

BRIDGE TO GENDER EQUALITY PROJECT: Transforming the Workplace Report

A project by the Women in Leadership Foundation

20
23



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Land Acknowledgement

This report was written on the traditional, ancestral, and unceded territory of the Syilx (Okanagan) people.

WIL acknowledges the land on which we gather is the traditional territory of the “Syilx People of the Okanagan Nation which are a trans-boundary tribe separated at the 49th parallel by the border between Canada and the United States. The Nation is comprised of seven member communities in the Southern Interior of British Columbia: Okanagan Indian Band, Osoyoos Indian Band, Penticton Indian Band, Upper Nicola Band, Upper and Lower Similkameen Indian Bands, and Westbank First Nation; and in Northern Washington State, the Colville Confederated Tribes. The members share the same land, nsyilxcən language, culture, and customs. They are a distinct and sovereign Nation”. We acknowledge that Metis and Inuit may also make their homes in the area.

Acknowledging this reminds us that our standard of living is directly related to the resources and friendship of Indigenous Peoples when they have been subjected to colonialism and oppression and that we all need to work on Truth and Reconciliation to correct this."

Acknowledgements

The Women in Leadership Foundation would like to thank all of the respondents who voluntarily participated in this report. By sharing their experiences, they provided insights into the challenges Canadian women are facing in the workplace and the practices that companies can adapt to achieve gender equality. We are honoured and deeply grateful to have had the immense support and guidance of the Advisory Committee comprised of DEI leaders & experts, along with business and human resources leaders who met with us monthly, attended the summit, reviewed documents, and provided ideas and advice. Lastly, the Women in Leadership Foundation acknowledges the financial support of Women and Gender Equality Canada.

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to create more inclusive, equitable workplaces.

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Women and Gender
Equality Canada

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Meet the Bridge to Gender Equality Project Team



Maya Kanigan, BComm.
Project Manager and WIL President & Founder

For the past 20+ years, Maya has been creating and directing solutions to advance women in leadership and empower the next generation. In 2001, she founded the Women in Leadership Foundation (WIL), a national, non-profit organization dedicated to advancing women in leadership positions and creating a platform to promote diverse & inclusive workplaces. She has led 13 Labour Market Programs for the Federal and Provincial Governments on the attraction, recruitment, and retention of women. Maya is also a proud Mom.



Denise Young, MAct.
Project Lead and Advisory Committee Chair

Denise has 15 years of experience in communications, training design and delivery, professional facilitation services and project management. She has led corporate change management projects such as shifting culture changes in large organizations. She has trained about 3000 employees in areas of Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, leadership development and effective communications in a variety of organizations. In addition to leading this project she is involved in two other national Gender Equality projects.



Michelle Negreiff, BA.
Project Coordinator and Advisory Committee Administrator

Michelle has a Bachelor of Arts degree in Human and Social Development. Michelle has 20+ years of experience as a child & youth care consultant specializing in supporting children & their families in reaching their full potential. She is passionate about being a lifelong learner of personal & professional development.



Annabella Feeny, MSc.
Project Assistant

Annabella is an early career researcher in clinical sciences and policy development. She holds a Master of Science in Psychological Research from the University of Edinburgh and a Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from UBC Vancouver. Annabella is committed to utilizing evidence-based practices and knowledge to address systematic barriers and advocate for positive change.

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What is the Bridge to Gender Equality Project?

About Women in Leadership Foundation

Founded in 2001, the Women in Leadership Foundation (WIL) is a national, non-profit organization committed to creating a platform to promote diverse and inclusive workplaces. We help all women across Canada to have the confidence and opportunities to pursue positions of leadership and help employers hire, grow, and support a diverse workforce. Over the past 22 years, WIL has delivered 13 Labour Market Programs for the Federal & Provincial Governments on the attraction, recruitment, and retention of women in various non-traditional sectors such as engineering, construction trades, capital markets, and technology.

Why this project?

Impacts of COVID-19 on women in workforce

Almost half a million women that had lost their jobs during the start of the COVID-19 pandemic have been unable to re-enter the workforce as of January 2021. (Desjardins & Freestone, 2021). The pandemic has disproportionately impacted women, especially those who identify as Black, Indigenous, migrants and refugees, women living with disabilities and members of the 2SLGBTQIA+ communities.

The Women in Leadership Foundation (WIL) is leading The Bridge to Gender Equality Project (BTGE), a 30-month project which began in October 2021, aims to “*support a feminist response and recovery from the current impacts of Covid 19 through systematic change*”. WIL acknowledges the financial support of Women and Gender Equality Canada.

