety, the event aligns with ESF's strategic commitment to advancing mental health and wellbeing initiatives by addressing shared challenges within the sector. By fostering open conversations on workplace systems that protect, empower and support women emergency management workers, the IWD event supports meaningful change. The overwhelmingly positive feedback underscores the importance of such initiatives in creating a healthier and more inclusive emergency management sector.

# OBJECTIVES



Objectives	Outcome
<p><b>Bring the emergency services sector together to raise awareness for intersectional challenges faced by people in the workplace.</b></p>	<p>The event brought together over 174 attendees, 105 of which were from ESF’s member agencies, including strong representation from agencies such as CFA, DEECA, FRV, Triple Zero, and St John Ambulance.</p> <p>Sessions showcased diverse voices within the emergency services sector and addressed topics such as management of maternity leave, gender bias, and how to create inclusive workplaces. Survey responses revealed that these conversations sparked important reflection and dialogue across agencies.</p>
<p><b>Encourage behaviour change in relation to advancement of gender, diversity and inclusion.</b></p>	<p>Attendees reported that the event, and especially the session with Bree Gorman, made them feel inspired to take action for equity in their workplace. This was demonstrated as part of an activity during which attendees were encouraged to write down “one action they will take for equity”. Examples include working with management to create a safe space to report issues, using more inclusive language in job descriptions and reconsidering interview processes to make them more accessible.</p>

# OBJECTIVES



Objectives	Outcome
<p><b>Celebrate people and work in the sector who are demonstrating inclusive leadership and can inspire others.</b></p>	<p>The Diversity &amp; Inclusion Awards showcased a range of initiatives which promote inclusion and gender diversity applied across ESF's member agencies. Attendees also highly praised the pre-recorded session with Dany Cotton, who spoke about her personal experiences as first female commissioner of the London Fire Brigade and the difficulties she had to overcome along the way.</p>
<p><b>Improved local inter-agency connections, collaboration and relationship building.</b></p>	<p>Seating was allocated beforehand to split up agencies across tables and encourage networking. Feedback suggests that this approach and the resulting cross-collaboration was highly appreciated.</p>

# BUDGET & FUNDING



Item	Description	Total
Venue (MCG, Jim Stynes Room)	Catering, room hire, AV	\$19,775.92
Registration	Ticket sale platform fees	\$407.33
Printing & Stationary	Programs, award certificates, award frames, name tags, holders and lanyards	\$560.00
Other	Travel expenses & presenter gifts	\$1,140.84

<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>\$21,884.09</b>
<b>Total revenue</b>	<b>\$25,712.00</b>
<b>Profit</b>	<b>\$3,827.91</b>

The budget summary outlines the financials for our International Women’s Day event held at the Melbourne Cricket Ground. It includes total expenses of \$21,884.09 covering venue, registration fees, printing, and other costs. Sales and partnerships generated a revenue of \$25,712.00, resulting in a small surplus of \$3,827.91 which helps to cover ESF staffing and operational costs.

ESF received sponsorship from CG Quickprint worth \$500, which helped to cover the printing costs. Otherwise the International Women’s Day event was funded solely by ticket sales.

Individual ticket cost was \$185 for ESF member agencies and \$200 for others, this fee was calculated to make the event accessible for attendees while enabling ESF to cover event costs.

# EVENT PROGRAM



*International Women's Day*  
**Give to Gain**

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
**DIVERSITY & INCLUSION AWARDS 2026**

