



5th Annual

Women's Leadership Impact Study

MASSACHUSETTS

MARCH 2023



MENTOR. PARTNER. LEAD.

Congratulations to the many Massachusetts employers who participated in this past year's Women's Leadership Impact Study in MA. Your participation in our annual Women's Leadership Impact Study results in clear data that drives change.

Many of you have been on the journey with The Women's Edge (formerly The Commonwealth Institute) since we launched this longitudinal research in 2018, and we thank you for participation. The data continues to inform us all of what is working and what still needs to be done to ensure the successful development and advancement of all women leaders across the Commonwealth.

What is truly encouraging is that most responding companies have doubled down on their commitment to women's leadership, even during periods of dramatic change and challenge.

Your commitment is setting a standard for enhanced inclusion for all employees, for advancements in gender equity, and for women's leadership throughout Massachusetts. Among the most meaningful responses in this study were those that showed that companies are taking measurable actions based on specific recommendations in our report and seeing positive results.

Moreover, the data collected in the 2022 Study indicates there has been:

- an increased use of goals and metrics for women's career development/leadership
- improvements with setting measurable career development goals for women of color
- a growing commitment to mentorship and sponsorship programs
- a greater recognition of identities that intersect with gender
- an intentional commitment to adopting the last year's recommendation

While there is always more to be done to foster equity, we are optimistic about the future. Women have long offered a positive edge to every organization where they have opportunities to lead, grow, and participate. The challenge is assuring that those opportunities are cultivated at every level of the career ladder. This very dichotomy is the reason that our organization changed its name to The Women's Edge.

The Women's Edge continues to focus and broaden its efforts to ensure women achieve greater impact and success, ranging from supporting the rising generation of women leaders, to corporate executive, entrepreneurs, and CEOs from the for-profit and non-profit sectors. As we look forward, our mission is clear: to support women at each stage of leadership development and to accelerate women throughout the leadership pipeline.

Sincerely,



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Elizabeth L. Hailer".

Elizabeth L. Hailer
Chief Executive Officer
The Women's Edge



A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pamela D.A. Reeve".

Pamela D.A. Reeve
Chair, Board of Directors
The Women's Edge

Contents

ABOUT THE STUDY	2
------------------------	----------

INTRODUCTION	3
---------------------	----------


KEY FINDINGS & TRENDS	4
Organizations are allocating resources and adopting goals and metrics.	4
Data is improving for women of color.	7
Commitment to mentorship and sponsorship is growing.	9
Employers are recognizing intersecting identities.	11
Participants are leveraging report recommendations.	12

A ROADMAP FOR SUCCESS	13
Leverage metrics to spur increased leadership accountability.	14
Wherever your progress is stalling, dig into what's holding it back.	15
Create a culture of allyship that recognizes intersecting identities.	17
Shift your perspective on mentorship and sponsorship.	20
Actively support women's workplace wellbeing.	22

ENDNOTES	23
-----------------	-----------

SPONSORS, PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS, & ABOUT THE AUTHOR	25
--	-----------

About the Study



The 2022 MA Women's Leadership Study marks the fifth year of longitudinal research examining the status of women's leadership in Massachusetts' businesses. Designed and managed by The Women's Edge (formerly The Commonwealth Institute), the research is conducted once annually.

The study examines the development, training, and benefits employers offer to support women where they work. Its goal is to catalyze progress in women's leadership, including the advancement of women of color and those whose other intersecting identities place them at risk for marginalization or underrepresentation.

This year's report highlights trends and relevant comparisons to previous years. Where appropriate, it spotlights or makes comparisons to broader data and national gender equity issues. The report concludes with a *Roadmap for Success* (page 12) that includes measurable recommendations for action.

The 2022 study surveyed Massachusetts-based small, medium, and large organizations. Private companies represented 37% of respondents, nonprofits 36%, and public companies 27%. Readers will note that the rate of participation of nonprofits in our study is greater than their overall representation in Massachusetts.

Responding companies include a high proportion of women-led businesses (71%). In contrast, 10% of Fortune 500 companies are currently led by women.¹ The disproportionate representation of participating companies with women at the helm is unsurprising given the study's focus. We acknowledge that these statistics could skew results in favor of support for women's leadership.

Readers Note: We use various terms to describe identities throughout this report and recognize that opinion about proper term usage varies. Wherever possible, our terms reflect original source material. Thus, readers will see terms such as the following throughout: LGBTQ; LGBTQ+; or LGBTQIA2S+; women of color; Black women; African American women; BIPOC (Black Indigenous and People of Color), Hispanic women; Latinas; or Latinx women.

Introduction

In 2022, women’s paths to leadership in Massachusetts businesses continued to improve. And yet, women also continued to face roadblocks consistent with national and global trends

This report – our fifth in a series of annual Women’s Edge studies begun in 2018 – examines how employers are meeting these roadblocks and working to fill the leadership pipeline with qualified women.

This report contains two major sections:

Key Findings and Trends (page 4) synthesizes major takeaways from this year’s survey and compares them to past years wherever possible. Highlights include: increased use of goals and metrics; improvements for women of color; a growing commitment to mentorship and sponsorship; greater recognition of identities that intersect with gender; and an intentional commitment to adopting last year’s report recommendations.

A Roadmap for Success (page 12) outlines specific recommendations for organizations focused on supporting and advancing women’s leadership. The roadmap includes: leveraging metrics that spur accountability; what to do when progress is stalling; creating a culture of allyship (that recognizes intersecting identities); shifting perspectives about mentorship and sponsorship; and actively supporting women’s wellbeing.

