



6<sup>th</sup> Annual

# Women's Leadership Impact Study

MASSACHUSETTS

NOVEMBER 2024



MENTOR. PARTNER. LEAD.



MENTOR. PARTNER. LEAD.

The Women's Edge is pleased to present the results of the **6<sup>th</sup> Annual Women's Leadership Impact Study**, which explores trends in women's leadership initiatives among Massachusetts-based employers. Research took place between late 2023 and early 2024. The number of participating organizations more than doubled compared to the previous year's survey, which signifies the importance of women's leadership among Massachusetts employers, as well as interest in ongoing research conducted by The Women's Edge.

Many readers have been on this journey with The Women's Edge (formerly The Commonwealth Institute) since we launched the study in 2018. The quantitative data, coupled with qualitative feedback, summarizes what is working and where there are gaps. These results provide a foundation for the report's *Roadmap for Success*, which identifies robust strategies to develop, retain, and advance women leaders at all levels.

In contrast to several years of positive trends, the 2024 study reveals some declines in progress:

- A decrease in funding and resources dedicated to women's leadership development
- Significant gaps between general leadership development initiatives and those specifically focused on women
- A decline in measurable career development goals for women of color

A noteworthy positive finding is organizations' increased use of technology and innovation to support women's leadership and gender equity objectives, including:

- Data analytics for gender pay equity
- Leadership development and skill-based learning platforms
- Virtual mentorship and sponsorship programs
- Increased data collection of marginalized communities

While the study's mixed results are sobering, we remain optimistic about the future. We invite readers to leverage our *Roadmap for Success* and the many actionable recommendations.

Thank you to those who participated in supporting this important work. Your contribution helps ensure women's ability to grow, thrive, and succeed in the workplace.

To learn more about The Women's Edge programs, visit us at [thewomensedge.org](https://thewomensedge.org).

Elizabeth L. Hailer, CEO, The Women's Edge



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At Liberty Mutual, we believe that we all have the power and responsibility to support each other. Creating an environment that encourages curiosity, empathy, and allyship is vital for building an inclusive culture where everyone can be themselves at work, share their ideas and push the boundaries of conventional thinking.

Women represent over half of Liberty Mutual’s workforce – and with an unwavering commitment to inclusion ingrained in our business and rooted in our values – we want every person to succeed and thrive.

**TIM SWEENEY**  
**President and CEO**

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# About the Study



The 2024 MA Women's Leadership Study marks the sixth 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 also provides national data for additional context. The report concludes with a Roadmap for Success that includes measurable recommendations for action.

Our research among Massachusetts-based small, medium, and large organizations took place between fall 2023 and spring 2024. The number of participating organizations more than doubled compared to the previous year's survey, reflecting an increased awareness of TWE's ongoing research among Massachusetts employers. Among participants, private companies represented 37% of respondents, nonprofits 44%, and public companies 19%. Readers will note that the rate at which nonprofits participate in our study is greater than their overall representation in Massachusetts and likely reflects the priority many nonprofits place on workplace equity.

Likewise, responding companies included a high proportion (54%) of women-led businesses. In contrast, 10% of Fortune 500 companies are currently led by women. The greater number of participating organizations 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.

# Introduction

**This year's Massachusetts' survey suggests that success in moving women into leadership is mixed and progress is temperate.**

Businesses continue to tell us that they support women's leadership. However, several trends explored on the following pages – such as declining support for women of color, reduction of resources on women's leadership development, and a lack of specific leadership development initiatives focused on women – contradict respondents' stated sentiments.

This report contains two major sections:

**Key Findings and Trends** (page 4) synthesizes major takeaways from this year's survey, compares them to past years' results wherever possible, and often provides national context.

**A Roadmap for Success** (page 13) outlines specific recommendations for organizations focused on supporting and advancing women's leadership.

Some of the challenges identified in our study are consistent with national trends: According to data from LinkedIn<sup>1</sup>, women's hiring into leadership began to deteriorate in 2023, from 37.5% to 36.9%, and continued dropping in early 2024 to 36.4%, below 2021 levels.

Positive signs emerging in this year's study include increased innovation that leverages technology to support equity and an expanded array of equity-oriented initiatives.

**The National Rate of Women's Hiring into Leadership has Declined<sup>1</sup>**

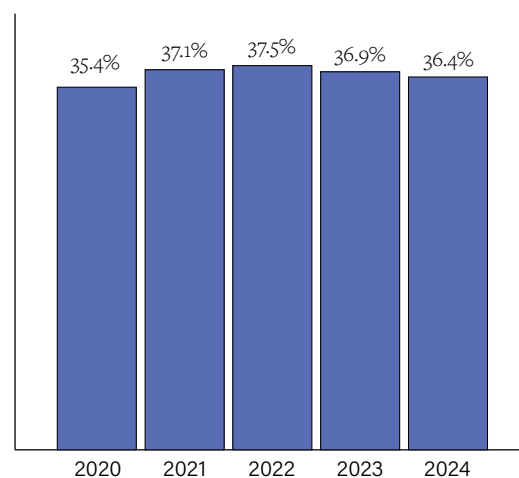


Figure 1: The percentage of women hired into leadership over time.