## Event Program

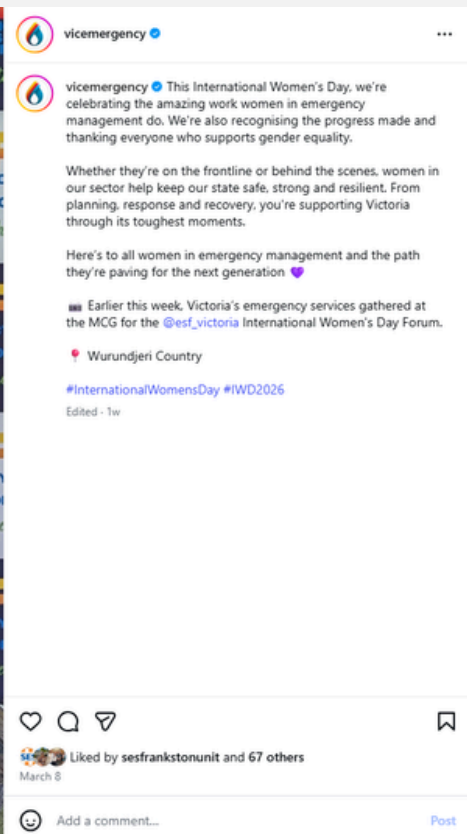
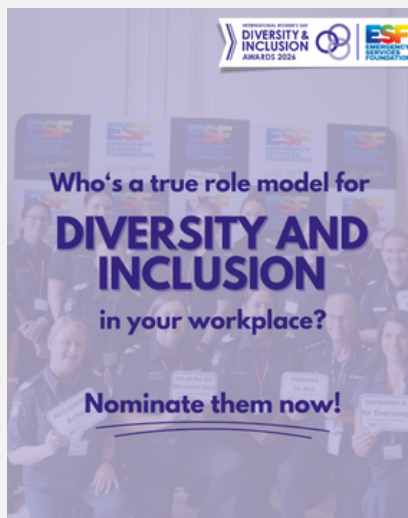
### Thursday, 5 March 2026

<b>9:30 am</b>	<p><b>Welcome</b></p> <p>Siusan MacKenzie, ESF</p>	<b>1:25 pm</b>	<p><b>Leading in the Heat:</b> <b>A conversation with Dany Cotton about courage, leadership and cultural change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Michelle Cowling, FRV</li> <li>• Lauren McCully, CFA</li> <li>• Erika Lind, DEECA</li> <li>• Natalie Kenely, SES</li> </ul>
<b>9:50 am</b>	<p><b>Inclusion by Design, Not Accident</b></p> <p><i>Facilitator Stephen O'Malley, FRV</i></p> <p>Bree Gorman, Diversity and Inclusion Coach</p>		
<b>10:30 am</b>	<p><b>Grasping Opportunities</b></p> <p><i>Facilitator Siusan MacKenzie, ESF</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Irina Tchernitskaia, FRV</li> <li>• Kat Horton, DEECA</li> </ul>	<b>2:25 pm</b>	<p><b>Presentation of Diversity and Inclusion Awards</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Vivienne Nguyen, CEO/Chair of the Victorian Multicultural Commission</li> <li>• Dr Niki Vincent, Victoria's Public Sector Gender Equality Commissioner</li> </ul>
<b>10:40 am</b>	<p><b>Morning Tea</b></p>		
<b>11:00 am</b>	<p><b>Emergency service through different lenses</b></p> <p><i>Facilitator Therese Fitzgerald, EMV</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Christine Dehavilland, VicPol</li> <li>• Thel Lay Paw, LSV</li> <li>• Keisha Jayasuriya, AV</li> <li>• Megan Leung, St John</li> </ul>		<p><b>Sharing Success</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Inclusivity Initiative</li> <li>• Women's Equality Initiative</li> <li>• Diversity Champion</li> </ul>
<b>12:00 pm</b>	<p><b>Impact of culture and gender on the workplace</b></p> <p><i>Facilitator Dr Barbara Cosson, War on Wasted Talent</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chris Hardman, DEECA</li> <li>• Tamara Beckett, DEECA</li> <li>• Shannon Devenish, DEECA</li> </ul>	<b>3:05 pm</b>	<p><b>Afternoon Tea</b></p>
		<b>3:25 pm</b>	<p><b>Life after the Lights</b></p> <p><i>Facilitator Karishma Kumar, AFAC</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Amanda Smillie, Department of Families, Fairness and Housing</li> <li>• Erin Smith, LaTrobe University</li> <li>• Debra Richardson, Police Veterans Victoria</li> <li>• Kate Siebert, Samphire</li> </ul>
<b>12:40 pm</b>	<p><b>Lunch and Networking</b></p>	<b>3:55 pm</b>	<p><b>Closing Remarks</b></p>

# MEDIA SUMMARY



We promoted the event through social media (Instagram, Facebook, LinkedIn) and internal channels, working with member agencies and contacts to share it across their networks. Post-event, we highlighted the success in our Impact eNews to maintain momentum. This collaborative approach ensured strong sector-wide engagement before and after the event.