CHART

Women Continue to Fall Behind on the Pathway to Senior Leadership²

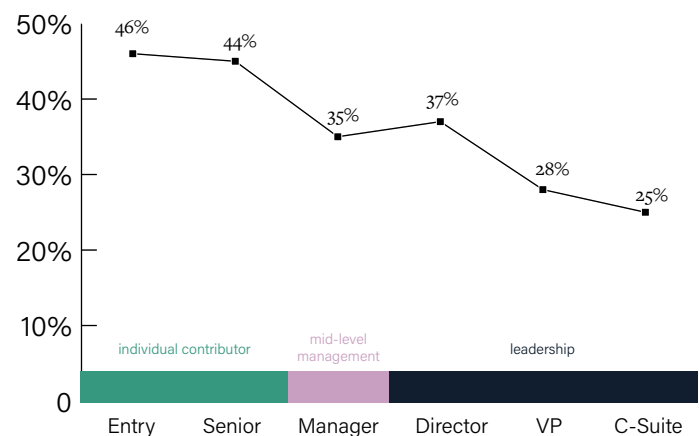


Figure 1: The representation of women by seniority across the US.

“AIM is proud to support the necessary work The Women’s Edge is doing to track and promote women’s progress and female leadership across the Commonwealth. The past few years have seen women’s advancement take a gigantic hit, as female labor force participation fell during the peak-pandemic to levels not seen since 1988. Although we are happy to see these numbers beginning to rise, and are encouraged by companies recognizing that affordable, accessible childcare is a major barrier to workforce entry, there are still 410,000 fewer women in the Massachusetts workforce today than there were in 2020, and much work remains to be done. AIM recognizes that our state, our communities, and our economy are all made healthier when led by diverse perspectives, and we look forward to continuing to partner with The Women’s Edge to maintain Massachusetts’ standing as a world-class economy by promoting women’s workforce accessibility and leadership potential.”



BROOKE THOMPSON

Executive Vice President of Government Affairs



Key Findings & Trends



Organizations are allocating resources and adopting goals and metrics.

Overall commitment to formal goals and metrics increased from 2021 to 2022, after decreasing in 2020 and 2021. Our hope is that this indicates a positive, sustainable trend as we emerge from the pandemic.

The results indicated a slight increase in companies with formal goals related to the development of women leaders – a 5% increase from 2021 to 2022.

Likewise, companies are reporting an increase in leadership initiatives specifically targeted to women after a decline for several years.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Does your organization have leadership initiatives specifically targeted to women?

● Yes ○ No

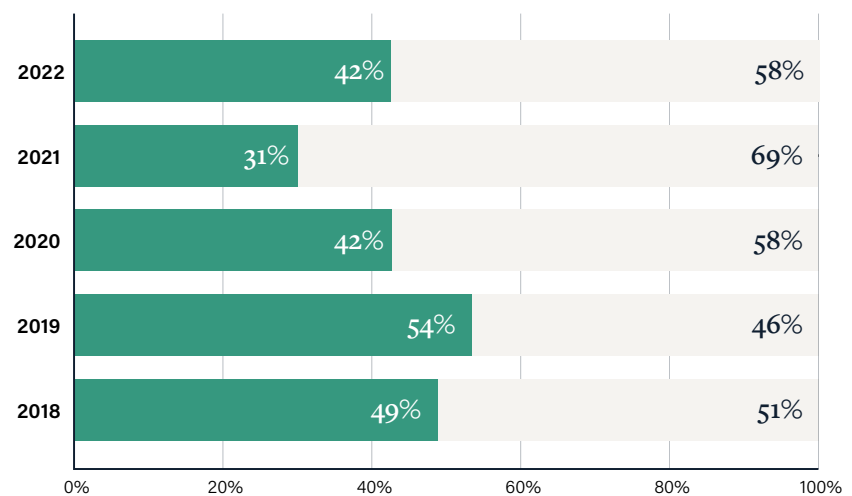


Figure 2: The percentage of responding organizations with leadership initiatives targeted to women



“We’ve been deliberate in how we assign our talented employees to key special projects and critical initiatives. Over time, more of our top female talent are engaged internally in developmental opportunities and we’re investing a great deal in outside development, including executive training, coaching and conferences. We believe this has translated into greater visibility for our talented women and more opportunities.”

STEVE VONDRAN
 President, US Tower
 Executive Vice President



Likewise, a year-over-year increase in specific resources dedicated to women's leadership development was indicated.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Does your organization have processes in place to identify and track high-potential women?

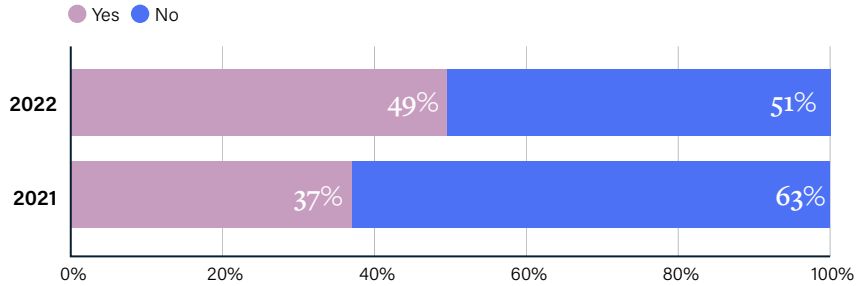


Figure 3: The percentage of respondents with processes to identify and track high-potential women.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Does your organization have resources earmarked for women's leadership development?

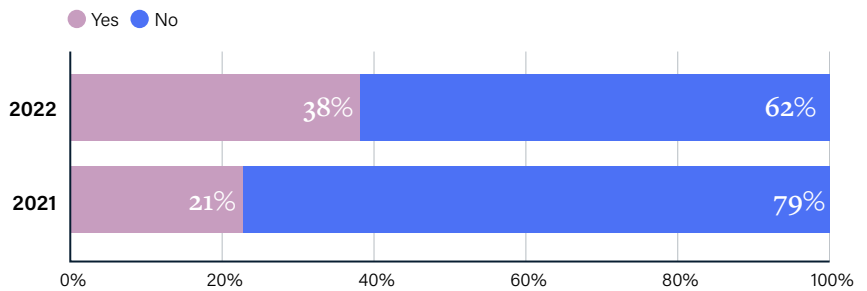


Figure 4: Respondents are increasingly earmarking resources for women's leadership development.



“

You can't really know the power of a diverse workforce, or hold yourself and your organization accountable for improvements in hiring and retention, until you're tracking and analyzing the data behind the people on your teams. This is how positive change happens. Instead of making educated guesses that lead to perhaps more limited or misaligned actions, you can make richer and deeper data-driven decisions that actually improve your team, which in turn, can lead to stronger organizational performance.

