

Restorative Engagement Program Evaluation

Program Overview

The Restorative Engagement (RE) Program, a requirement of the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) – Department of National Defence (DND) Sexual Misconduct Class Action Settlement, was approved in November 2019. It was designed and implemented by the Sexual Misconduct Support and Resource Centre (SMSRC) in consultation with subject matter experts, as well as internal and external stakeholders (including individuals affected by sexual misconduct). As part of SMSRC, the RE Program is outside the CAF chain of command and investigation processes but is within the DND civilian organizational structure. It officially launched in November 2021 and is expected to conclude in March 2026. The RE Program was allocated a budget of \$58.9 million between 2021 and 2026.

The RE Program uses a restorative approach **to acknowledge, understand and learn from the harm done by sexual misconduct and to contribute to culture change**. It places people at the centre of its work and aims to provide opportunities for members of the class-action lawsuit (class members) to share their experiences, impacts or insights about sexual misconduct. The RE Program provides opportunities for class members to be heard, acknowledged and responded to through an engagement session with a representative from the Defence Team (Defence representatives). Class members do not meet directly with the individual who harmed them. Specially trained restorative practitioners (RP) facilitate the engagement sessions between class members and Defence representatives.

Through the RE Program, Defence representatives participate in small cohorts where they practise reflective learning in sessions facilitated by RPs. Defence representatives learn about sexual misconduct while acquiring knowledge, skills and experience in using a restorative approach when engaging with others. Through this work, Defence representatives are prepared to meaningfully engage with class members, during which they are provided with the opportunity to acknowledge the harm done and learn from class members to understand the impacts of sexual misconduct. Defence representatives are supported by the RE Program to plan for, act on and lead contributions to culture change across all levels and ranks in the Defence Team.

Overall Assessment

The RE Program is a relevant and innovative initiative that offers the Defence Team the opportunity to acknowledge the harm endured by those impacted by sexual misconduct and introduce the concept of restorative approaches to the organization. Despite many implementation challenges, staff were able to offer a program that had an almost universally positive impact on the participants, as reported by those who took part in the evaluation. However, the impacts of the RE Program on the wider organization are unknown.

While it is intended that Defence representatives will incorporate restorative approaches into their daily work, there is no strategic plan for supporting the dissemination of their knowledge across the Defence Team. This poses a risk that the positive impacts achieved by the RE Program may remain with Defence representatives alone or fade out over time. When attempting to effectively address negative cultural norms that allow for sexual misconduct to take place, the Defence Team should consider how its efforts can be shared across the organization and sustained over time.

Findings

1. The RE Program aligns with the Final Settlement Agreement (FSA) and the organization’s culture change priorities regarding sexual misconduct.
2. The RE Program demonstrated adaptability in responding to various implementation challenges while maintaining operational efficiency by staying within budget.
3. While evaluation participants reported positive program effects, the impact of the RE Program on Defence Team culture is yet to be determined.

Recommendation

Ensure class members’ and Defence representatives’ insights are strategically integrated into the Defence Team’s culture change efforts.

Future Considerations

Any future RE initiatives should consider the following:



1. Maintain ongoing communication with program participants/interested parties to keep them informed of program progress and impact.
2. Collaborate with the Defence Team to provide transition support for participating Defence representatives as culture change agents.
3. Create a performance measurement framework at the outset of implementation to monitor progress and success.

NOTE: The evaluation team invited all class members who expressed interest in the RE Program to participate in the evaluation. However, only 23 class members responded to the survey, and 18 class members consented to be interviewed. Of those class members who participated in the evaluation, all but one met with Defence representatives; therefore, information is not available regarding why other class members chose not to participate in the RE Program or only chose to meet with an RP and not a Defence representative.

What is a restorative approach?

A restorative approach is a relational way of responding to harm. The principles of a restorative approach are:

- focusing on the importance of relationships;
- following a comprehensive and holistic approach to understanding the causes and impacts of harm on individuals and culture;
- using inclusive and participatory processes and activities;
- being responsive to the needs of the participant;
- focusing on individual and collective responsibility for harm; and
- using a collaborative and non-adversarial approach to addressing harm.

International Comparisons

The Defence Team RE Program shares similarities with Australia’s Restorative Engagement Program, New Zealand’s Project RESTORE and the Royal Canadian Military Police’s Restorative Justice Program in their use of trained restorative facilitators and a victim-centred approach. While not identical programs, the Defence Team RE and Australian programs both focus on facilitated conversations between a representative of the military and those affected by sexual misconduct.