# MEDIA SUMMARY



**Werribee Fire Brigade - CFA is with Emergency Services Foundation.**  
8 March at 17:37 · 🌐

Earlier this week at the Emergency Services Foundation's International Women's Day Forum, the Werribee Fire Brigade accepted the Women's Equality Initiative Encouragement Award for our inclusive uniform initiative for our competition running team.

Rose Higgs, Alannah Inglis, Lisa Bubb and Michael Trifilo accepted the award on behalf of the Brigade. Their efforts in bringing forward this change and those of many more members behind the scenes are an example of how our brigade is working hard to create an inclusive environment for all.

#wfb #internationalwomensday #cfa

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY  
**DIVERSITY & INCLUSION AWARDS 2026**

**ESF** EMERGENCY SERVICES FOUNDATION

**MOBILE SHOWER BLOCKS**  
Forest Fire Management Victoria

**ESF** EMERGENCY SERVICES FOUNDATION *better together*

**International Women's Day 2026: Event Highlights**

The Emergency Services Foundation (ESF) brought together over 170 professionals from across the emergency management sector to celebrate International Women's Day 2026.

This year's theme, Give to Gain, emphasizes that active, collaborative investment of time, resources, mentorship, and opportunities in women creates a reciprocal effect, driving gender equality and societal progress regarding diversity and inclusion. At the event, three awards recognising individuals and initiatives championing these values were presented.

**Emergency Services Foundation is with VicEmergency and 3 others.**  
Published by Franziska Wohlfarth · 7 March at 17:07 · 🌐

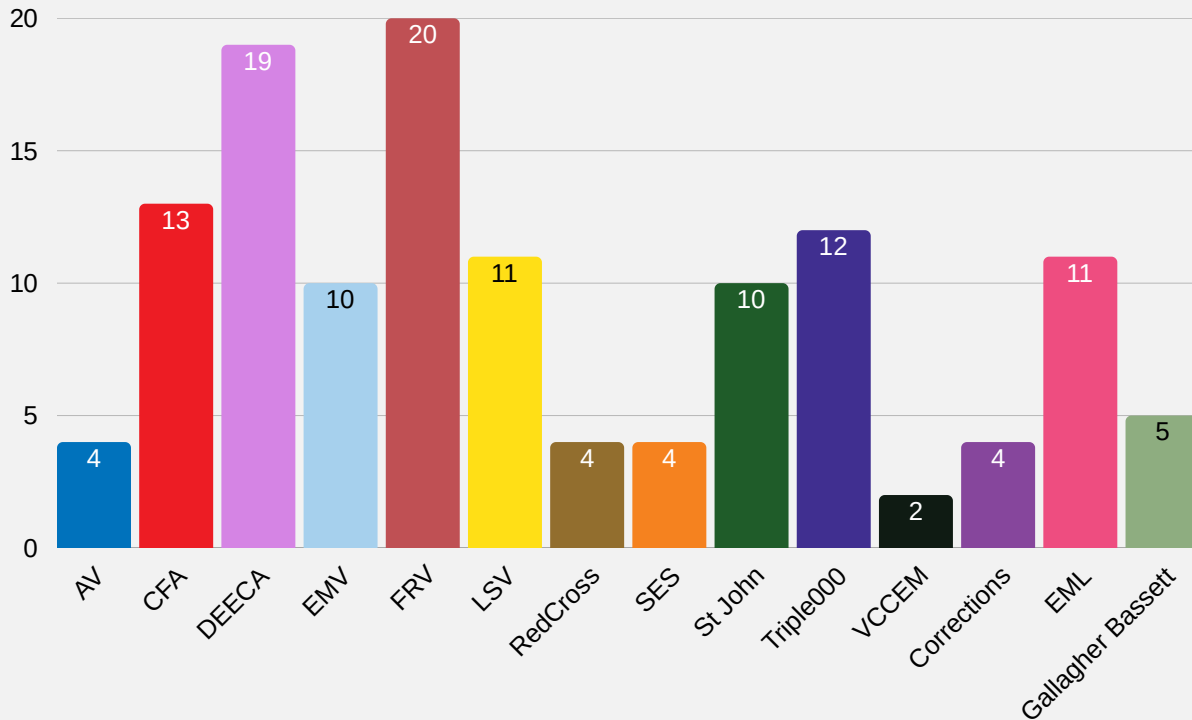
It's a wrap! Our International Women's Day event brought the sector together to celebrate diversity, inclusion and the individuals championing positive change. From pow... See more