”

NANCY HUNTINGTON STAGER
President and CEO





Data is improving for women of color

The overall trend in metrics to track progress for women of color is encouraging.

A full 84% of respondents said that they wanted to increase the number of women in leadership roles, and the exact same number said they wanted to increase the number of *women of color* in leadership roles.

- The percentage of organizations with formal metrics related to promotion and advancement of women of color has steadily increased from a low of 29% in 2019 and now stands at 58%.
- The percentage with formal metrics to track women of color in leadership roles has increased steadily from a low of 28% in 2019 to a high 55% in 2022.
- The percentage of organizations with metrics to improve retention of women of color has increased from a low of 29% in 2019 to a high of 58% in 2022.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Does your organization have formal metrics to improve retention of women of color?

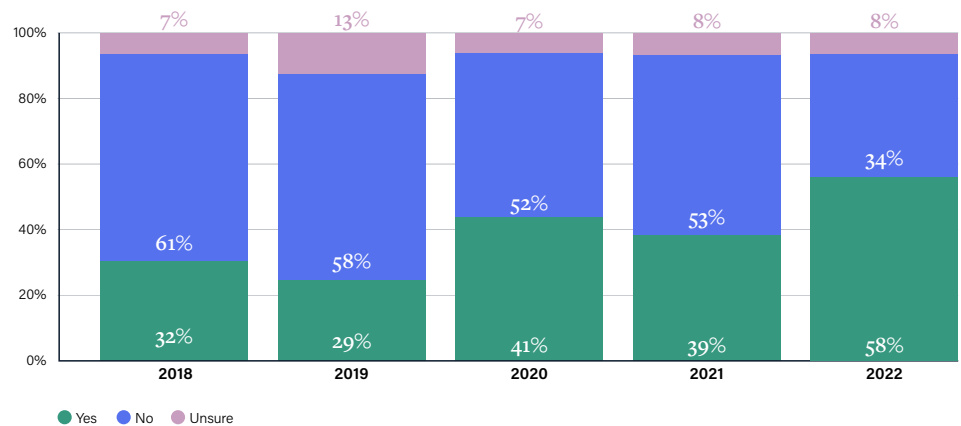


Figure 5: Organizations have formal metrics to improve retention of women of color



“Diversifying leadership in an organization requires intentionality. Posting positions is not enough. It is necessary to create a culture of development and advancement – scan your workforce for individuals at every level who have the potential to advance and invest in them. In the last three years, Goodwill promoted almost 15% of its workforce. Of those who moved up, 62% were women and 26% were women of color.”

JOANNE HILFERTY
President & CEO





“

At Accenture, we are promoting women at all stages of their lives and investing in targeted support, flexible work arrangements and comprehensive training programs designed to help women build productive and meaningful careers. I'm proud to say that women represent 47% of our global workforce and that we are well on our way to achieving our goal of becoming a gender-balanced workforce by the year 2025. Personally, I make a concerted effort to sponsor and advocate for the growth of our women to top-level leadership positions through our North America Women's Executive Leadership Program.

”

PALLAVI VERMA
Senior Managing Director





Commitment to mentorship and sponsorship is growing.

The trend toward increased mentorship and sponsorship for women is gaining traction.

In 2022, 94% of respondents said they believe sponsorship is an effective women's advancement strategy. This figure is up from 85% in 2021 and 67% in 2020. Mentorship also received overwhelmingly high marks, with 97% of respondents – up from 94% in 2021 – believing mentorship is an effective women's advancement strategy.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Tell us about your organization's experience with sponsorship programs and their measurable impact.

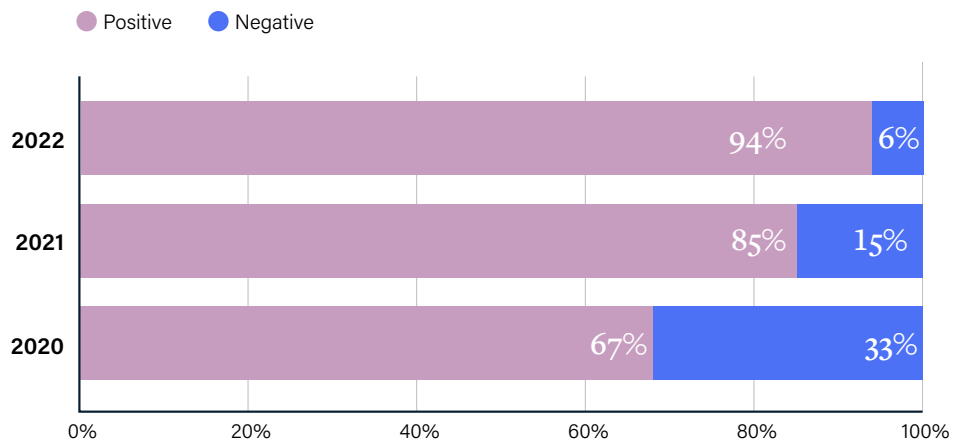


Figure 6: Sponsorship programs increasingly have positive impact on women's leadership development.

Impact Study participants provided ample written feedback about the importance of sponsorship and mentorship. A sampling of quotes includes:

MENTORSHIP

"All high potential women leaders are assigned a mentor."

"One of our goals is to establish a formal mentorship program for women and women of color."

SPONSORSHIP

"We actively support, promote, and sponsor female colleagues to advance in their careers and assume leadership roles within and outside of the organization."

"We have an ongoing sponsorship program for people of color."



“

I once heard it said that a mentor is someone who talks to you, but a sponsor is someone who is talking about you. Women leaders need both. Mentoring throughout one’s career is important, but sponsors are critical in helping mid- to senior-level women advance their career successfully. And while sponsors are important for men, they are vital for women. Senior-level sponsors in an organization – those who have a seat at the table – can advocate and use their influence to help women obtain opportunities in which they might otherwise be overlooked.”

”

BRENNA JONES
SVP, Chief Human Resources Officer



AMERICAN TOWER®



Employers are recognizing intersecting identities.