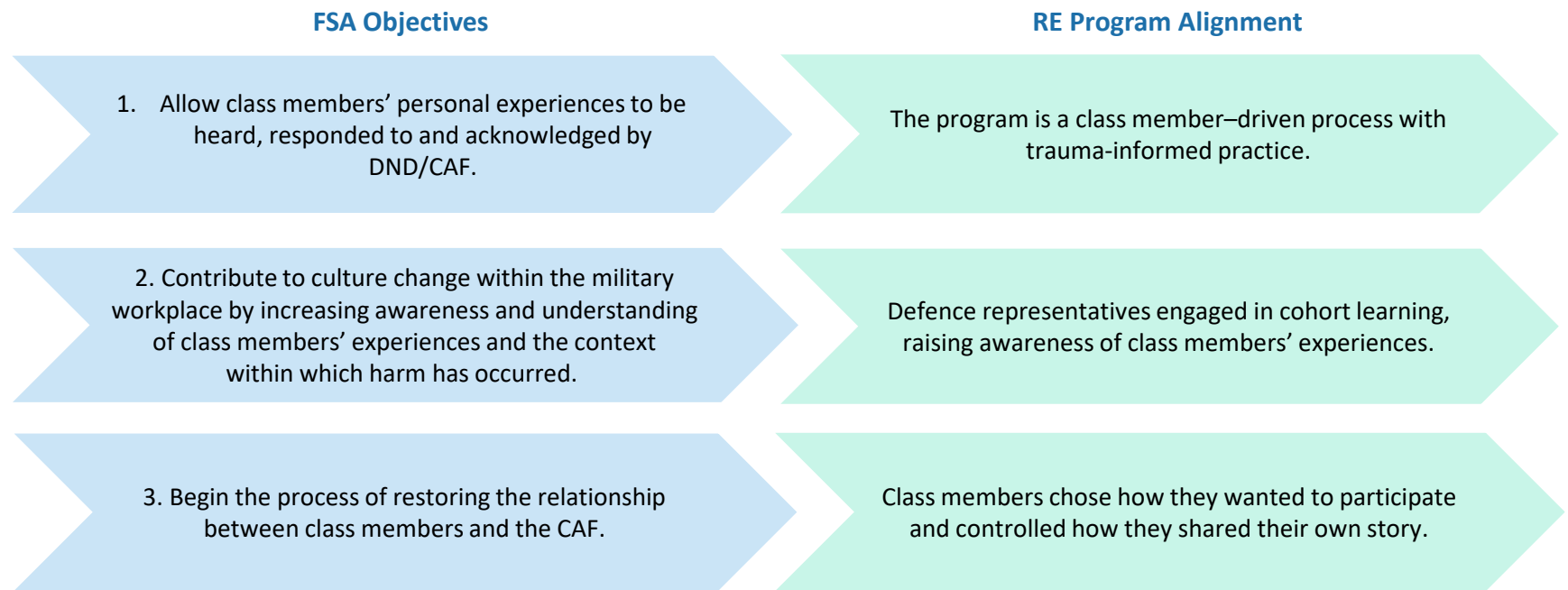
By comparison, the other programs focus on facilitating a victim-offender dialogue. The Australian program is also outside of the military institution while the Defence Team RE Program is outside the chain of command and reports to the Deputy Minister on the civilian side of the Defence Team.

Key Findings

Finding 1: The Restorative Engagement Program aligns with the Final Settlement Agreement and the organization’s culture change priorities regarding sexual misconduct.

The RE Program aligns with the objectives in FSA.

FSA was a class-action settlement that addressed sexual misconduct in the Defence Team. It required the creation of the RE Program, which was developed to give class members an opportunity to share their experiences of sexual misconduct, as well as be heard, acknowledged and responded to by the Defence Team. From its design, the RE Program was rooted in restorative principles and trauma-informed practice. It provided a structured, class member–driven process that created space for participating Defence representatives to learn from the lived experiences of class members and (through cohort) to learn, plan and act to contribute to culture change across the Defence Team.



The RE Program has addressed the first two objectives directly by providing participating class members with a space to be heard, acknowledged and responded to, as well by increasing participating Defence representatives’ awareness and understanding of the class member experience. The third objective has been approached more cautiously. Subject matter experts and program designers noted that full reconciliation with the Defence Team is neither a reasonable nor universally desired outcome for class members. The RE Program has emphasized that it is the choice of participating class members whether they want to restore their relationship with the Defence Team.