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# ATTENDEES

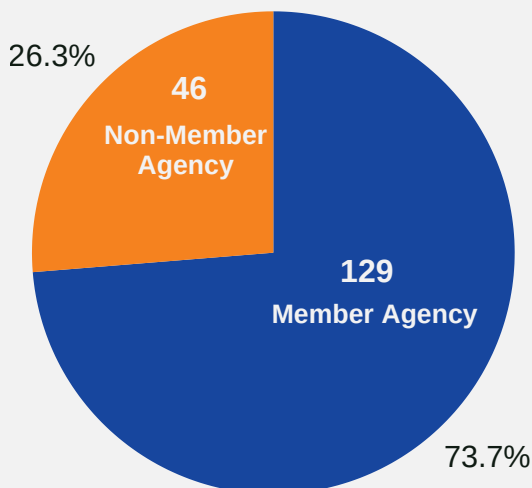


## Registered Attendees According To Agency



Our 2026 IWD event garnered a total of 175 attendees from across the sector and beyond. Out of the total number of attendees, 129 came from one of ESF's member agencies. Notably, Fire Rescue Victoria (FRV) had the highest representation of the agencies with 20 attendees, closely followed by DEECA with 19, CFA with 13 and Triple000 with 12. Outside of the member agencies, an additional 46 attendees came from other organizations, such as Victoria Ambulance Union, AFAC, Hays, Volunteer Fire Brigades Victoria and DXC.

## Proportion of Member Agency Attendees



73.7% of registered attendees were volunteer or paid staff from our member agencies, reflecting strong engagement from within the emergency management sector. This demonstrates that we are achieving our objectives of bringing the sector together to deepen understanding of gender bias and to create opportunities for sector-wide conversations around gender and diversity.

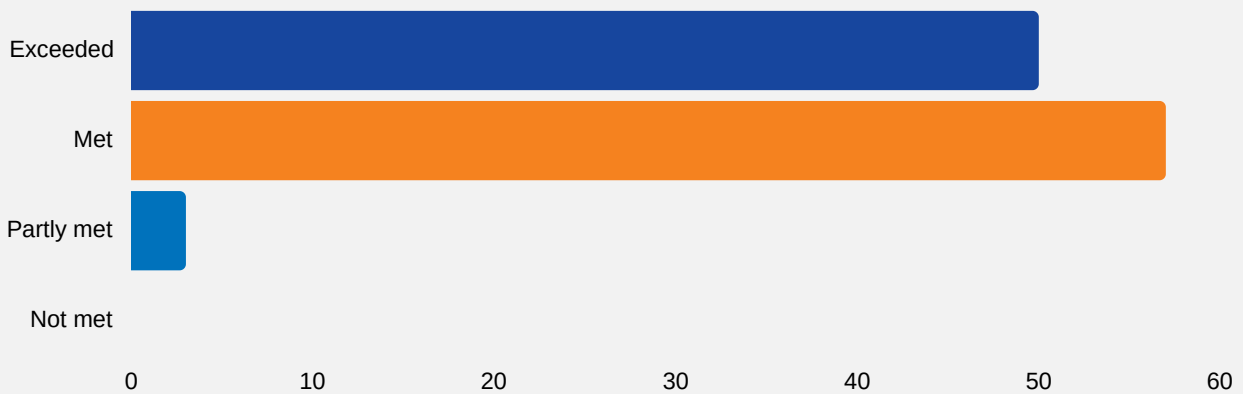
# EVALUATION FINDINGS



This year’s event was evaluated using brief, anonymous feedback forms which were filled out and left on the tables.