*"Building diverse leadership teams requires being intentional and proactive. Create a culture of career development. Scan your workforce for individuals with the potential to advance at every level. Look for women and others who may otherwise be overlooked. Then invest in them. In the last three years, Goodwill promoted almost 10% of its workforce. Of those who moved up, 70% were women and 27 % were women of color. This has strengthened the organization in terms of leadership, diversity, and loyalty."*



**JOANNE HILFERTY**  
President and CEO



# Key Findings & Trends



## Overall Women's Leadership Development Resources Decreased

After a slight increase from 2022 to 2023, resources dedicated to women's leadership development have declined significantly.

**SURVEY QUESTION:**

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

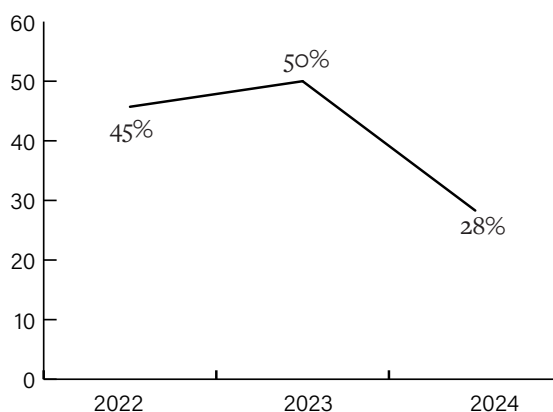


Figure 2: The percentage of responding organizations with dedicated resources or funds earmarked for women's leadership development



*"It is common knowledge that a diverse workforce and inclusion of diversity of thought yield positive outcomes for organizations across sectors. Given the new legal landscape around DEI, organizations are now grappling with how to embrace equity as they balance the needs of the next generation of leaders. In order to remain competitive in a diverse economy it is imperative that business leaders keep equity at the center of gravity because women and people of color continue to face significant opportunity gaps - particularly when it comes to wage parity and professional advancement parity."*

**ENEIDA M. ROMÁN**  
President & CEO





## Overall Women's Leadership Development Resources Decreased

The percentage of survey participants saying they were advocating for women's issues publicly decreased from:

50%  
in 2022

to

16%  
in 2023-2024.

When asked what was hindering progress, organizations stated the top two reasons as:

1. Organization size (too small) and resources (limited)
2. Lack of organizational prioritization, despite verbal commitments to women's advancement

This highlights a critical need for consistent, long-term dedication to developing women leaders; structural changes to make this a true organizational priority; and allocation of adequate resources to support these efforts.

The disparity between stated intentions and actual impact or follow-through is noteworthy. This gap between words and actions is a common issue in diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives, particularly in gender equity efforts. Acknowledging this disconnect between expressed commitments and real-world implementation could be a valuable step in promoting more meaningful progress in women's leadership development.

DEI programs, once broadly supported as necessary for workplace equity, are facing political and cultural pushback.

Critics argue that these programs are either ineffective, overly ideological, or unnecessarily focused on identity politics. As a result, some organizations are deprioritizing DEI, including gender-based initiatives. Reasons include fear of alienating stakeholders and easy cost-cutting. Some organizations who were never authentically committed to DEI are eliminating, reducing, or redeploying DEI resources and programs.

***But other employers are staying the course, recognizing that DEI – and particularly women's leadership – is essential to progress and success.*** These businesses also understand that younger workers – with Gen Z at the forefront – are unwavering in their comment to equity and inclusion in the workplace. The most progressive organizations see gender advancement in the broader context of DEI and as a values-based priority.



*“The future is undeniably diverse. Despite the resistance to diversity, equity, and inclusion, the core reasons for organizations to prioritize DEI remain unchanged. The increasing diversity in the US and globally demands organizational and leadership practices that embrace and leverage differences for better outcomes. Those who rise above the DEI backlash will not only survive but also thrive in both the present and the future.”*

**JAVIER BARRIENTOS**  
Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer







## Support for Women of Color Waned

This year’s research revealed a concerning decline in support for the advancement of women of color.

After notable increases in metrics to track progress of women of color into leadership roles between 2018 and 2023, such support declined in 2024.