RE principles align with the military ethos.

CAF Ethos: Trusted to Serve is the foundation of military culture and professional identity. The RE Program aligns with the military ethos on several fronts. In particular, respect for the dignity of all persons is a core ethical principle of the military ethos that emphasizes appreciating the experiences and perspectives of others. The RE Program applies this principle by teaching Defence representatives about sexual misconduct. It also aims to develop Defence representatives’ active listening and empathetic responding skills so they may fully appreciate the experiences of class members and respond to them appropriately. The RE Program reinforces the principles of the military ethos while offering a practical application of dignity in the context of addressing sexual misconduct.

RE Program activities address issues of inappropriate sexual and discriminatory language in the Defence Team.

The program also contributes to organizational priorities by explicitly addressing inappropriate sexual and discriminatory language, one of the predominant issues identified in the Defence Team’s culture space.

Through Defence representatives’ cohort discussions, the RE Program creates structured opportunities to better understand the social and cultural context of such language and behaviours. These discussions focus on critically thinking about sexual misconduct and culture change, as well as developing skills to respond restoratively to harm.

There is an evolving focus on relationship restoration.

While the FSA identified relationship restoration as an objective, program implementation has shifted toward giving class members control over the process: for example, by allowing them to determine the pace and focus of their engagement.

This evolution ensures that the RE Program is responsive to class members by prioritizing acknowledgment, validation and agency of class members, rather than presuming reconciliation with the Defence Team as the intended outcome. The program ultimately aligns with this objective in that it aims to build trust, which is central to RE and its relational approach.

Key Findings

Finding 2: The Restorative Engagement Program demonstrated adaptability in responding to various implementation challenges and increased its operational efficiency over time while remaining within budget.

The RE Program demonstrated adaptability to numerous challenges.

At the end of FY 2024/25, the RE Program had spent \$30.8 million, staying well within its allocated budget of \$58.9 million. This was accomplished despite being the first program of its kind in the Defence Team and encountering numerous challenges during implementation.

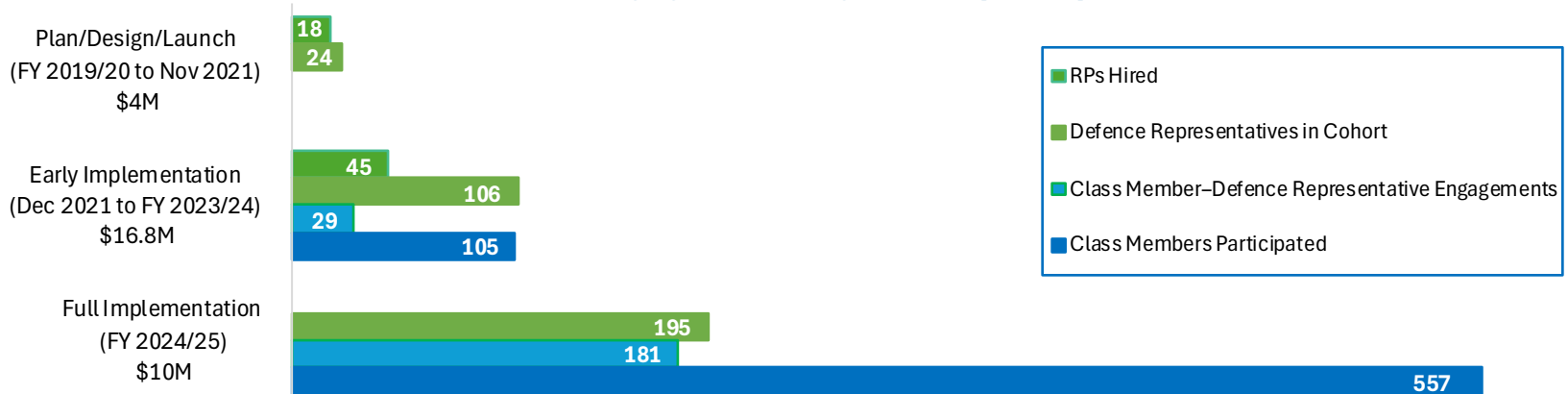
The COVID-19 pandemic prompted the RE Program to strategically pivot and adapt to a remote working environment. The pandemic also compounded existing challenges the RE Program faced in scaling up its workforce, such as labour market disruptions. This contributed to the postponement of key milestones, including delaying the RE Program’s full implementation, and pushed planned activities and expenditures into future fiscal years (FY).