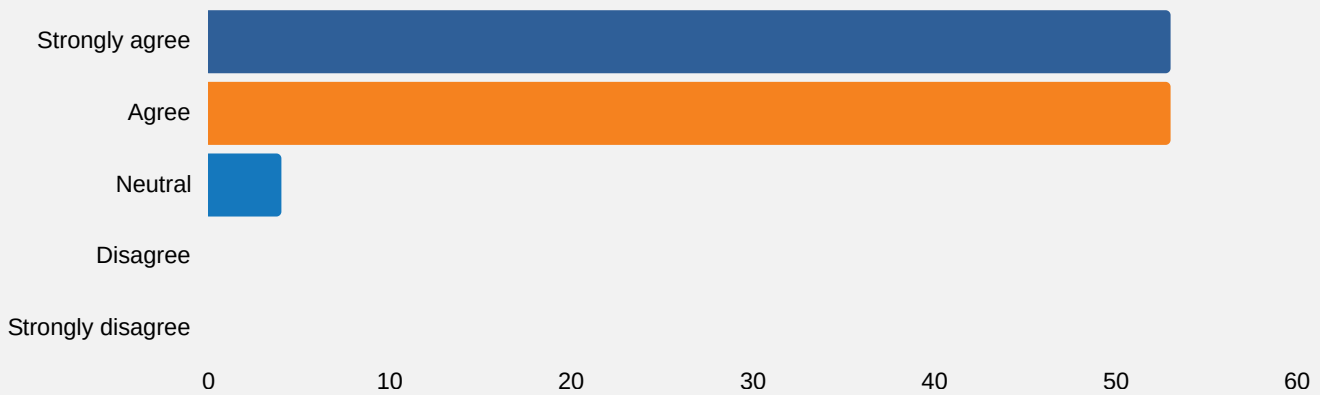
In total, the survey received 110 responses, providing valuable insights into the event experience.

## 1. How well did the event meet your expectations?



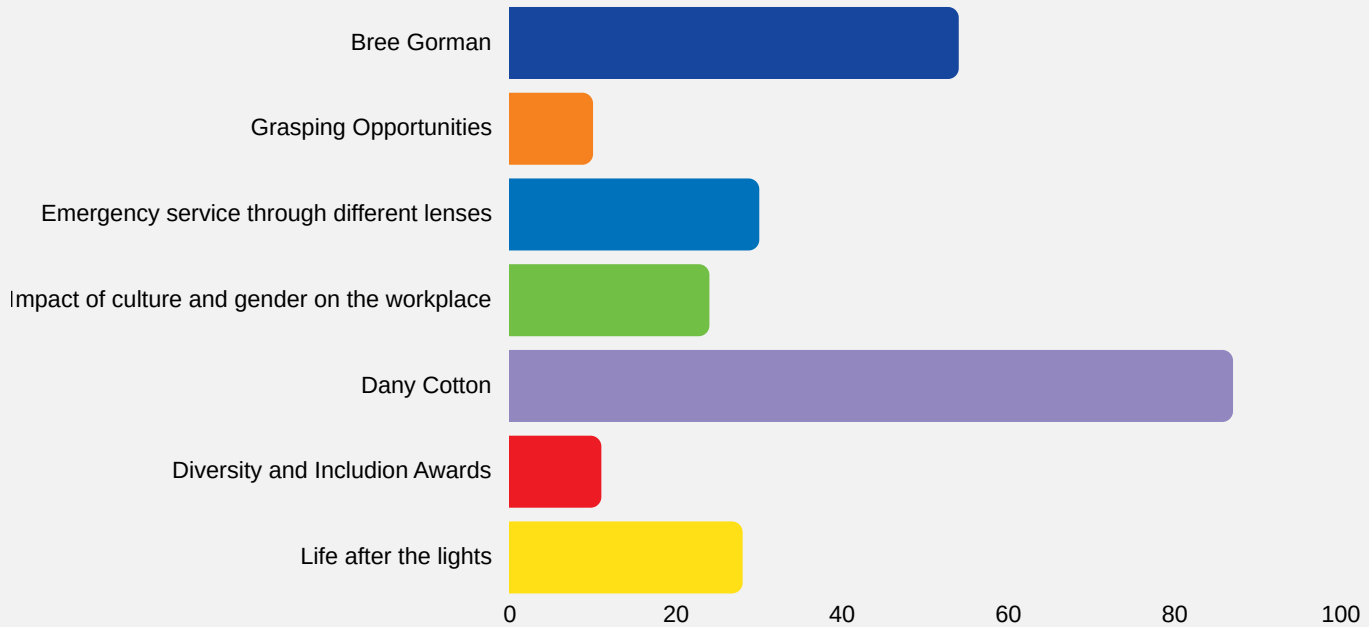
107 of the 110 feedback respondents claimed that their expectations for the event were exceeded or met. Only three people said that their expectations were only partly met.