Lack of women in leadership positions



"47% of the Canadian workforce consisted of females in 2021, 36% of women in the workforce are in management positions, 31% in senior management occupations" (Statistics Canada, 2023).

Macdougall et al (2022) note that, among companies providing disclosure, women held only 23.4% of the total board seats, an increase of 2.2 percentage points compared to 2020. The UN (2020) suggests that the pandemic disproportionately impacted women's workforce participation and ability to pursue leadership roles, yet their representation is not only critical to economic recovery but also shock-proofing ourselves from future crises. Jeffery (2023) contends that for Canada to truly be a global competitor, we must increase representation of women at the leadership table, including the representation of women with at least one intersecting identity.

This project will bring together employers and stakeholders to identify gender bias norms in their hiring practices and policies, and gain an understanding of how to build an inclusive HR framework to support more women to apply and be considered for leadership positions. We conducted primary research across Canada through an online survey, focus groups, best practice interviews, and a 20 member national advisory board. Respondents were predominantly white, able bodied, and heterosexual women, therefore other equity seeking groups perspectives are not fully represented in the report.

In addition to this report, information sessions will be held and a best practice review in combination with a **Women in Leadership Policy Toolkit** will be released to engage employers and stakeholders to create and amend policies and procedures. **We hope you will be part of the change.**

Maya Kanigan, BComm.
WIL Founder & President

Denise Young, MAct, Bmgt
Bridge To Gender Equality Project Lead

Executive Summary

"20% of the Canadian workforce is eligible to retire by 2026." How are organizations going to fill this gap?

Why a Diverse, Equitable, and Inclusive Workforce Matters

Organizations are at risk for a mass exodus, according to a study by the Conference Board of Canada (Rubin, 2022). In the next three years, more than 20% of the Canadian workforce is eligible to retire, nearly double the amount in the previous five years (Rubin, 2022). Attracting, recruiting, and retaining equity seeking groups will become vital to fill the workforce gap. In concert with this huge demographic shift, an opportunity exists to transform the workplace through the adoption of diverse, equitable and inclusive policies and procedures.

Employers that remove the systemic barriers and create a sense of belonging to support more women applying for leadership and decision making roles, will thrive with increased retention, productivity, and empowered employees.

"Companies in which women held 20% or more management roles generated 2.04% higher cash flow returns on investment than companies with 15% or less women in management roles", based on a report of over 30,000 senior executives at over 3,000 companies across the world. (Kersley et al., 2019). Despite progress made, women are still dramatically underrepresented in leadership roles in organizations and on boards.

Executive Summary (Con't)



How can organizations be change agents and part of the change?

This report aims to provide a business case for employers to build on their organization's diversity, equity, and inclusion policies and procedures. Our research has identified key barriers to women's advancement along with recommendations to increase the representation of women in leadership. **Key barriers were linked to organizational cultures, program supports, individual mindsets and confidence.** Following this report, a best practice review in combination with a **Women in Leadership Policy Toolkit** to be released and info sessions will be held to engage employers and stakeholders beginning in Spring 2023.

Executive Summary (Con't)



Key Theme from Research:

The main theme throughout the project research is ways to shift individual mindsets and how organizations can transform their workplaces to create a more inclusive, diverse and equitable work environment.

The following model was created during the BTGE Advisory Committee Summit to address how an organization can start to change individual behaviors within the organization.

Mindset Shift Diagram

From Hierarchies →→→→→ Networks

From Controlling →→→→→ Empowering

From Privacy & Silos →→→→→ Engagement & Transparency

(Advisory Committee Summit, 2022)

Project Outcomes:

To engage 60 medium to large size organizations and 30 employers in varying capacities throughout this project.

What Did We Do to Identify Barriers?



This primary research utilized multiple methods to collect data. These included online surveys, focus groups and one-on-one interviews to garner information about the lived experiences of women. As well, interviews were conducted to identify best practices and policies with corporate leaders. Appendix B provides a detailed overview of the methodology and research findings.

417 participants who self-identified as women were sampled using an anonymous online questionnaire distributed through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; and supporting industry partners. All data collection occurred between March 8 and June 30, 2022.

What Did We Do to Identify Barriers?

Demographic Gaps

While there was a significant response to the survey and interviews, there was not a significant amount of research data collected from women in other identity groups including newcomers, immigrants, people of Color, Black, Indigenous, 2SLGBTQIA+ and women with disabilities. As well, research participation remained low for ages 18-24 though this age group who were significantly affected by the pandemic. Both of these gaps provide opportunities for future research.