In 2022, survey participants demonstrated greater recognition of the impact of intersecting identities in both their qualitative and quantitative responses.

Over time, this should become increasingly helpful in measurement and goal setting related to women whose intersecting identities result in marginalization.

Some of the many open-ended survey responses included:

- "Our goal is to mentor, educate, and promote *junior* women of color to hold management roles."
- "In all our development programs, we review participants for level of diversity and seek out additional representation."
- "We have special leadership development opportunities that are exclusively for specific population segments: Latino/Hispanic, Black, Asian, female and veteran."

Organizations are also gathering quantitative demographic data.

SURVEY QUESTION:

Does your organization formally collect demographic data for employees in the following historically marginalized communities?

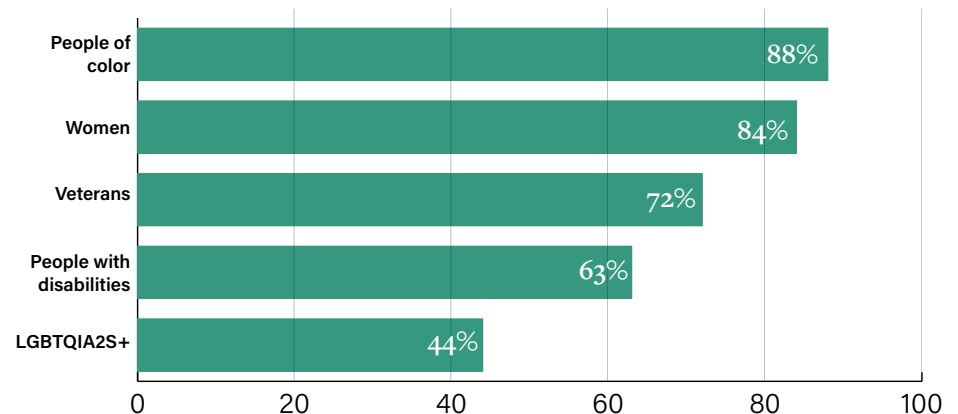


Figure 7: Organizations are collecting more employee demographic data.

The information above indicates that LGBTQ+ data collection is lacking compared to other data, and there are multiple reasons:

- LGBTQ+ employees often fear they will face increased discrimination if they disclose.
- Employers sometimes provide insufficient or inaccurate choices for employees to select when self-identifying.
- International companies are hindered if it is illegal for people to identify as LGBTQ+ in a country where they operate.

The percentage of survey participants saying they want to increase the number of LGBTQ+ women in leadership roles has increased from:

45%

in 2021

to

60%

in 2022.

This increase demonstrates growing understanding of the benefits that flow from truly diverse and inclusive organizations – cultures that value intersecting identities.



Participants are leveraging report recommendations.

Survey results in 2022 indicate that companies are leveraging the recommendations included in the *2021 Roadmap for Success*.

Quantitative responses demonstrated adoption of more mentorship and sponsorship programs, improved data collection for varying identities, and an increase in initiatives for women of color.

Qualitatively, participants shared a number of comments affirming report recommendations:

- The roadmap helped us expand our programs for women and track their impact.
- We set up a women's ERG.
- We increased the number of development and mentorship programs for women and women of color.
- We are providing more coaching and mentorship.
- We increased sponsorship for people of color.
- The report confirmed that we are on the right track, so we doubled down on addressing issues.
- We increased our diversity training.
- We are working to increase the number of women and minorities in professional feeder roles.

Ample data affirms the power of strategic and tactical actions such as those our participants are taking. Deloitte reports³ that the behavior of executives and managers can drive a difference of 70 percentage points between the proportion of underrepresented employees who feel included and those who do not. Likewise, well-respected DEI experts such as Frank Dobbin⁴ and Iris Bohnet⁵ advocate for specific structural and process-based interventions such as those survey participants are taking.

Survey participants are leveraging many recommendations in our *Roadmap for Success*, but they are lagging in establishing formal goals related to the development of women leaders.

While the trend is positive, increasing from 40% in 2020 and 2021 to 45% in 2022, there is significant room for growth on this metric.

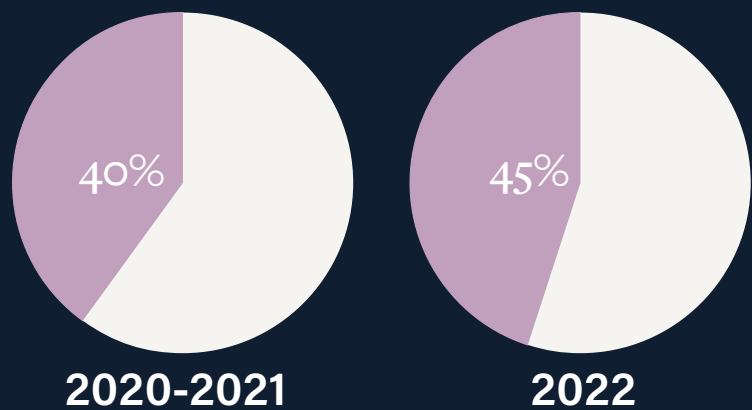
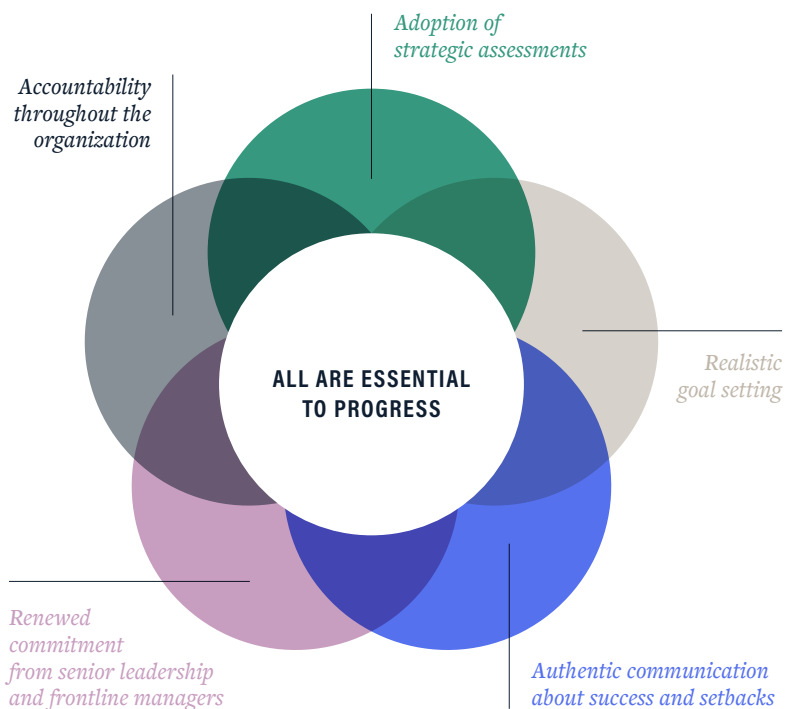