## 2. The event content was relevant and meaningful.



The vast majority of respondents considered the event content relevant and meaningful. This shows the event successfully resonated with attendees and addressed topics that matter to the sector.

### 3. What session did you find most beneficial?



Survey responses show that Dany Cotton’s keynote was considered the most beneficial session. The pre-recorded meeting, which was shown at the event, featured Dany in conversation with four female emergency services representatives. Despite initial concerns about how a recorded session would be received, feedback from audience members was overwhelmingly positive.

Bree Gorman’s presentation, “Inclusion by Design, Not Accident,” was the second most highly rated session. Panel discussions exploring lived experiences and diverse perspectives across the emergency services sector were also highly valued by participants.

The lowest rated session was “Grasping Opportunities”, which introduced ESF’s scholarships and its two latest recipients. This is closely followed by the presentation of the Diversity and Inclusion Awards, which received only 11 votes. Despite the relatively low ranking, feedback received through comments, suggest that understanding DEI practice in the workplace is still a highly valued topic of conversation.

The results suggest strong audience interest in leadership, practical ways to create inclusive workplaces, and diverse voices from within the sector.

## Positive comments and feedback:

- “Facility and catering were great. Sessions were engaging and long enough.”
- “I appreciate the diversity of topics and presentations”
- “Very well run, good job”
- “Will use points made by Bree in developing future programs.”
- “Dany was incredibly engaging and a great guest speaker. Venue and food was good.”
- “Keep up the amazing work you do to expose, promote and normalize talking about mental health and wellbeing.”
- “I really appreciate the inclusion of myself to attend an ESF function like this.”
- “Love this day!”
- “Amazing mix of presenters and facilitators.”
- “Lots of notes taken & professional development”
- “All sessions were extremely valuable, Dany Cotton was a stand out.”
- “Loved hearing from diverse voices.”
- “Loved the dynamic, positivity and kindness the women presenting and in panels brought to the day.”
- “All sessions were interesting, lots of gems to take away.”
- “Loved the focus on transitioning from emergency services to retirement/other work.”
- “Great content, ideas and initiatives.”
- “Great venue, inspirational speakers.”
- “I loved hearing the stories. Loved Dany.”
- “Highly engaging content. Dany was amazing!”
- “Nice to be physically present, thanks!”
- “All the sessions were insightful and valuable – thank you!”
- “Loved the interview with Dany Cotton – inspiring!”
- “Well organized, love the table # idea.
- “It was truly an inspirational event and such a privilege to spend time surrounded by so many inspiring women. Hearing their journeys and having the opportunity to learn from and support one another made it a very special and meaningful occasion.”
- “Siusan and the team ran such a well-polished showcase of inspirational and educational speakers and panels; and I, personally, came away from the day with a range of actionable initiatives that I plan to implement immediately at LSV – and I know that many (including my own team members) who attended, felt the same. The speaker line up was exceptional and the cross-collaboration amongst agencies was as powerful as ever – aided enormously by ESF’s careful planning and forethought to split up agencies across table plans. Well done to Siusan and the team – this forum is absolutely unique to the EM sector, and the change I have seen over the past few years in terms of (particularly male) agency leaders stepping in to this space as champions of women, diversity, equity and inclusion, has been nothing short of remarkable.”