In addition, class members needed more time between being contacted and participating in the RE Program than initially estimated, mainly due to the sensitivity of the discussion topics and the time needed for class members’ emotional processing.

Initially, the Defence Team was reluctant to send Defence representatives to the program. To improve Defence Team participation and reduce time commitments, the program reduced the full-time 12-week Defence representative cohort program model to 8 weeks and introduced an additional “2 weeks + 2 weeks” model, a senior leader model and an executive-level model. At the same time, the RE Program pared the options for participating class members down to one engagement in the format that best meets class members’ needs.

The RE Program continues to demonstrate adaptability and flexibility. The Treasury Board Submission established FY 2025/26 as the program’s sunset year. Based on current funding projections, the RE Program has budgeted for completing closeout in FY 2026/27. This additional time provides participating class members the opportunity to complete their engagements before the program officially closes out. Should the program timeline extend into FY 2026/27, the resulting increase in personnel costs would be offset by Operations and Maintenance expenditure savings, realized mainly from reduced travel during the pandemic.

Restorative Engagement Program Outputs by Phase



The RE Program increased its operational efficiency over time.

The RE Program spent approximately \$4 million prior to launching in November 2021. This represents 9.5 percent of total projected program expenditures. Per Treasury Board costing guidelines, early-stage program costs should typically range from 10 to 25 percent, meaning the RE Program’s initial budget for the plan, design and launch phase was within traditional targets.

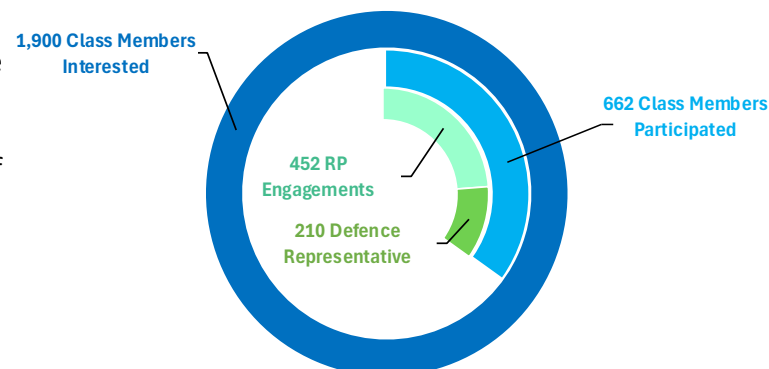
The RE Program remained in early implementation for just over two years, spending roughly \$16.8 million. During this period, it increased staff capacity to meet growing class-member demand stemming from two large outreach campaigns conducted in December 2023 and again in January 2024. Confirmed interest among class members grew from 100 in December 2023 to 1,710 by March 2024, necessitating a shift in operational tempo and coordination. Additionally, the RE Program established a waitlist for for class members that grew to 1,195 by March 2024.

In its first year of full implementation the RE Program spent \$10 million and increased operational throughput. Defence representatives in cohort increased to 195, class member–Defence representative engagements increased to 181, an additional 557 class members participated in the RE Program, and the waitlist was reduced to 80 class members (a 93 percent reduction). The RE Program’s investment in building capacity during early implementation enabled the program to increase its rate of participation during its first year of full implementation. While RE Program staff are still working through the waitlist, there have been class members who did not participate for a variety of reasons: They were not ready to participate; they were no longer interested in the program; or they did not respond to the RE Program, etc.

When comparing the RE Program’s expenditures and resulting outputs by phase, one can see that it achieved greater operational output while spending less during its first year of full implementation compared to the more than two years spent in early implementation. This would suggest that the RE Program became more efficient (on a dollar per output basis) as it progressed through each successive phase, and operational tempo and output increased.

As a human-centric program, the priority is the quality of the program rather than the number of participants.

As of April 2025, of the 1,900 who expressed interest, a total of 662 class members have participated in the RE Program (210 class members with Defence-representative engagement and 452 class members with RP engagement), along with 301 Defence representatives involved in the cohort model. Despite what may appear as a low level of class member participation, those who took part in the evaluation almost universally expressed their positive experience with the RE Program. As an innovative program, it allowed the Defence Team to test a new model that met the needs of its participants and holds potential to impact organizational culture if its outcomes can be sustained over the long term.