Figure 8: Organizations are lagging in establishing formal goals related to the development of women leaders.

A Roadmap for Success

Overall, the study results indicate ongoing and intentional increased commitments to women's leadership.

But the data also indicates that employers have work to do to overcome systemic and cultural challenges that are impeding or eroding progress.



The roadmap outlined on the following pages highlights specific strategies directly related to issues that have emerged in the 2022 study. Ideally, these recommendations will become part of a blueprint for action for women's leadership for all participating organizations.



Leverage metrics to spur increased leadership accountability.

Leaders who embody inclusion are essential to cultures of belonging.⁶

In fact, it's nearly impossible to make sustained progress without committed exemplars at the top of the organization. And while committed leaders set the stage, frontline managers are also critical: their behavior directly impacts employees' experiences, including those of inclusion.

Because best intent doesn't always convert to substantive action, increased use of metrics can hold leaders and frontline managers accountable and ensure success.

HOW DO YOU START?

Initially, leadership accountability goals and measurement can tilt towards the qualitative, growing more focused and quantitative over time.

A starting point might be allowing leaders to select three goals out of many options and demonstrate progress by discussing achievements and challenges during their performance review. Later, goals can become more specific and quantitatively assessed.

A few examples of goals that could be flexed (depending on where your organization/leadership is in its DEI maturity) include:

- 1 Increase the number of women with underrepresented identities on your team from 30% to 40% over two years.
- 2 Introduce targeted training or development for women of color.
- 3 Act as a formal mentor/sponsor to two women within the next year.
- 4 Offer more flexible arrangements for employees who need it, and seek direct input from women about the kind of flex they need.
- 5 Serve as an active executive sponsor for a women's ERG, and demonstrate how you have supported them.
- 6 Model allyship for women of color, and demonstrate how you have done this.

Consider whether you should be disaggregating data.

For instance, your overall numbers for women might look good, but do they vary significantly from one division or one region to another? Fortune 500 Boards provide a helpful example: Despite increased gender diversity, white women have made the greatest strides, gaining 209 board seats in 2020 for an increase of 20.6% from 2018.⁸ But it seems to have come at the expense of larger, more intersectional board diversity: the increase of board representation that Black women experienced in that same period decreased to six seats and there was minimal progress for most other race/ethnicity-gender combinations.



Wherever your progress is stalling, dig into what's holding it back.

NEARLY

60%

of bachelor's and master's degrees are awarded to women.¹⁰

There is no shortage of qualified women entering the pipeline. But when faced with unconscious bias and limited workplace support, making it to the top can seem like an out-of-reach goal, even for the most ambitious women.

Despite making progress, survey participants told us that they face organizational challenges that hold back progress in women's advancement. Issues included: time, financial resources, a lack of goals, too few women available to hire, and women self-selecting out.

As you assess what's holding back progress, be sure you are being honest and transparent about where you are lagging. Consider using Accenture's recommendations to "create feedback loops" and "include multiple perspectives." (See framework at bottom of page.)

DO YOU THINK THERE ARE TOO FEW WOMEN TO HIRE?

- Look at your job requirements. Are they too limiting? How can they be enhanced to appeal to a broader demographic group?
- Speak to your women's ERG if you have one, and get their input.
- Identify women candidates in places you haven't before, such as: women's professional organizations; women's colleges; and incubator or apprenticeship programs run by universities or chambers of commerce.
- Look for women in different parts of the organization, perhaps where gender representation might be more equitable.
- Examine your hiring process closely and identify where hidden gender bias exists. How are you reviewing resumes? Are you using gender bias decoders? Who is on the interviewing panel? Be sure there are multiple women involved in the entire process and that more than one woman makes it to the final candidate slate.
- Remember that men are often hired or promoted based on their potential while women are more often promoted for their experience and track record.⁹

USE A FRAMEWORK

All leaders and organizations committed to making progress in women's advancement and overall inclusion can leverage Accenture's 4-step best practices framework:

- Measure what matters: Identify the strategic metrics that will help you reach your goals.
- Define measurement process and cadence: Conduct pulse checks on how specific groups (women and women of color) feel about progress. Take timely action based on results.
- Share results for transparency and accountability: Publicize progress and be transparent about setbacks.
- Create feedback loops that promote better actions: Include multiple perspectives to ensure representation in feedback and recommendations.



A focus group among women at Harvard Business School revealed what they were up against in the workplace.¹²

They were often “the only” on a team, lacking role models and real-time support from women on the same journey. They reported isolation, fear, and decreased engagement. Some of them left that first employer as a result. One participant noted, “I was always the only woman on the team at my consulting firm, and an immigrant, too. I think it’s shocking that, over five years, I have still not worked for a woman. Why don’t firms put multiple women on teams so that we don’t feel alone?”

DO YOU THINK WOMEN ARE SELF-SELECTING OUT?

Research demonstrates that women leaders leave their workplaces for three primary reasons¹¹:

- 1 They face more barriers to advancement than men.
- 2 They do more work that goes unrecognized and under rewarded.
- 3 They want a better culture.

Work to learn more about the issues impacting women’s advancement and their perceived development needs via pulse surveys, exit interviews, and focus groups. Explore whether women are leaving due to structural barriers or microaggressions that could be mitigated.