**SURVEY QUESTION:**

**Does your organization have formal metrics to track progress of increasing women of color in leadership?**

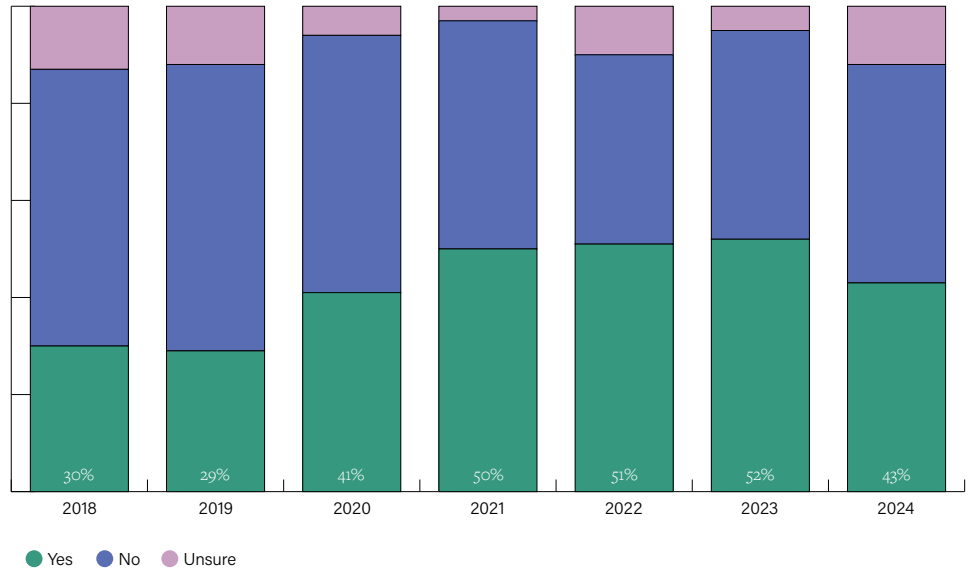


Figure 3: Organizations have formal metrics to improve retention of women of color

The discouraging data regarding women of color demonstrates how fragile progress continues to be. Reasons for declining progress are not clear, but the overall decrease in support for DEI in both academic and work settings is likely a contributor.

While 50% of respondents in this year’s study said that they have formal metrics to track progress in retaining women overall, only 35% said they have metrics to track progress in retaining women of color.

Robust initiatives, particularly sponsorship, are essential for women of color. However, experts note<sup>3</sup> that, “Black women in the workplace often lack this kind of sponsorship, and Black women in leadership can be stifled in their growth due to this lack of support.” Please see page 17 in a Roadmap for Success for additional information about sponsorship.

McKinsey/Leanin.Org<sup>2</sup> reports that, “At the current pace of progress, it will take 22 years to reach parity in corporate America for white women – and more than twice as long for women of color – and that assumes companies can translate their somewhat precarious momentum into more substantial and sustainable gains.”



## Data Collection for Marginalized Communities is on the Rise

Despite the disappointing data regarding support for women of color, there has been some increase in the collection of demographic data across all groups, including historically underrepresented communities.

Women, people of color, and veterans saw particularly high levels of data collection in both 2023 and 2024.

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### SURVEY QUESTION:

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

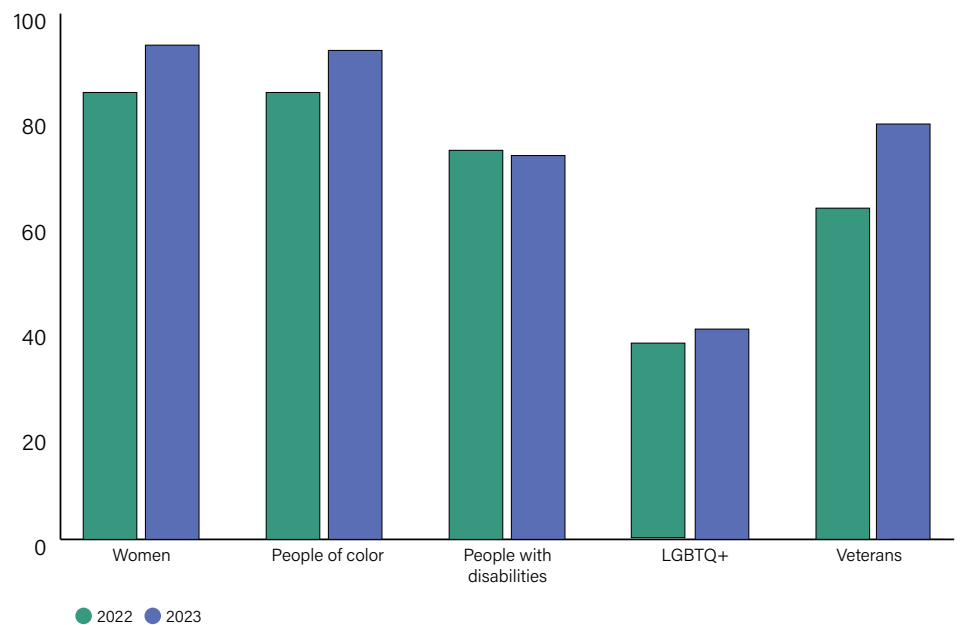


Figure 4: Percentage of responding organizations who formally collect demographic data for employees in historically marginalized communities

Collecting data related to sexual orientation, gender identity, and variations in sex characteristics (SOGI) presents unique challenges and requires careful consideration of best practices.<sup>4</sup> One significant challenge is ensuring the privacy and safety of individuals from LGBTQI+ communities, as disclosure of sensitive information can lead to unintended harm, including discrimination or violence. Moreover, standardization of terms and definitions across various data collection efforts can be difficult due to the fluidity and diversity of identities. Incomplete or inconsistent data can skew results, leading to underrepresentation of certain groups, particularly those with intersecting marginalized identities.