Key Findings

Finding 3: While evaluation participants reported positive program effects, the impact of the Restorative Engagement Program on Defence Team culture is yet to be determined.

Most interviewed class members felt that Defence representatives heard, acknowledged and responded to them; however, they have reservations about the impact of their participation on the Defence Team organization.

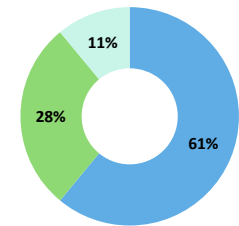


When asked about the personal impact of the program, interviewed class members consistently expressed appreciation for the opportunity to share their experiences and felt that the participating Defence representatives genuinely listened, acknowledged and responded to them. They felt that this interaction fostered a sense of **personal healing**.

Most interviewed class members were “cautiously optimistic” when it came to systemic change.

“It helped me heal... I’m proud of my military service.” - Class Member

However, this did not always translate into confidence in systemic change. Many interviewed class members expressed **cautious optimism** for future change. While they appreciated the RE Program’s intent and execution, they remained uncertain about its long-term impact on the Defence Team. They were unsure if meaningful future organizational change would follow.



■ Cautious Optimism ■ Personal Healing ■ Discontent or N/A

“The Defence representatives were genuine, but the organization still has a long way to go.” - Class Member

RE Program communications did not outline how class members’ contributions impacted broader institutional reform efforts.

RE Program communications focused primarily on operational details, as opposed to reporting actions being taken to address sexual misconduct and culture change within the Defence Team. This lack of clarity contributed to a sense of disconnect among participating class members, some of whom struggled to see how their concerns were being acknowledged or addressed by the Defence Team.

REPs within the RE Program also noted that participating class members expressed a desire to understand the RE Program’s impact and that this lack of information strained their relationships with class members and the RE Program.

“... heard from several class members that they would like to know what impact the program is having in DND/CAF.” - RP

These insights from RE practitioners underscore the need for more transparent, outcome-focused communication that validates participating class members’ experiences in the program and fosters trust in the RE Program’s objectives.

Defence representatives increased their understanding of restorative approaches and reported a positive change in attitude related to sexual misconduct in the Defence Team. However, there were challenges with contributing to culture change after participating in the RE Program.

The RE Program succeeded in increasing Defence representatives’ knowledge concerning sexual misconduct in the Defence Team and RE. After participating in the program, there was a 43 percent increase in the number of Defence representatives who viewed sexual misconduct as a major problem in the Defence Team, as compared to their views before.

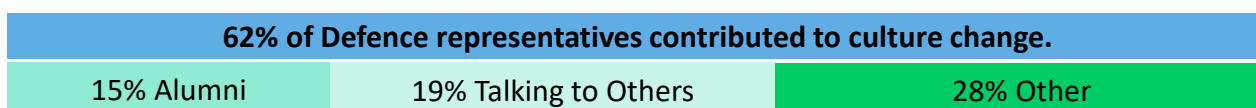
The RE Program effectively educated Defence representatives on restorative approaches.

Participation in the RE Program led to a deep and widespread transformation among Defence representatives, with the vast majority of Defence representatives who participated in the evaluation reporting that the RE Program significantly enhanced their awareness and understanding of sexual misconduct and the value of restorative approaches.



Of the 47 Defence representatives surveyed for the evaluation, 29 (62 percent) reported having the opportunity to contribute to culture change. However, 17 (36 percent) of Defence representatives felt that they were not supported in implementing their plans and that they shouldered a disproportionate share of the work to effect culture change. Some Defence representatives faced significant barriers, including time constraints, lack of a post-program mandate and resources, lack of authority to influence change, competing priorities, and inconsistent support from their chain of command and colleagues.

Of those Defence representatives who contributed to culture change, 15 percent reported their contribution was specifically participating in the Defence representative alumni community (DRAC). As the alumni community has no mandate for it, participation alone would not contribute to culture change. Without the Defence representatives who are participating in DRAC, the number of Defence representatives surveyed who directly contributed to culture change drops from 62 percent to 47 percent, which is less than half of all Defence representatives. This suggests that Defence representatives require more support following RE Program participation to contribute directly and effectively to culture change.