DO YOU THINK THAT YOUR COMPANY DOESN'T HAVE THE TIME OR FINANCIAL RESOURCES TO DEDICATE TO WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP ADVANCEMENT?

- Companies with the greatest proportion of women on executive committees earn a 47% higher rate of return on equity than companies with no women executives.¹³
- Companies in the top 25% for gender diversity are 27% more likely to outperform their national industry average in terms of profitability.

BUT BE ALERT TO THE WAY THIS WORK CAN FALL DISPROPORTIONATELY ON YOUR WOMEN

- While female leaders are twice as likely as male leaders to spend substantial time on DEI work, 40% say such work is not acknowledged at all in performance reviews.¹¹

She+ Geeks Out recommends these tools to mitigate gender bias in hiring¹⁴:

- *Textio* or *Gender Decoder* to ensure more inclusive job descriptions, since women are less likely to respond to job listing coded with more masculine language.
- *Hundred5* and *Skillist* to focus on knowledge and skills, and to demonstrate competencies beyond what resumes provide.
- *Unbiasify Chrome Extension* to remove names and photos from sites like LinkedIn and Twitter.
- *Talent Sonar* combines some of the above in an all-in-one platform.



Create a culture of allyship that recognizes intersecting identities.

Allyship is a powerful force to propel women to leadership, yet only 18 percent of study respondents said they have a formal allyship program.

Most often, allyship programs for women enlist men as active advocates, and for good reason. Deloitte notes that, "Allies might be the missing link in creating more inclusive organizations."¹⁵

Effective male allies build collaborative and supportive relationships with women, identify and reduce their own sexism, understand the social privilege conferred by their gender, and actively address gender inequities at work and in society.

ACCOUNT FOR INTERSECTING IDENTITIES

Gender allyship must account for intersecting identities. Increasingly, organizations are recognizing the need for – and the complexities related to – allyship for women whose multiple identities can create barriers to advancement. These include race, ethnicity, LGBTQ+ status, and disability, to name a few. Consider the following¹⁶:

- Women of color who make it to the top consistently cite the importance of allyship.
- Workplace allies help break down stigma attached to disability.
- Allies for LGBTQ+ employees educate others about how to intervene to reduce microaggressions.

Despite the powerful case for allyship, research reveals persistent barriers to progress:

- Asian women and Black women are less likely than white women to have strong allies on their teams.¹¹
- LGBTQ+ women and women with disabilities are more likely than other women to experience demeaning microaggressions.
- A significant percentage of people consider themselves workplace allies but don't recognize their personal roles and responsibilities.
- About 75% of men say that are doing "everything they can" to support gender equality at work, yet only 41% of women agree.¹⁷
- Nearly 90% of men believe that they would be a "good listener" to a woman reaching out about workplace harassment but only 58% of women concur.¹⁸



LEVERAGE BEST PRACTICES

Consider the following best practices¹⁶:

- Embedding a culture of psychological safety, where employees know it is safe to speak up, show up authentically, make mistakes, and question the status quo
- Providing educational programs about allyship for all employees, always recognizing that self-awareness can be the single most important step in becoming an ally
- Prioritizing allyship education and action among senior leaders
- Adopting frameworks for honest conversations across difference
- Establishing a culture of “calling people in” respectfully, collaboratively, and non-judgmentally
- Celebrating unique identities and stories, along with moments of allyship
- Making a public commitment to allyship as an organization
- Ensuring accountability among leaders and teams

“No experience or journey is the same. Queer people often have experience as part of multiple marginalized communities. We may also be Black, indigenous, or a person of color (BIPOC). We may be part of the disability community or face poverty or homelessness. The struggles of these groups often intersect with those of the queer community. To be an ally, take the time to listen to the experiences of marginalized people and help us to live openly and authentically. Take the time to learn about the unique experiences of LGBTQ communities of color.”

HUMAN RIGHTS CAMPAIGN¹⁸



“ One of the biggest challenges in diversity, equity and inclusion-efforts is helping people understand the impact of DEI more broadly. People who don’t feel a part of DEI tend to think of it in narrow terms—‘it’s only about people of color’ or ‘it’s only about women,’ etc. When you look at DEI through this lens, it’s easy to feel left out. At Liberty Mutual, we focus on how diversity is about all of us and all of the differences and similarities that make us who we are. Yes, we want to raise underrepresented groups so that we have talent of all backgrounds at all levels of the organization—and so our workforce reflects the customers and communities we serve. In the end, we want everyone to bring their unique talents to the table. Achieving gender equity and equity in general means we ALL win. And when we all win, we are going to be more engaged and do our best work. It’s crucial not to blame, shame or attack others, but to help people find ways to connect with the work. Understanding and valuing our differences allows us to collaborate more effectively to make Liberty an even stronger global organization.”

”

DAWN FRAZIER-BOHNERT

EVP, Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer





Shift your perspective on mentorship and sponsorship.

Both mentorship and sponsorship are valuable and essential to women's ability to thrive and succeed in their careers.

Broad data demonstrates that, when successful, these relationships result in increased self-confidence, self-awareness, job satisfaction, aspiration, employer loyalty, and career fulfillment.

The lines can be blurred between mentorship and sponsorship, and sometimes this is okay. Mentorship, after all, can sometimes grow into sponsorship. Remember, though, that the core difference between the two approaches is that mentors listen and advise while sponsors use their influence to connect protégés to high-profile people, assignments, pay increases, and promotions. Sponsors, therefore, must hold senior positions and have the power to influence promotions for their protégés.