Young women are integral drivers in the Canadian economy, but continue to experience high rates of discrimination based on both gender and age. Critical gaps in resources and funding for education, skills development, and mentorship opportunities significantly impact the ability of young women to realize their full potential as leaders. Investing in women's leadership requires a trajectory approach through strengthening and supporting initiatives during childhood, adolescence, and into young adulthood (KPMG Leadership Study).

While we actively sought representation from women with at least one intersecting identity, much more needs to be done to gather and honour their insights. As noted by Jeffery (2023), while there is some growth across Canada in the representation of women with at least one intersecting identity in leadership roles, there is still serious work to be done to increase the representation of women with intersecting identities in leadership roles.

Key Barriers to Women's Advancement in Leadership



This research sheds light on the barriers that women face in navigating the challenges of gender parity and career advancement within organizations in Canada.

As this research was conducted during the COVID-10 pandemic, rapid changes in the Canadian workplace are evidenced. With a greater acceptance of work from home and hybrid work programs, there is increasing workplace flexibility. At the same time, challenges are apparent due to labour shortages and employee retention. With an aging workforce, it is imperative to focus on developing and implementing effective strategies on how to attract, recruit, and retain employees.

Despite these changes and the need for a strong leadership pipeline, the participants in our study posit key barriers that still remain and inhibit their career progression and advancement to leadership roles within their organizations across Canada.

What is Hindering Women in Leadership?

1. Lack of inclusive corporate cultures.
2. Human Resource/Company policies do not promote equal opportunities for women and equity seeking groups.
3. Lack of programs and support to address gender bias.
4. Women's perception of themselves and other women in leadership positions.

Content warning: Content within this report may address sensitive topics including but not limited to workplace discrimination.

1. Lack of Inclusive Corporate Cultures

Despite a global focus on diversity, equity and inclusion, challenges are still apparent. The participants identify key barriers within corporate cultures including exclusion from development opportunities, motherhood penalties, old boys club mentalities and overt harassment and discrimination.

Barrier #1: Lack of inclusion limits opportunities for advancement.

According to the survey results, 37.36% of survey respondents experienced exclusion from group activities or isolating behaviors. This was quite evident in male-dominated industries or environments, where women lack the same opportunities for engagement or advancement.



“We are underestimated, overlooked, and not thought of. I work in a male-dominated environment and I see it happening. The junior males are being groomed for high-level positions and the women are not getting the same opportunities”. (Survey Respondent)

1. Lack of Inclusive Corporate Cultures

Barrier #2: The “old boys club” mentality still exists, especially in male dominated industries and environments.

"Even though the number of women in leadership positions has increased, there are still so many leaders that believe it's a 'man's world' or 'boys club'."
(Survey Respondent)

It is evident, from the participants, that patriarchal behaviors still linger, despite an increase of women in visible leadership roles.

- "There is a boys club at the senior leadership level. The only successful C suite executive, who is female, has taken on a mom role. The women get the lion's share of the work, but the majority of higher level decisions happen behind closed doors in informal boys clubs meetings".
- "We still live in a patriarchal society. There is a lingering attitude that the work sphere is predominantly white and male. Women and underrepresented groups introduce competition into a society that, for a long time, has been dominated by men".

One respondent suggest that the dominance of the boys club culture leads to:

"An unwillingness to evolve from traditional work structures that were designed by white men, for white men."

1. Lack of Inclusive Corporate Cultures

Barrier #3: Harassment, discrimination, and racism from direct managers or members of the management team.

According to the survey, 367 out of the 417 respondents indicated that they have experienced unwelcome comments or conduct within their organizations that they felt were offensive, embarrassing or hurtful. 41% of the 367 respondents indicated these came from their manager (who they directly reported too) and 38% were from a member of the management team. Only 30% of these respondents felt safe to bring it to their direct manager or Human Resources Manager. 65% of survey respondents agreed that they witnessed an individual within an organization feel uncomfortable or out of place at work because of their personal characteristics.

Survey respondents indicated that these comments and conduct were based on Age (48.75%), Disability (28.75%), Ethnicity (50.83%), Gender (73.75%), Race (57.08%) and Sexual Orientation (40.42%).



2. Policies including hiring practices do not promote equal opportunities for women and equity seeking groups.

The findings suggest that gender bias and in group preferences impact hiring and promotion decisions, including leadership roles, that limit the advancement of women.

Despite advances, there is a lack of EDI practices and policies noted in the findings. While training is referenced, there is a lack of appropriate implementation of both policies and practices.