## Less Focus on Women’s Leadership Development, More Focus on All Staff



“Both nationally and in Massachusetts, the job market is shifting. What was recently a white-hot competition for talent has cooled, forcing employers to be more creative about their efforts to recruit and retain workers. Investing in employees and creating diverse leadership pipelines is an important element of that strategy. By focusing on the development and advancement of women, employers are both meeting their talent needs while ensuring an equitable and competitive workplace. The Roundtable is pleased to be part of the Leadership Council for the Impact Study and is grateful to The Women’s Edge for shining a spotlight on this issue.”

**JD CHESLOFF**  
President & CEO



**Our data reveals a significant gap between general leadership development initiatives and those specifically targeted at women.**

While 93% of organizations report having leadership development programs in place, only 31% offer programs specifically aimed at women.

**SURVEY QUESTION:**

**Does your organization currently have any leadership development initiatives or programs?**

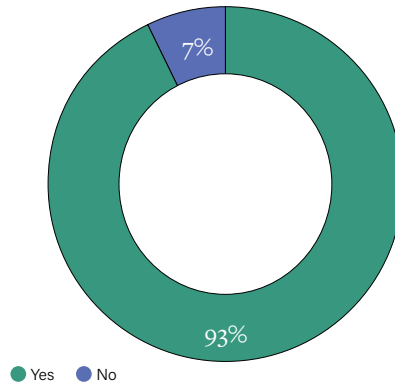


Figure 5: Responding organizations who currently offer leadership development initiatives

**SURVEY QUESTION:**

**Does your organization currently have leadership development initiatives or programs specifically targeted to women?**

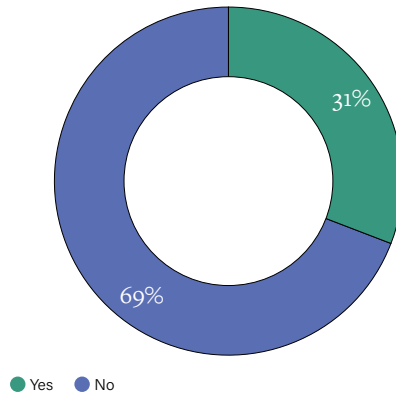


Figure 6: Responding organizations who currently offer leadership development initiatives targeted at women

The stark disparity illustrated in Figures 5 and 6 highlights a persistent, nagging gap in professional leadership development programs: too often, they are “one size fits all,” resulting in training best suited to historically majority groups, such as white men. Such traditional approaches overlook the immensely positive impacts of customized support. Professional development for women should encompass self-identity about leadership, internalized gender bias, the lack of role models, enhanced mentorship and sponsorship, greater access to high-profile assignments, and supportive peer groups. Organizations should further customize approaches and initiatives for women from historically underrepresented communities.



## Participants Identify a Robust Suite of Offerings for High-Impact Programs

### A promising survey result has emerged in the past several years.

When asked what programs are most effective, participants are increasingly pointing to a robust suite of offerings. They unanimously praise these initiatives and their effectiveness in driving meaningful progress. Commonly cited initiatives include:

- **DEI Training:** Equipping employees with the skills and knowledge to foster inclusive environments and address unconscious biases.
- **Mentorship Matching:** Facilitating connections between experienced professionals and emerging leaders to guide career growth.
- **Sponsorship Matching:** Matching high-potential individuals with senior leaders who advocate for their advancement within the organization.
- **Leadership Development Programs:** Tailored initiatives to build leadership capabilities across various levels, helping future leaders thrive.
- **Leadership Consultants:** External experts brought in to provide specialized advice and strategies to improve leadership effectiveness.
- **Employee Resource Groups (ERGs):** Groups that offer safe spaces for employees from marginalized backgrounds and serve as key components in building an inclusive culture.



## Employers are Leveraging Innovation to Drive Gender Equity

### For the first time in 2024, we asked respondents to reflect on innovative technologies.

Responding companies are using the latest innovations supporting women in the workplace, heavily centered on technology-driven solutions designed to promote gender equity, leadership development, and skills enhancement.

#### SURVEY QUESTION:

What new innovations are being used to support women in your work efforts?