MENTORSHIP VS. SPONSORSHIP¹⁹

MENTORS	SPONSORS
Mentors have mentees	Sponsors have protégés
A mentor could be anyone with experience desired by a mentee who can offer advice and support	A sponsor is a senior level staff member invested in a protégé's career success
Mentors support mentees through formal or informal discussions about how to build skills, qualities and confidence for career advancement	Sponsors promote protégés, using their influence and networks to connect them to high-profile people, assignments, pay increases and promotions
Mentors help mentees craft a career vision	Sponsors help drive their protégé's career vision
Mentors give mentees suggestions on how to expand their network	Sponsors give protégés their active network connections and make new connections for them
Mentors provide feedback to aid a mentee's personal and professional development	Sponsors are personally vested in the upward movement of their protégés

Research shows that Black executive women find it more difficult to obtain and hold onto sponsorship than others. In one study, only a third of Black women's sponsors were white men, while 75% of white men's sponsors were also white men. HBR reports that, "It is time to understand and acknowledge the power dynamic that prevents Black women from reaching the top seat of corporations. Regardless of education, motivation, and personal and professional success factors, being sponsored by a white man remains the primary accelerant to the career mobility of Black women."

Sponsorship is particularly vital in advancing women into senior leadership ranks. Studies show that powerful sponsors help overcome organizational risk-aversion to promoting women to key positions.²⁰

Further research demonstrates that while most women face barriers to white male sponsorship – such as exclusion from informal networks, lack of opportunity to build camaraderie with white males, and concerns regarding misinterpretation of the relationship by others – the challenges are compounded for women of color based on the intersection of their gender and race.

4

When women are sponsored by men, they make more money²², get more promotions, and have better career outcomes – not because men are better sponsors but because they have more power.

ARE YOU STRUGGLING WITH ADDING SPONSORSHIP TO THE MIX?

If so, shift your mindset and view your mentorship-sponsorship initiatives on a spectrum. Classic mentoring (private advice and support) sits at one end of the spectrum and classic sponsorship (strong advocacy and personal risk taking to provide protégé with opportunities) sits at the other end. In between are a range of roles and relationships to consider.

A number of strategies are effective for both mentorship and sponsorship:

- Strategize with your advisee, sharing insider knowledge on how to advance.
- Connect your advisee to influential people.
- Provide high-visibility assignments.
- Seek advisees with intersecting marginalized identities.
- Get training on how to be an effective mentor or sponsor to women of color.
- Ensure that your organization is providing as many high-level, influential mentors and sponsors to women as they are to men.

ARE YOU LEVERAGING FRONT LINE MANAGERS?

Frontline managers can play a vital mentor/sponsor role for women of color who are moving through the ranks. Fewer than a third of Black workers report having sponsors²¹, and fewer than 25% report receiving sufficient help in making it to the next level. Mid-level managers can find their place on the mentor-sponsor spectrum. A good starting point is providing honest, compassionate feedback, which people of color receive disproportionately less of than white people.



“We have learned from our member companies that mentorship and sponsorship are critical to support employees from underrepresented groups in navigating and advancing in their careers. When a senior colleague leverages their influence to advocate for a protégé, that sponsored woman is more likely to gain visibility, recognition, and advancement opportunities. With more understanding about the importance of sponsorship, our members have increasingly provided either formal sponsorship programs or fostered cultures that encourage these types of relationships across the organization.”

JAY ASH
President and CEO





Actively support women's workplace wellbeing.



“We have created a culture at Sun Life that supports women throughout their careers by providing mentorship, sponsorship and amazing benefits, including sabbaticals that can be taken every five years, and generous paid time off for recovering from child birth, bonding with a new child, or caring for themselves or a loved one. We recognize the delicate balancing act of work and life that women must contend with and are proud to offer the flexibility and support that women – and everyone – need to succeed and thrive.”

DIONTHA FANCHER
Director of Diversity, Equity and Inclusion



The pandemic underscored and exacerbated the profound impacts of mental and physical health for women in the workplace.

It is well-established that ongoing inequities related to pay and caregiving, outsized expectations to qualify for advancement compared to men, and numerous other gender-related microaggressions contribute to poor health outcomes for women.²³

In 2021-22, over 50% of women²⁴ reported that their stress levels were higher than the previous year, and burnout has become a top factor driving women away from their employers. In fact, nearly 40% of women actively looking for a new job cite burnout as the main reason. And while women with the highest levels of burnout are in middle management or are younger (aged 18 to 25), even women leaders feel more strain: a full 40% of women leaders report burn out compared to only 31% of men at the same level.

THE PANDEMIC'S LONG-TERM IMPACTS

The long-term impacts of the pandemic and the “new normal” for work remain uncertain. For instance, we know that increased virtual work can reduce micro-aggressions. For women whose intersecting identities place them at greater risk, remote work can provide protection. Yet simultaneously, it can be isolating, leading to further advancement barriers.

WHAT CAN EMPLOYERS DO?

A key factor in supporting women's advancement is supporting women's health. Consider these strategies to nurture well-being for women and all employees:

1. Provide mental health training for people at all levels, teaching how mental health intersects with various aspects of identity. Provide baseline knowledge, discuss intersectionality, dispel myths, and offer strategies for conversation about mental health.
2. Explicitly build health supports into organization-wide practices. Restructure processes where necessary. Look at workloads, after-hours boundaries, flexible hours, paid time off, parental leave, pay inequity, consequences for microaggressions and harassment, and accountability mechanisms like regular surveys.
3. Over-communicate about health benefits that are available. Remember that stigma prevents or delays people from seeking help. Leaders can help destigmatize mental health issues by sharing if they have personally used benefits.
4. Ensure that leaders model behaviors that prioritize physical and mental health. This is essential in order to destigmatize often-hidden health issues and to nurture culture change that prioritizes self-care for all employees. Leaders must talk about their own vulnerabilities, their own challenges, and how they use employee benefits. This will establish greater connection, trust, and support for a culture of well-being.

Endnotes

1.

Hinchliffe, E. (2023, January 30). "Women Run More Than 10% of Fortune 500 Companies For the First Time". *SHRM Executive Network*. www.shrm.org/executive/resources/articles/pages/women-run-ten-percent-fortune-500.aspx#:

2.

Ghayad, R. (2023, March 6). "March 2023 update: Weak growth, robust labor markets, and persistent gender inequity". *LinkedIn's Economic Graph*. www.linkedin.com/pulse/march-2023-update-weak-growth-robust-labor-markets/.

3.