Barrier #1: Biased Hiring Practices

Respondents note that hiring panels are not diverse and then biased to in group preferences i.e. they hire people that look like them. As stated by one respondent,

“The wrong people sit in on the interview panel, especially when it comes to Indigenous positions. The entire interview panel are non Indigenous people. How can you expect to be a successful candidate when those interviewing you don't have the same lived experiences and their view comes from a westernized one? Interview panels ask the wrong questions when it comes to Indigenous Education.”

This speaks to the need to ensure effective EDI practices and policies to address this homosocial behavior. An advisory committee member cautioned,

“Equity, diversity, and inclusion training is being implemented into organizations prior to solid policies being in place. Therefore training is not effective.”

2. Policies including hiring practices do not promote equal opportunities for women and equity seeking groups.

Barrier #2: Resistance to change from the "traditional" organization structures.

Aligned with hiring practices, is the inherent bias towards traditional male dominant structures are evident barriers to career progression.

"I believe the biggest barrier is traditional structures which have always favoured white cisgendered males. I also believe that we don't empower women, and other equity deserving groups to feel like they are able to take on leadership positions." (Survey Respondent)

Barrier #3: Bias, lack of flexibility and other factors cause women to leave the workforce.

Many women experience workplace bias not only because of their gender, but also because of their ethnicity, sexual orientation, accessibility needs and other identities. This bias has caused women to quit or to choose not to get into leadership positions.

About 3 in 5 immigrant women professionals identify experiencing exclusionary behaviours in their day-to-day interactions at work (or "microaggressions"), for reasons they primarily attribute to their language or accent (34%), immigrant background (27%), race (24%) and gender (14%) (Council, 2022).

3. Lack of programs and support within organizations (to address gender bias and opportunities to advance women into leadership roles).

“There is a gap between entry level positions and senior women leaders, there is a lack of women in middle management that can be trained to move into senior positions.” (Interview, HR Recruitment Organization)

Along with current challenges, the participants identify opportunities to combat gender inequality in leadership advancement. Gaps are identified between entry levels and leadership positions that may be addressed by effective leadership development opportunities. The findings suggest the importance of mentorship and sponsorship to career advancement for women. Coupled with this is an acknowledgement of inclusive leadership skills and competencies that truly impact organizational performance. It is imperative to address these barriers as their impact on organizational performance is significant.

Barrier #1: Lack of mentorship, sponsorship opportunities, and role models.

It is evident that mentorship, sponsorship and role models are deemed essential, particularly in more formalized structures and early in one’s career. As one survey respondent suggests,

“Opportunity and mentorship. We need to give [women] more opportunities and they need to grow into those roles with ongoing mentorship - not just when they're in the position or almost in the position but from way earlier.”



3. Lack of programs and support within organizations.

Barrier #2: Lack of awareness on individual impacts of unconscious and implicit bias.

The lack of diversity, particularly for intersectional identities, needs to be addressed, both in hiring and mentorship.

“There is much systemic bias and unconscious bias against the 5 underrepresented groups. Men in most instances are often not willing to mentor women and promote them to be in positions of power and privilege. We have a societal issue where we hire based on culture fits not culture adds.” (Survey Respondent)

Barrier #3: Undervaluing leadership styles and skills that create inclusive environments.

Traditional views of leadership skills and competencies still dominate the workforce. As a focus group participant suggests:

“We all need to understand that leadership is changing and we need to be at the forefront of driving that change and helping our leaders, the CEOs, and the leadership team to understand how we could be that change?”

A survey respondent also highlights the importance of the evolving competencies and skills of leaders that could be addressed through effective leadership development:

“Undervaluing other types of leadership skills, like empathy, resiliency, human-first thinking instead of business-first. There's such an extreme dependency on attributes like competitive, ambitious, self-confident, that interpersonal skills are hugely undervalued and sometimes entirely overlooked.”

4. Women's perception of themselves and other women in leadership positions.

"Women need to support other women and be role models, yet so many senior leaders still feel they haven't made it. When speaking to women and encouraging them to be a mentor, I had a CEO, who owned several companies, say to me, why me, I have nothing to offer?" (Interview)

Key barriers were noted relative to self-perceptions of leadership and supportive relationships from women leaders. Some women suggest limited advocacy and rivalry from other women, aligning with the "queen bee" phenomenon (Derks et al 2016). Others note a lack of confidence, seeing it as a barrier to advancement. They note the internal struggle of confidence as a barrier to progression. As well, they suggest choices related to family have an impact on their career progression.

Barrier #1: Women not supporting other women.