## Critique:

- “I don’t think the first presentation (Bree Gorman) was suitable for this event.”
- “Felt that there was too much diversity early on.”
- “Staring at speakers in front of a bright window was a lot all day. Maybe shift the layout.”
- “At times the audio was hard to hear but mainly because of sitting next to catering area.”
- “Day was too long.”
- “I recently became aware that TZV sent an all-male delegation to the forum. In internal correspondence responding to staff concerns about this decision, it was stated that the approach had been discussed with the CEO of ESF and that the feedback received was: ‘Wonderful! We encourage that approach and in fact called for it a few years ago.’ must admit that reading this was disappointing. While I understand the importance of engaging male leaders in conversations around gender equity, it was difficult to reconcile the purpose of an International Women’s Day forum with the attendance of an entirely male cohort from our organization – particularly when women within TZV had expressed interest in attending but were not given the opportunity. For many of us working in operational roles within emergency services, forums such as the ESF International Women’s Day event represent one of the very few opportunities available to connect with other women across the sector, hear lived experiences, and build networks that can support professional growth and leadership development. These opportunities are not always readily available within our day-to-day operational environments. [...] I wanted to share this feedback respectfully as someone who genuinely values the work ESF does to support women across the emergency services sector. My intention is not to criticize the event itself – which I believe is incredibly important – but rather to express how the representation from our organization has been perceived by some of the women working within it.

# KEY LEARNINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS



Based on feedback from respondents and insights gained throughout the process, several key learnings have been identified. These findings have informed a set of recommendations that will help shape our International Women’s Day event in 2027 and beyond.

Key Learnings	Recommendations
Apply for sponsorship grant and increase ticket price	For future events, it is recommended that ESF pursues at least one sponsorship opportunities and to increase ticket price to achieve a small operating surplus.
More group activities and interactive sessions	Based on feedback, we recommend incorporating more interactive elements throughout the day. This could include short creative activities, table discussions, or workshops.
Shorter event program	Feedback suggests that some attendees found the event day slightly too long. To ensure that everyone stays engaged, we recommend incorporating practical activities throughout they day (see above) or even shorten the whole program by 30 minutes.
Transparency around theme	A couple attendees have criticized ESF’s choice to market the event using the Aurora Ventures IWD theme (‘Give to Gain’), rather than the official UN-theme (‘Balance the Scales’). We recommend re-evaluating this and communicating the reasoning for our choice with the public prior to the event.

# CONCLUSION



Overall, the 2026 International Women’s Day event achieved its key objectives of bringing together the emergency management sector, fostering meaningful conversations around gender and diversity, and inspiring action toward more inclusive workplaces. Strong attendance from member agencies and overwhelmingly positive feedback demonstrate the ongoing value and impact of this event for the sector. Attendees particularly valued the opportunity to hear diverse lived experiences, connect across agencies, and gain practical insights that can be applied within their own organizations.

While the event delivered meaningful outcomes, the evaluation also identified opportunities for improvement, including incorporating more interactive elements, refining the program length, and exploring sponsorship opportunities to strengthen financial sustainability. By applying these learnings, ESF can continue to build on the success of the event and further enhance its role as a facilitator for collaboration, leadership and progress in gender equity across the emergency management sector.

The cost benefit of this event is something the Board must consider.

# PHOTO GALLERY



# PHOTO GALLERY



# PHOTO GALLERY