Fullilove, C. (2019, June). "Improving the Employee Experience Through Diversity". *ADP SPARK*. www.adp.com/spark/articles/2019/06/improving-the-employee-experience-through-diversity.aspx.

4.

Dobbin, F., Kalev, A. (2016, July-August). "Why Diversity Programs Fail". *Harvard Business Review*. hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail.

5.

Morse, G. (2016, July-August) "Designing a Bias-Free Organization". *Harvard Business Review*. hbr.org/2016/07/designing-a-bias-free-organization.

6.

Foster, T. (2020). Workplace Inclusion — Nurturing a Culture of Care and Belonging. *Bentley University*. www.bentley.edu/centers/center-for-women-and-business/workplace-inclusion-research-report-request.

7.

Mendonça, N., et al. (2022, March 8.) "Driving real ID&E change: Measuring what matters." *Accenture*. www.accenture.com/au-en/insights/software-platforms/measuring-inclusion-diversity-equity-goals.

8.

Foutty, J. (2021, June 23). "Driving Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) Accountability Starts with Data". *LinkedIn Pulse*. www.linkedin.com/pulse/driving-diversity-equity-inclusion-dei-accountability-janet-foutty/.

9.

Mohr, T.S. (2014, August 25). "Why Women Don't Apply for Jobs Unless They're 100% Qualified". *Harvard Business Review*. hbr.org/2014/08/why-women-dont-apply-for-jobs-unless-theyre-100-qualified.

10.

Connley, C. (2020, March 5). "Ambition is not the problem". *CNBC Make It Blog*. www.cnbc.com/2020/03/05/why-women-are-locked-out-of-top-jobs-despite-having-high-ambition.html

11.

McKinsey. (2022, October 18). Women in the Workplace 2022. www.mckinsey.com/~ /media/mckinsey/featured%20insights/diversity%20and%20inclusion/women%20in%20the%20workplace%202022/women-in-the-workplace-2022.pdf

12.

Foster, T. (2019). Intersectionality in the Workplace: Broadening the Lens of Inclusion. *Bentley University*. www.bentley.edu/centers/center-for-women-and-business/

13.

Sharp Emerson, M. (2020, March 27). "Why Gender Equity in the Workplace is Good for Business". *Harvard Continuing Education*. professional.dce.harvard.edu/blog/why-gender-equity-in-the-workplace-is-good-for-business/

14.

Murray, R. (2020, November 20). "Seven Tech Tools to Mitigate Bias in Hiring". *She+ Geeks Out Blog*. www.shegeeksout.com/blog/seven-tech-tools-to-mitigate-bias-in-hiring-2/

15.

Cooper, T and Horn, E. (2019.) "The bias barrier: Allyships, inclusion, and everyday behaviors." *Deloitte Insights*, 2019. www2.deloitte.com/content/dam/Deloitte/us/Documents/about-deloitte/us-inclusion-surveyresearch-the-bias-barrier.pdf.

16.

Foster, T. (2021). Elevating Allyship in the Workplace. *Bentley University*.

17.

Hook, Christopher et al. (2019). "So, You Want to be a Male Ally for Gender Equality (And You Should): Results from a National Survey, and a Few Things You Should Know." *Promundo Global*. promundoglobal.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Male-Allyship-Study-Web.pdf.

18.

Human Rights Campaign. (2020). "Being an LGBTQ Ally." hrc-prod-requests.s3-us-west-2.amazonaws.com/ComingOut-Ally-Resource-2020.pdf?mtime=20201009121120&focal=none.

19.

Stanford SLAC. "The Key Role of Sponsorship." inclusion.slac.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/The_Key_Role_of_a_Sponsorship_for_Diverse_Talent.pdf.

20.

Bradley Smith, S. (2021, March 5). "How a Lack of Sponsorship Keeps Black Women Out of the C-Suite". *Harvard Business Review*. hbr.org/2021/03/how-a-lack-of-sponsorship-keeps-black-women-out-of-the-c-suite.

21.

McKinsey Blog. (2021, February 2021). "Why sponsorship is key to helping Black employees advance". www.mckinsey.com/about-us/new-at-mckinsey-blog/why-sponsorship-is-key-to-helping-black-employees-advance

22.

Ibarra, H. and von Bernuth, N. (2020, October 09). "Want more diverse senior talent? Sponsor junior talent." *Harvard Business Review*. hbr.org/2020/10/want-more-diverse-senior-leadership-sponsor-junior-talent

23.

Greenwood, K. (2022, March 18). "How organizations can support women's mental health at work". *Harvard Business Review*. hbr.org/2022/03/how-organizations-can-support-womens-mental-health-at-work.

24.

Deloitte. (2022). Women @ Work 2022. www.deloitte.com/global/en/issues/work/women-at-work-global-outlook.html

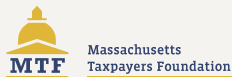
PRESENTING SPONSOR



KEY SPONSORS



PARTNER ORGANIZATIONS



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Trish Foster is a sought-after diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) strategist on a mission to help organizations become more inclusive for all employees. She advises a wide variety of clients. She also designs DEI programs, facilitates educational workshops, serves as a keynote speaker, and writes extensively on DEI topics. A sampling of her expertise includes allyship across identity difference, inclusive leadership, psychological safety, intersectionality, sponsorship and mentorship, employee resource groups (ERGs), and gender equity.

Previously, Trish served as Executive Director for the Center for Women and Business (CWB) at Bentley University, leading mission-driven work to create more inclusive organizations. Earlier, she served as a senior executive for Ogilvy and Mather and Fleishman Hillard.



The Women's Edge propels women leaders to achieve professional and personal success and deliver positive impact within their businesses and communities.

We do this by:

- collaborating and connecting extraordinary women at all stages of their careers - from next generation leaders to CEOs
- continually building a pipeline of high performing women leaders
- delivering relevant leadership programs, events and perspectives, with actionable insights
- incorporating diversity, inclusion, and belonging to foster gender and racial equity
- leveraging technology to expand reach and amplify impact

Elizabeth L. Hailer, CEO
ehailer@thewomensedge.org

[THEWOMENSEDGE.ORG](https://www.thewomensedge.org)