Participants identify the lack of support from other women as a disturbing barrier to progression. Whether we consider them as micro-aggressions or bias, participants suggest that, rather than take a competitive stance,

"Women think there are limited resources which cause rivalry. Women should support women leaders in organizations and not be intimidated by each other..rather uplift each other, and then we will get there faster moving up into a leadership position." (Focus Group Participant)

4. Women's perception of themselves and other women in leadership positions.

Barrier #2: Lack of confidence.

Confidence is a key trait of leadership and essential to career progression. Kay and Shipman (2014) found gender differences in perceptions of confidence that men's competence translates into an image of confidence whereas for women being competent is not equated to confidence. Ignatiova (2019) also notes that in order to apply for a job women feel they need to meet 100% of the criteria while men usually apply after meeting about 60%."

Developing self-confidence is key. One participant suggests:

"We have to sell women to themselves."

Another states that the concept of glass ceiling is also an internal barrier,

"We call it a glass ceiling, but we also have a glass (ceiling) sitting inside our heads."



4. Women's perception of themselves and other women in leadership positions.

Barrier #3: Women believe they need to choose between a career or a family.

The impact of family and children is recognized, particularly relative to career advancement. They acknowledge that women still bear the burden of home and family care and, thus, the need for policies and flexibility as well as expectations and pressures on leaders who are parents. They identify motherhood as a significant deterrent in their current organizations.

“Encourage better work-life balance, limit overtime hours, flexible schedules, strong parental leave benefits, generous vacation time and sick leave.” (Survey Respondent)

Some women's perceptions are that they can either have a great family life or a successful career but not both. As a focus group participant said,

“I am putting my education on hold until after I have children as I also want to support my partner first.”

Barrier #4: Motherhood penalty / bias towards family and motherhood expectations.

The motherhood penalty, a term that suggests working mothers encounter disadvantages in pay, perceived competence, and benefits relative to childless women and men, appears to be a real deterrent to advancement within the workforce. As one respondent noted,

“There is a risk involved with a woman having a family and becoming pregnant. That would disrupt their job.”

How Will We Break Barriers?



Recommendation #1: Organizations need to create transparent policies and hiring practices to address barriers that hinder hiring women and equity seeking groups into leadership positions.

1. Address work-life balance concerns including paternity leave benefits.

- Create and sustain policies such as paternity leave and flexible working arrangements that encourage work-life effectiveness among all employees regardless of gender. When used, these policies dispel beliefs that career advancement must come at the expense of personal and family life—one of the hallmarks of a combative culture (Strauss, 2018).

“Encourage better work-life balance, limit overtime hours, flexible schedules, strong parental leave benefits, generous vacation time and sick leave.”

(Survey Respondent)

How Will We Break Barriers?

2. Foster inclusivity and remove biased practices by looking at how organizations are promoting jobs, how candidates are selected and how they are hired.

- "Actively seek out women and underrepresented groups when hiring. Encourage women to apply. Adjust expectations for leadership roles -- working 60 hours a week is not attractive or feasible for women who are often caregivers." (Focus Group Participant)
- "Blind resume applications and diverse hiring panels of people outside the team to be less biased." (Focus Group Participant)
- "I offered to work for free for 3 months to prove my worth to a new startup. They still refused. I wished they would have given me a chance. It's all one person's thinking that a person with a disability might not be able to work with the team." (Focus Group Participant)

"I was humbled then. What do I have to offer...at that moment I realized....I included these women and I am empowering them. It was a great mentorship program for them and myself included. to realize....wow look at what I can do..." (Focus Group Participant)



How Will We Break Barriers?

3. Use accountability tools such as audits, metrics, and quotas that are transparent.

4. Train and support Human Resource Departments to ensure that they are engaged and have the proper training to support employees.

- “An engaged Human Resources group can have a major impact on this by ensuring advancement opportunities are encouraged and provided, and having a performance evaluation process where a manager actually takes the time to review and learn about all of the achievements of their employees, take an interest in their goals and development, and provides opportunities for growth.” (Survey Respondent)

5. To encourage women to apply, be thoughtful about what you put in your job postings. Roles with endless lists of requirements, nice-to-haves, and strict seniority demands can deter women from applying as they often want to make sure they check every box you list.” (LinkedIn Respondent)



How Will We Break Barriers?

Recommendation #2: Organizations need to shift the culture by creating programs and supports to increase women employees in leadership positions and/or board positions including:

1. Create sponsorship, mentorship and coaching programs.

- "Empower other women in leadership roles to be role models, mentors, and [establish] a support network within that organization. Men in leadership roles can act as allies and actively support women in their career progression within an organization." (Survey Respondent)
- "Set up women with leadership potential with a coach or mentor. Clarify pros and cons and expectations associated with leadership roles such as the work, the people, salary-bump potentials, work-life balance, and incremental work over non-leadership roles. Ensure pay equity and pay transparency." (Focus Group Participant)

"There should be opportunities for training on unconscious biases and training available for women on how to overcome the "imposter" syndrome. The need for this type of training will decrease as the number of women in senior roles increases and there are more role models for women and allies."