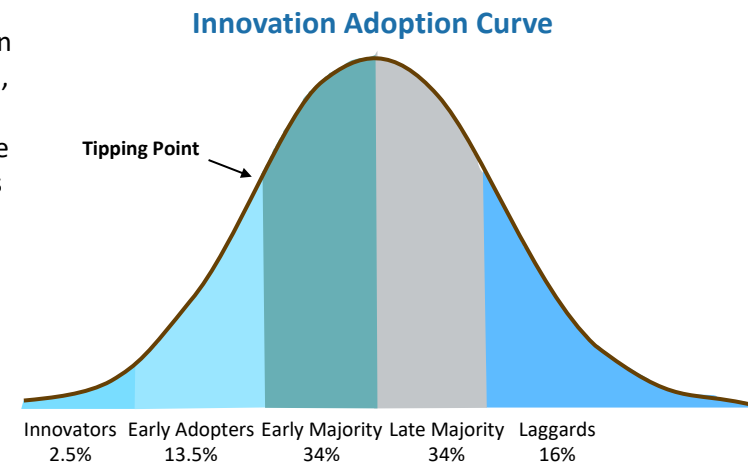


Key Findings

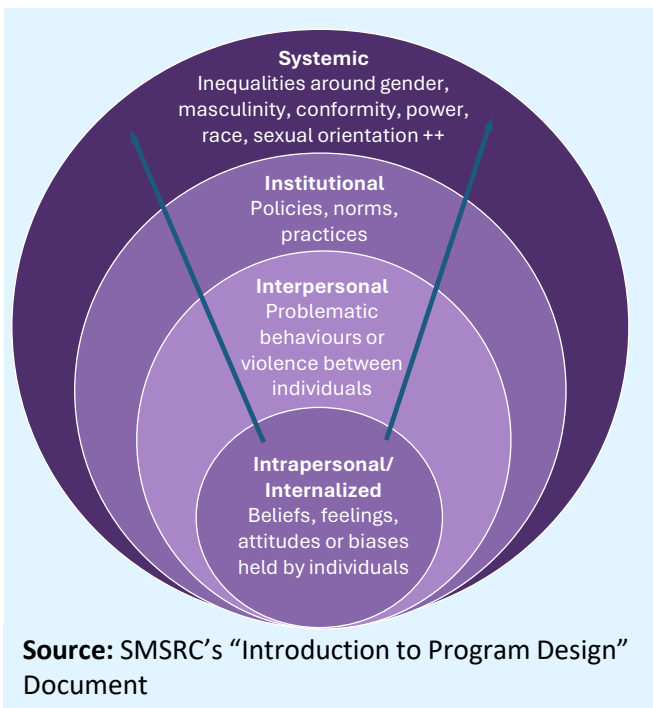
There may be too few Defence representatives to influence culture change in the Defence Team.

According to organizational change research, 15–34 percent of an organization’s population must adopt a new idea before the rest of the organization is likely to follow suit. Otherwise, the new idea will not take hold. As of April 2025, the RE Program trained 301 Defence representatives, representing just 0.2 percent of the Defence Team. Without more Defence representatives or institutional support, there is a risk the existing Defence representatives will not be able to contribute to institutional change by using restorative approaches. As a result, the time and effort invested into RE Program participation may have limited impact beyond Defence representatives themselves.

The Innovation Adoption Lifecycle, from Everett Rogers’ Diffusion of Innovations theory, outlines how new ideas are adopted across a population (divided into five categories) over time. Once 15–34 percent adopt the change (the tipping point) adoption accelerates as the innovation becomes normalized.



While the RE Program is demonstrating early signs of contributing to culture change, it is unclear how the program’s contributions to culture change will be applied, tracked or sustained.



FSA calls for the RE Program to contribute to Defence Team culture change. The RE Program is designed to foster culture change across all levels of the institution. At the **individual** level, it aims to shift the knowledge and attitudes of participating Defence representatives around sexual misconduct and RE. Defence representatives begin to influence organizational culture through their **interpersonal** relationships during cohort and continue this effort upon returning to their substantive roles.

At the **institutional** level, the RE Program envisions senior leaders and executive Defence representatives leveraging their positions to shape teams, influence policy and contribute to structural changes, further advancing culture transformation within the Defence Team. However, currently no plan exists to apply these learnings to Defence Team culture change efforts, nor a performance measurement framework to measure change, nor a vision to sustain positive changes.

It should be noted that the RE Program is one of over 300 culture change initiatives currently underway in the Defence Team. How this individual program contributes to Defence culture change should be considered in concert with all other culture change efforts.