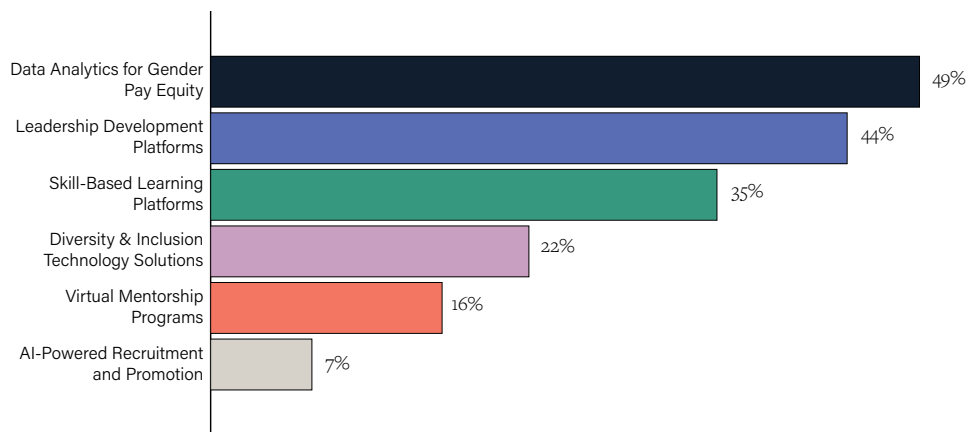


Figure 7: Percentage of responding organizations using innovation to support women



## Employers are Leveraging Innovation to Drive Gender Equity



*“Massachusetts employers have redoubled their commitment to women’s leadership at a time when leadership is a singularly valuable commodity in a complex world. That’s why Associated Industries of Massachusetts and its 3,400 member companies support the new Frances Perkins Workplace Equity Law, which provides an unparalleled opportunity to ensure that the commonwealth remains a unique destination for workers who value fair pay and transparent hiring. At a time of persistent labor shortages, Massachusetts employers understand that leading the way on pay equity and developing women’s leadership will allow businesses and the economy to thrive.”*

**BROOKE M. THOMSON**  
President & CEO



The data highlights key tools and platforms organizations are adopting:

- **Data Analytics for Gender Pay Equity:** Organizations are increasingly using data analytics to identify and address gender pay gaps. These tools allow companies to track compensation trends, analyze pay disparities, and make data-driven decisions to ensure women are paid equitably across all levels of the organization.
- **Leadership Development Platforms:** Digital platforms that offer tailored leadership development programs are becoming more common. These platforms provide women with access to resources and training that build their leadership capabilities, offering flexibility in terms of delivery (e.g., online or in-person) and content designed to empower them in senior roles.
- **Skill-Based Learning Platforms:** These platforms offer women opportunities to enhance their skill sets through targeted learning modules. They focus on developing the technical and soft skills necessary for career advancement, ensuring women have access to continuous development tailored to their personal and professional needs.
- **Diversity and Inclusion Technology Solutions:** These tools help organizations track, measure, and improve their DEI efforts. Solutions may include bias detection in hiring, real-time diversity metrics, and initiatives to foster a more inclusive workplace for women and other marginalized groups.
- **Virtual Mentorship Programs:** Virtual mentorship platforms are facilitating connections between women and experienced professionals globally. These programs enable women to access mentorship regardless of location, helping them receive career guidance and support from mentors who can advocate for their advancement in leadership roles.
- **AI-Powered Recruitment and Promotion:** Artificial intelligence is being applied to recruitment and promotion processes to eliminate bias and ensure a more equitable approach to hiring and advancing women. These tools help companies focus on skills, qualifications, and performance data, rather than allowing unconscious biases to influence decisions.

These innovations demonstrate a growing commitment from organizations to leverage technology to address barriers to gender equity and support women’s career advancement, particularly in leadership roles.



## Participants' Aspirations for Progress Continue to Lag



*"Ensuring that women have clear and supportive pathways to leadership isn't just the right thing to do—it's essential for Massachusetts to stay competitive in attracting and retaining talent. The Women's Leadership Impact Study captures the remarkable strides Massachusetts employers are making to advance women in the workforce. While we are proud to work alongside employers who are paving the way for a more inclusive and resilient workforce, more needs to be done to remove remaining barriers and foster a culture where women's leadership is valued and nurtured across all levels."*

**JAY ASH**  
President and CEO



### Accountability for progress continues to lag intent in most organizations.

For instance, 62% of participants have a formal goal to increase the number of women in leadership, but only 54% have established formal metrics to track progress toward this goal.

**SURVEY QUESTION:**

**Does your organization have formal goals to increase the number of women in leadership?**

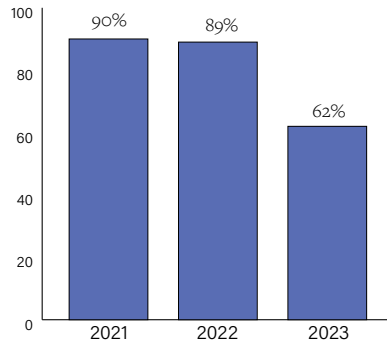


Figure 8: Responding organizations who currently have formal goals to increase the number of women in leadership

**SURVEY QUESTION:**

**Does your organization currently have leadership development initiatives or programs specifically targeted to women?**

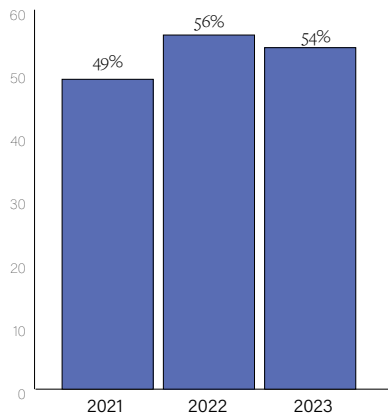


Figure 9: Responding organizations who currently offer leadership development initiatives targeted at women

This indicates that although there is a clear intention to promote gender equity at the leadership level, a significant portion of organizations lack the necessary mechanisms to measure their success and hold themselves accountable.



