

# Policy priorities for gender and entrepreneurship

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## Read here about policy suggestions from an academic-practitioner collaboration for gender and entrepreneurship

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In several prior Open Access Government articles, Dr. Jennifer Jennings from the University of Alberta has shared findings from her [gender-related entrepreneurship research](#).

In this article, she has paired up with Ms Jessica Carlson, a policy professional and Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) student at the University of Calgary, to share a comprehensive set of queries currently salient to policy practitioners working at the intersection of gender and entrepreneurship. In doing so, Carlson and Jennings hope to stimulate future academic research at this nexus that is more likely to be “accessed, appreciated and acted upon by policy-practitioners” (2024: 1). They also hope to encourage others to form academic-practitioner collaborations as a means of researching the identified set of policy-oriented queries.

### Methodology for identifying the salient policy-oriented queries

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The policy-relevant questions described below were derived from background research that Carlson had conducted for her doctoral program. This background research involved a cross-jurisdictional scan of gender-related entrepreneurship policies enacted across different regions, a review of academic and other publications on the topic, and interviews with close to 30 stakeholders (i.e., entrepreneurs, representatives of financial institutions, and members of other entrepreneurial ecosystem organizations).

This multi-source approach yielded a plethora of issues that are currently salient to policy practitioners working at the nexus of gender and entrepreneurship. Carlson and Jennings grouped the salient questions by level of analysis, delineating those pertaining to individual entrepreneurs, those focused upon supportive (or not-so-supportive) organizations, and those attentive to the broader institutional environments in which entrepreneurs and organizations are embedded.

A couple of quick caveats are important to raise at this juncture. For one, the identified questions are arguably most relevant to policy practitioners within countries that have already enacted at least some gender-aware initiatives regarding entrepreneurship. Second, because policy relevance is deeply contextual, it is critical to consider a region’s unique characteristics before planning any research on a particular question.

### Policy questions salient to gender and entrepreneurship at the individual level

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When summarizing the gender-relevant queries currently salient at the individual level, Carlson and Jennings noticed that many reflected an ‘intersectionality’ approach. Such questions recognize that experiences as a potential or active entrepreneur are likely to be shaped not only by gender but also by other aspects of social identity, like race/ ethnicity, age, religion, and/or sexual orientation. Illustrative questions include the following:

- Which subgroups of women have a high desire and/or intention to become entrepreneurs yet low levels of actual participation? What can explain any observed discrepancies in this regard?
- Which subgroups of women are more likely than others to become entrepreneurs? Why is this the case?
- How do different subgroups of women entrepreneurs conceptualize notions of growth, innovation, and success? What are the implications for their entrepreneurial ventures and outcomes?
- Do the factors that contribute to entrepreneurial exit/failure vary across different subgroups of women entrepreneurs? If so, how and why is this the case?

### **Salient gender-related entrepreneurship policy questions at the organizational level**

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An intersectionality approach to gender and entrepreneurship is also evident in the organizational-level queries of current interest to policy practitioners. As noted by Carlson and Jennings, questions at this level of analysis collectively aim to enhance understanding of the existence, nature, and effectiveness of initiatives targeting different subgroups of women entrepreneurs. The following examples are indicative in this regard:

- Within a certain region, which entrepreneurship support organizations (e.g., incubators, accelerators, venture capitalists), if any, are explicitly targeting different subgroups of women entrepreneurs? What types of programs do these organizations offer?
- How and why do organizations/ programs targeting certain subgroups of women entrepreneurs differ from mainstream entrepreneurship-related initiatives? How do their results compare?
- Do initiatives targeting certain subgroups of women entrepreneurs tend to be over- or under-subscribed? If so, why is this the case, and what corrective measures must be taken?
- To what extent are the different subgroups of women being targeted by entrepreneurship support organizations represented within the organizations themselves?

Salient policy questions at the institutional level related to gender and entrepreneurship. Notably, Carlson and Jennings observed that the intersectionality approach also underlies many of the institutional-level queries pertinent to gender and entrepreneurship that are currently salient to policy practitioners. This is so for questions focused upon the role of formal institutions (such as legislation and regulation) and those attentive to the impact of informal institutions (such as cultural norms and biases). Illustrative examples include:

- Which regions most effectively support women’s entrepreneurial activity from different subgroups? Why are these regions especially successful?
- What rules/laws/regulations tend to impact the incidence with which women in general, and certain subgroups in particular, engage in entrepreneurship? Do the effects differ across the subgroups of women entrepreneurs? If so, how, and why?
- Which regions have implemented initiatives explicitly targeting gender bias, either on its own or in combination with other biases (such as racism)? What factors contribute to regional variation in this regard?

Although the above set of policy-oriented questions identified by Carlson and Jennings is fairly comprehensive, the scholars noted that: “Policy priorities related to gender and entrepreneurship will continue to evolve, due in part to emergent academic contributions as well as changing socio-economic and political contexts” (2024: 11). As such, Carlson and Jennings emphasize that the queries surfaced through their research should not be viewed as a definitive guide for future investigations, but rather as a source of inspiration.

For more details on the policy-oriented queries summarized above, including a list of illustrative academic studies relevant to each, please see the [full article](#) that has been accepted for inclusion within a special issue of the International Journal of Entrepreneurial Behavior & Research entitled “Exploring entrepreneurship policy in a global context: A gender perspective”.

In a future Open Access Government article, Carlson and Jennings will share their ideas for strengthening policy- relevant research at the nexus of gender and entrepreneurship.

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