While lessons learned from the RE Program are shared with the Defence Team, plans for broader institutional outcomes have yet to be articulated.

The FSA also calls for a final report to be prepared by SMSRC that includes a requirement for “DND/CAF to consult with [SMSRC] and [subject matter experts] to determine how the stories shared by participating class members and the lessons learned and potential recommendations from the RE Program Final Report will be leveraged to increase awareness and understanding of the problem of sexual misconduct; inform policy and training related to these issues; and contribute to culture change. DND/CAF will be responsible for implementing the agreed upon mechanisms.” SMSRC is planning to publish this report at the conclusion of the RE Program.

To date, the RE Program has shared summaries of lessons learned from participating class members, Defence representatives and the program itself with Chief Professional Conduct and Culture (CPCC) within the Defence Team. Launched in June 2021, CPCC serves as the single authority for professional conduct and culture at DND. To date, the lessons learned shared with CPCC have led to the creation of Military Liaison Teams within CPCC and the establishment of a DRAC.

In addition, in the spring of 2025, CPCC conducted a comprehensive review of its processes. This led to a decision to formalize the process of turning lessons learned into actions through the central Defence Lessons Learned System framework, which will be shared with all Level One Organizations (L1) in fall 2025. This will allow L1s to consider integrating the observations/recommendations into policy updates and cultural evolution tools.

While the lessons learned serve as a strong foundation for identifying areas for review and potential change, how they will be applied to effect change across the organization remains unclear. **A plan, including mechanisms, does not yet exist to ensure class members’ insights, Defence representatives’ insights, and other lessons learned are integrated into the Defence Team’s culture change efforts.**

Recommendation

Ensure class members’ and Defence representatives’ insights are strategically integrated into the Defence Team’s culture change efforts.

Management Action Plan

Annex A — Management Action Plan

**ADM(RS)
Recommendation:**

Ensure class members' and Defence representatives' insights are strategically integrated into the Defence Team's culture change efforts.

Action 1.1:

SMSRC will produce the Sexual Misconduct RE Program Final Report. The report will collect and identify themes from the experiences of program participants, including class members, Defence representatives, program staff and strategic partners. From the experiences of participants, emerging insights will be identified by themes and will be used to offer potential ways forward. SMSRC will develop a plan to socialize and communicate the final report within DND/CAF.

SMSRC will share drafts of the final report with CPCC as it moves toward the completion date. SMSRC will brief the final report to CPCC.

Deliverable: This Management Action Plan will be considered closed when:

- the final report is published on Canada.ca;
- the plan to socialize and communicate the final report within DND/CAF is actioned; and
- the final report is briefed to CPCC.

OPI: SMSRC

OCI: CPCC

Target Date: December 2026

Risk Statement: Expertise, insights and capacity to support from key Sexual Misconduct RE Program personnel must be retained within SMSRC post-program closeout to ensure that SMSRC can support CPCC's culture change initiatives.

Action 2.1:

While SMSRC works on the production of the Sexual Misconduct RE Program Final Report, CPCC shall publish observations/recommendations from Defence representatives and class members in the Defence Lessons Learned System to facilitate strategic integration in policy and training updates. After the report is complete, CPCC will assume the Office of Primary Interest (OPI) role and will be responsible for developing a plan, guiding implementation and monitoring progress, in partnership with any implicated L1s across the Defence Team. Continued collaboration with SMSRC and DRAC will be essential during the planning and implementation stages of all initiatives related to the Heyder Beattie RE Program Final Report to ensure strategic integration.

Deliverable: This Management Action Plan will be considered closed when:

- SMSRC briefs findings from the final report to CPCC leadership, and the final report is published on Canada.ca (December 2026);
- the handover of OPI to CPCC occurs (January 2027);
- CPCC leads planning for the strategic integration of insights in collaboration with SMSRC (February 2027); and
- CPCC has an approved plan and processes in place to guide implementation and monitor progress with implicated L1s (April 2027).

OPI: CPCC

OCI: SMSRC

Target Date: April 2027

Risk Statement:

- SMSRC failure to meet its December 2026 deadline will delay CPCC timelines.
- Following the conclusion of the Sexual Misconduct RE Program, there will not be additional opportunities to clarify the insights of class members. Continued collaboration with SMSRC and DRAC will be critical to developing a plan and guiding implementation.