(Survey Respondent)

How Will We Break Barriers?

2. Identify creative and innovative approaches to change.

- "One thing that appears to be absent in terms of speaking to the 'why this matters' (from the c-suite/employer perspective), is the significance and importance of diversity as a driver of innovation." (Advisory Committee Member)

3. Identify the type of metrics that measure the success of the program.

4. Identify programming that will shift the corporate culture to an inclusive, equitable and diverse workplace.

- "Diversity must be seen at every level within the organization. Businesses need to consciously create that gender balance, especially at managerial level, by giving opportunities to all who qualify" (Grant Thornton, 2021, p.17).

5. Focus on younger generations.

- "Have young women, starting from new grads and young professionals, in leadership programs, mentorship programs, career development programs, etc. There is always a lot of focus on women making the jump from management to senior management. But you also need to make sure women are not getting left behind before the management level. If you have more women at the management level, then you can have more women at the senior management level. You need to start the pipeline early and put this in women's minds when they're first hired. It is hard at 23 to imagine how you could be in a senior leadership position. What is the recipe? What is the trade secret? What steps should women take to move them in that direction? No one tells you and depending on the organization, these answers can be very challenging to find." (Survey Respondent)

How Will We Break Barriers?

Recommendation #3: Change starts at the individual level; therefore, organizations need to focus on shifting individual perspectives to address gender bias.

1. Identify unconscious and implicit bias that hinder women from getting into leadership positions.

“Unconscious bias and a fear of the "other" or the "unknown". As long as senior leadership groups continue to NOT educate themselves on unconscious bias, they'll continue to promote others who they identify with. They won't branch out to consider others who have different skills, different experiences, and different views because this could create change which entails risk.” (Survey Respondent)

2. Identify how to shift women's perspective of themselves which prevents them from applying to leadership positions and board positions.

“Fear of rejection and an internalized belief that they are not good enough, qualified enough, and that they must be a different version of themselves to 'make it' into a leadership role.” (Survey Respondent)

“...being able to bring your whole self to space, professionally, personally. I think all of us are tired of not being able to do that and we have to compromise. Try and fit into and be palatable for others.” (Focus Group Participant)



How Will We Break Barriers?

3. Equity seeking groups sometimes feel that it is unsafe to express their cultural identity therefore, systems need to be in place such as unconscious bias, cultural diversity training, and appropriate procedures that address and guide one through racism and racist acts. This is about creating psychological safety where all employees can bring themselves to work.

- Determine if your organization provides a safe environment for women, women of color, transgender, or non-binary individuals that you hire.
- Determine if you have a strong anti-bullying and anti-harassment policy in place.
- Determine if there is any unconscious bias in the way that your organizational processes and systems are set up.



“For large organizations, I think it's important to have publicly visible stats and data pertaining to gender and diversity. It holds them accountable, both internally and externally. And once you see that there is a gap, it's hard to ignore it. Only then can you set KPI's and metrics, and put an action plan into place.”

(Focus Group Participant)

How Can You Be a Changemaker or Agent?



1. Review your organization's strategic priorities to ensure Equity, Diversity and Inclusion are integrated into priorities and everyday practices.

- Determine if the balance of power in your organization is equal – is there sufficient gender diversity on your executive team, board(s), and in management roles?
- Determine what is your turnover based on identity factors?
- Integrate non-biased language and inclusive language practices into your organization's vision, mission, and values so employees understand the importance.



2. Update Human Resource policies and hiring practices. Evaluate how you are attracting, recruiting and retaining women.

- Remove bias language and practices.
- Integrate inclusive practices into employee and organization orientation.
- Include cultural awareness training.
- Include anti-harassment training and examples of micro-aggressions.
- Address family or motherhood biases and expectations to support women employees such as childcare support and benefits.
- Create policies to ensure a healthy work and life balance for all employees.
- Create flexible work environments.

“Dialogues with team and management to have clear expectations and understanding of work life balance.” (Advisory Committee Member)



3. Implement initiatives and programs to address harmful gender bias' to shift individual perspectives which will shift organization culture.