## Participants' Aspirations for Progress Continue to Lag

**SURVEY QUESTION:**

Do you routinely obtain written, anonymous feedback from women participants about your leadership offerings?

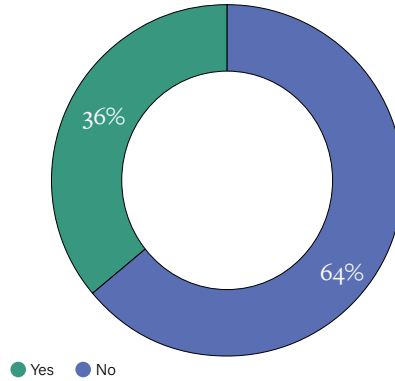


Figure 10: Percentage of responding organizations who routinely obtain written, anonymous feedback from women participants about leadership offerings

Additionally, 64% of companies do not routinely gather feedback from their women participants about their leadership development programs. Organizations might be missing out on valuable insights that help improve the effectiveness of these initiatives. Without regularly seeking input from women on their experiences and the impact of leadership programs, companies risk implementing strategies that may not fully address the specific needs and challenges women face.

To drive and sustain progress, it is crucial that employers not only set goals and metrics but also actively engage the women they aim to support via ongoing feedback about programs intended to advance their leadership opportunities.



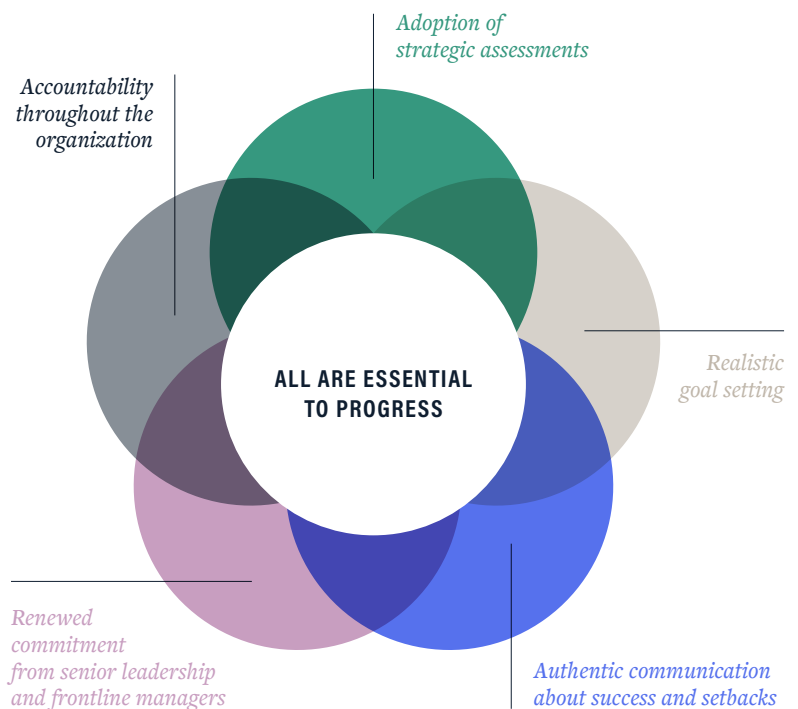
*“The gap between intention and accountability remains one of the key challenges in advancing all women into leadership positions. While organizations readily set aspirational goals, they often fail to implement the tracking systems and feedback mechanisms necessary to drive ‘measurable’ progress. Without clear metrics and active dialogue with all women leaders, even the most well-intentioned goals and initiatives risk becoming hollow promises rather than catalysts for real change.”*

**ELIZABETH L. HAILER**  
CEO



# A Roadmap for Success

The following pages present a strategic approach to advance gender equity, women's leadership within organizations, and overall inclusion.



Building on the trends and challenges identified in Part I, this section offers actionable recommendations to help organizations foster inclusive environments that support women – particularly those from historically underrepresented groups – as they ascend to leadership roles.

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.





## Assess Your DEI and Women's Leadership Program Status

**An authentic assessment of where your organization stands establishes a benchmark, identifies challenges, engages employees in the process, demonstrates transparency, and is the starting point for goal setting.**

A variety of tools and approaches exist. Be sure to use both qualitative and quantitative approaches.

---

### HOW DO YOU START?

Quantitative tools include data gathering and a variety of survey approaches. For instance, routine pulse surveys provide an ongoing process that focuses on one or two issues and gathers information efficiently.