Organizational change is everyone's responsibility and if an organization wants to shift behaviours it is crucial to create programs, supports and accountabilities. "Putting values on skill sets and emotional intelligence, and focus on resiliency vs deliverables." (Advisory Committee Member)

Change starts at the individual level therefore all employees from front line to senior managers need to be coached, trained and supported to shift harmful gender bias.

- Create Employee Resource Groups: "In terms of building trust and empowerment...I think one way at least [that my] organization has done really well is through employees resource groups, and I think it's because they are built by the people for the people. It kind of takes away that [barrier]." (Focus Group Participant)
- Create training and supports to align with the following employee groups:

All Employees

- Unconscious bias training
- Gender Bias Training

Women Specific

- "Provide training to women, transgender and non-binary people that promotes their sense of confidence in their own skills and values that they bring to the organization, and that at the same time, recognize their value in meetings by not talking over women and inviting their contributions to decision-making." (Focus Group Respondent)

Men Specific

- Sponsorship and how to be an active and effective ally
- Impacts of the "boys club" and how to dismantle it

HR Managers and Recruiters

- Requirement to be trained on how to support employees on various cultural needs and how to create psychologically safer spaces.

Managers

- Lead and coaching training: specifically to leading diverse teams and within a hybrid working environment.

What's Next?



Achieving gender equality is complex and it is moving towards the right direction.

Due to labour shortages and women leaving the workforce, it is critical for organizations to be proactive and create equitable and inclusive workplaces to encourage women to come back as well as take on leadership positions. The benefit is increased profitability which has been proven if you have a gender diverse leadership team.

Employees are demanding a more supportive, inclusive workplace, “which is what the next generation of employees — and especially younger women—want and expect.” (Women in the Workplace Report, page 15). Simply hiring women, transgender, or non-binary people into your workplace isn’t enough. To reap the many benefits of gender diversity, **you need to empower those workers to not only reach, but exceed their full potential!**

“Dismantle our economic system to reflect an Indigenous worldview...all of which speaks to so many issues about women and underrepresented groups being attracted to these organizations, how they are recruited, retained and advanced”

For real change to happen we need to do more than simply create policies. Organizations must create safe places for employees to thrive. This is everybody's responsibility but senior management teams need to create and implement accountability measures, programs, support systems and then role model the desired behaviors. Change management programs do not succeed when senior leaders do not model the desired behaviors.

Call to Action for Organizations

We aim to transform workplaces by accelerating change with employers building or amending policies and procedures to support more women applying for leadership and decision making positions.

In addition to this report, information sessions will be held and a best practice review in combination with a Women in Leadership Policy Toolkit will be released to engage employers and stakeholders.

“Getting into leadership you constantly have to fight that current and swim upstream constantly at what is coming at you.” (Focus Group Respondent)

We hope you will be part of the change by:

- Attending an information session hosted by the project team to receive the policy toolkit.
- Adopting the recommendations as per this report to address systemic biases.
- Sharing this report with other organizations.

Please contact us to discuss further on how you can participate.

Call: 250-764-0009

Email: info.wil@womeninleadership.ca

Project Webpage: <https://www.womeninleadership.ca/bridge-to-gender-equality-project>

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Appendix A: Key Terms

Ageism – Prejudiced thoughts and discriminatory actions based on differences in age; usually that of younger persons against older.

Ally – Someone who makes the commitment and effort to recognize their privilege (based on gender, class, race, sexual identity, etc.) and work in solidarity with oppressed groups in the struggle for justice. An ally recognizes that though they are not a member of a marginalized group(s) they support, they make a concentrated effort to better understand the struggle of another's circumstances. An ally may have more privilege and recognize that privilege in society.

Belonging – A sense of being secure, recognized, affirmed, and accepted equally such that full participation is possible.

Bias (Prejudice) – An inclination or preference, especially one that interferes with impartial judgment. A form of prejudice that results from the universal tendency and need of individuals to classify others into categories

BIPoC – An acronym that stands for Black, Indigenous and People of Color. It is based on the recognition of collective experiences of systemic racism and meant to emphasize the hardships faced by Black and Indigenous people in the United States and Canada and is also meant to acknowledge that not all People of Color face the same levels of injustice.

Colonization – The action or process of settling among and establishing control over the indigenous people of an area that can begin as geographical intrusion in the form of agricultural, urban or industrial encroachments.

Diversity – The presence of different and multiple characteristics that make up individual and collective identities, including race, gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, ethnicity, national origin, socioeconomic status, language, and physical ability.

Equality – The practice of ensuring equal treatment to all people, without consideration of individual and group diversities.

Equity – The process of identifying and removing the barriers that create disparities in the access to resources and means, and the achievement of fair treatment and equal opportunities to thrive. See also equality.