Qualitative approaches might include focus groups, listening sessions, and 1:1 discussions with new, experienced, or departing employees. Conversations help overcome the static nature of surveys, which only capture snapshots in continually-evolving organizations. Conversational feedback often provides "the why" behind survey data.



## Create a Comprehensive Action Plan that Includes Realistic Goals

**An effective DEI plan will align with overall business goals and will incorporate targeted programs, smart resource allocation, and innovative technology.**

It will contain proactive feedback mechanisms and require accountability. Employees throughout the organization will contribute to the plan's development in some way. In short, a comprehensive plan will set your organization on a path for sustained progress.

Emphasize women's leadership development with specific, measurable goals for the inclusion of women in leadership pipelines. Key components will include recruitment, hiring, onboarding, reviews, training, and promotion processes. Wherever possible, initiatives should be customized for women of color and other intersecting identities.



## Build an Inclusive Culture

**An inclusive culture is one where employees feel a true sense of belonging, know that they are valued, recognize that they can contribute to success, and feel safe to challenge the status quo when needed.**

An inclusive culture is the crucial backdrop for your DEI and women's leadership initiatives.

- Leaders should set the tone, as role models, by visibly and actively advocating for a workplace where all employees contribute to a sense of belonging.
- Leaders should model and nurture trust, encouragement, empathy, psychological safety, and a shared sense of values and purpose.
- All employees can contribute to culture-building. They should recognize that culture is a "top to bottom" affair and acknowledge that every individual is accountable for progress.

The most inclusive cultures are marked by the ability to hold honest and challenging conversations about difference (Please see additional information under #4, Offer Education and Training.)



## Offer Education and Training

**Effective inclusion training must be sequential and sustained.**

Avoid "one-off" workshops and, instead, incorporate specific educational offerings in your plan. Remember that employees, including leaders, often avoid DEI efforts primarily because they lack knowledge. At a minimum, trainings should include:

1. Interactive sessions that provide foundational information about bias, diversity, and the real-life experiences of employees who are underrepresented.
2. Offerings marked by compassion and trust (and avoid blame), allowing all participants to ask important questions.
3. Programs that incorporate data and personal stories. Because the work of inclusion requires both "the mind and the heart," the combination of these two approaches is powerful.
4. Trainings that provide specific, actionable strategies attendees can use immediately.
5. Workshops that teach people how to hold challenging conversations. These should incorporate two kinds of dialogue: 1) conversations across difference with the goal of listening and learning and 2) feedback conversations about performance that are useful in reviews. The latter is relevant to women's leadership because women often lack the honest feedback that fuels career progression.



## Use Proven Initiatives to Advance Progress

Women who have sponsors are

**27%**

more likely than their un-sponsored female peers to ask for a raise, and

**22%**

more likely to ask for 'stretch assignments' that build their experience and visibility.<sup>5</sup>

### Prioritize women-specific initiatives.

Ensure that at least a portion of leadership development programs directly address the unique challenges and opportunities facing women in leadership. Particularly important – and emphasized in TWE’s research year-after-year – are mentorship/ sponsorship programs and Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).

#### MENTORSHIP & SPONSORSHIP

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

For either of these approaches, consider the following tips for success: Identify goals; select mentor/sponsor pairs thoughtfully; incorporate inclusion (ensuring that women with other intersecting identities are prioritized); provide training and guidance for all participants; use tools to facilitate regular check-ins and track progress, leverage online templates and software; track participation; and measure program impact based on documented opportunities, promotions, and salary increases for women.

The core difference between mentorship and sponsorship is that mentors mostly 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. It’s okay if the lines are sometimes blurred between mentorship and sponsorship. A mentoring relationship, after all, can sometimes become sponsorship, especially over time and if the mentor is more senior.

5

**EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS (ERGS)**

ERGs are employee-led groups that work to foster a diverse, inclusive workplace and are often aligned and actively engaged with the employer's business goals. Be sure to provide your ERGs with adequate resources, including funding, training, and access to leadership. With these supports, they will be instrumental in creating an inclusive culture and supporting women's advancement.

Women's ERGs are often the catalysts behind successful mentorship and sponsorship programs. Consider whether your ERG can take the lead in this work, and once again, provide support for their efforts.

Figure 11 illustrates the overall effectiveness of ERGs, with community building at the top and leadership and career advancement lagging. TWE recommends that your ERGs' executive sponsors help them develop more robust leadership/career advancement initiatives since such initiatives directly support women's path to leadership.

When ERGs are done well, they can increase engagement and retention of employees across all demographic groups, build a sense of community, and contribute to personal and professional development.

- Boston Consulting Group<sup>7</sup>

**Employees are most likely to rate their employee resource groups effective in building community within the organization.<sup>6</sup>**

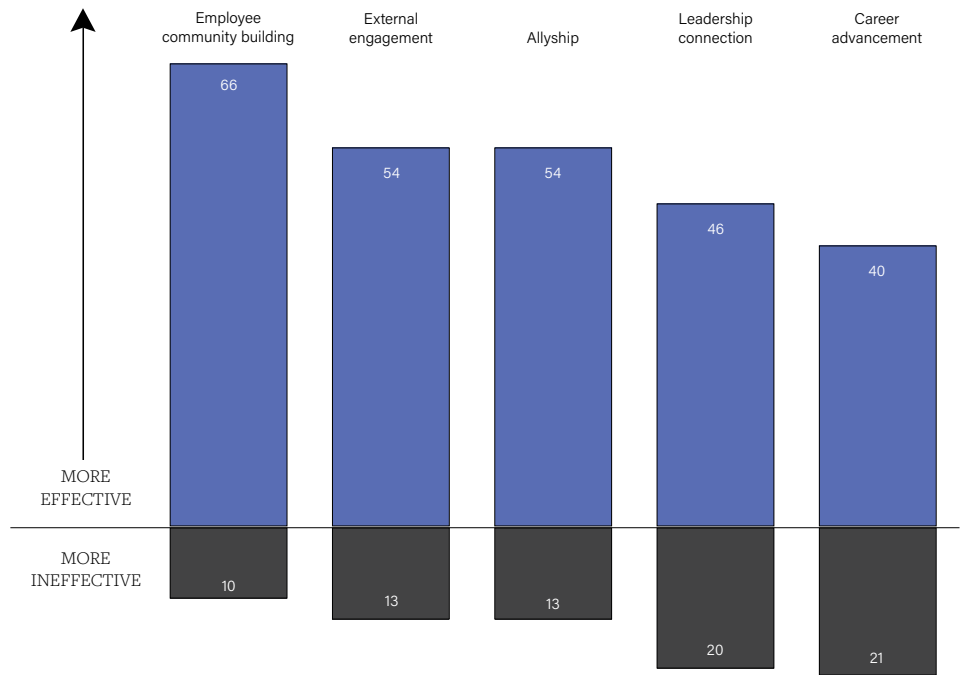


Figure 11: Effectiveness of employee resource groups by dimension, % of ERG members



## Communicate!

**Be sure your leaders talk to employees about their roles and experiences as leaders as well as where the organization stands in its inclusion journey.**

Share success stories and setbacks. Leverage internal communication channels and internal social media. Hold town halls and other in-person forums.

Be sure to communicate externally, too. Employees can serve as “brand ambassadors,” sharing information on effective initiatives with external stakeholders. You can also display your inclusion philosophy on your website.

In today’s climate of DEI pushback, you might incorporate some new communications approaches. For instance, a focus on “fairness and equity” versus “diversity,” which almost everyone can relate to regardless of their DEI views, is persuasive and hard to oppose.

- Your organization’s inclusion language related to hiring might therefore sound like this: “We want to get all qualified applicants to the table, and our hiring approach does just that.”
- Likewise, your women’s leadership development might be positioned as a well-accepted component of a forward-thinking, successful organization.

**You can also display your inclusion philosophy on your website.**

Progress Software’s website<sup>8</sup>, for instance, prominently displays its values as

“ProgressPROUD: Progress collaboratively; Respect differences and diversity; Own our tomorrow, today; Uphold trust; Dare to innovate.”



*“About half of my leadership team are women, which is up significantly from when I arrived in Boston. This mix of diverse backgrounds and experiences has helped us improve our talent acquisition and retention, business metrics and cultural aspirations. Diversity is a business missive which just happens to be the right thing to do.”*

**JEFF SWARTZ**

Managing Director

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## Accountability, Iteration, and Course Correction

**You are engaging in an ongoing, long-term process, so be ready to refine and adjust your strategies over time.**

Use feedback, continuous data collection, and new insights to enhance and adapt your initiatives.

Remember the adage, “what gets measured gets done,” and be sure to gather data on the percentage of women in leadership, of women on your board, participation rates of women in specific leadership programs, retention and promotion compared to men, and relevant metrics for women of color and those with other key intersecting identities.

Additional considerations include:

- Ensuring organization-wide accountability, with goals tied to job descriptions and by tracking success quantitatively and qualitatively.
- Using new technologies, like gender pay-tracking and AI solutions that help de-bias job descriptions. (But beware of new biases that can creep in!)
- Staying invested even when budget constrained. If necessary, reallocate resources instead of cutting programs. For instance, remember that highly effective mentorship, sponsorship, and ERG efforts are relatively low cost but are high impact for women’s advancement.
- Regularly soliciting feedback from participants in women-specific programs to identify gaps and areas of improvement, then incorporating their input into program design.
- Celebrating inclusion success stories to fuel commitment and sustainability of your programs. It’s a proven technique<sup>9</sup> that will also enhance culture and boost employee engagement!

“What gets measured gets managed. Setting clear, measurable goals for diversity and inclusion, and holding leaders accountable for meeting them, is crucial for making real progress.”<sup>10</sup>

# Endnotes

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- incorporating diversity, inclusion, and belonging to foster gender and racial equity
- leveraging technology to expand reach and amplify impact

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