Equity-seeking groups - Groups of people that experience oppression and exclusion from society, the economy, and education based on social, physical, cultural, religious, or personal characteristics.

Gender - Refers to the socially constructed roles, behaviours, expressions, and identities of girls, women, boys, men, and gender diverse people.

Gender bias norms – is the tendency to prefer one gender over another. It is a form of unconscious bias, or implicit bias, which occurs when one individual unconsciously attributes certain attitudes and stereotypes to another person or group of people.

Gender Identity – This term is used to explain each person's internal and individual experience of gender. It is their sense of being a woman, a man, both, or neither. Gender identity may differ from an individual's sex assigned at birth. Gender identity is fundamentally different from an individual's sexual orientation (who you're physically or emotionally attracted to).

Implicit Bias (Hidden or Unconscious Bias) – The unconscious attitudes or stereotypes that affect a person's understanding, actions or decisions as they relate to people from different groups.

Imposter Syndrome – The fear that some high-achieving individuals have of being exposed as a fraud or inadequate, inhibiting their ability to recognize their own accomplishments, common in members of underrepresented groups.

Inclusion – An approach that aims to reach out to and include all people, honouring the diversity and uniqueness, talent, beliefs, backgrounds, capabilities and ways of living of individuals and groups. Is creating environments in which any individual or group can be and feel welcomed, respected, supported and valued to participate fully.

Inclusive Language – Language that acknowledges diversity, conveys respect to all people, is sensitive to differences, and promotes equal opportunities.

Identity – Identity is a person's sense of self, molded by their unique characteristics, affiliations, and value systems.

Intersectionality – It is described as a framework for approaching issues from multiple perspectives and understanding how multiple groups, or individuals with multiple identities, may be affected. For example, approaching feminism with an intersectional lens would involve acknowledging and addressing the unique barriers faced by women of colour, disabled women, or trans women.”

2SLGBTQIA+ – This is one version of many identifiers in use for LGBT communities. For the purpose of this project we are using this identifier and it stands for: 2 spirit, lesbian, gay, bisexual / non-binary, trans / transgender, queer / questioning, intersex, asexual, and the + refers to all other gender identities or sexual orientations not listed.

Microaggressions – Small interactions with people or the environment that expose bias towards marginalized groups (ie. Asking “where are you really from?” or a woman in a meeting being repeatedly spoken over or dismissed by her male colleagues).

Neurodivergent – conditions that are classified as a developmental disability like autism or long-term mental health issues like bipolar disorder as part of human neurodiversity rather than a deficiency.

Psychological Safety – interpersonal trust that makes individuals feel they won’t experience negative repercussions for speaking up with ideas, questions, concerns or mistakes.

Privilege – The unfair and unearned advantages individuals are granted for having, or being perceived to have, social identities that align with those deemed to be superior according to societal rules and norms.

Racism – Ideas or practices that establish, maintain or perpetuate the racial superiority or dominance of one group over another.

Sex – Refers to the physical and physiological differences between males, females, and intersex individuals that includes primary and secondary characteristics. Primary characteristics are things like the reproductive system, chromosomes, gonads, hormones, and genitalia. Secondary characteristics are things like height differences, presence of body hair, body structure, and percentage of body fat, for example.

Socially constructed definitions – based on socially agreed-upon characteristics.

Tokenism – The practice of making a symbolic effort towards involving an underrepresented group of individuals under the guise of inclusivity or equality, and is often seen within a group, committee, organization, or workplace.

Definitions Sources

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Appendix B: Research Methodology

Methodology

The Bridge to Gender Equality Project is a national comprehensive survey of professional Canadian women, examining women's experiences in the workplace and practices that contribute to women's leadership and advancement. Specifically, the study sought to identify and address harmful gender norms that prevent women from advancing into leadership and achieving equal pay. Each of the approaches is described in detail below. All data collection occurred between March 2022 and June 2022 .

Inclusive data collection methods were adopted to reach a wide range of women and demographic groups, and mitigate barriers of participation and exclusion. Interviews and focus groups were conducted via zoom to lift geographic limits and accessibility barriers. Focus group sessions were offered at various times of the day. The online survey was offered in English and French.

Primary Research (conducted directly by Women in Leadership Project Team)

Bridge to Gender Equality National Survey

417 participants were sampled using an anonymous online questionnaire distributed through social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter; and supporting industry partners. All data collection occurred between March 8 and June 30 2022. Personal and employment demographic characteristics were collected from the respondents. Personal demographic characteristics included age, gender identity, sexual orientation, ethnicity, educational level, and region of residence. Employment demographic characteristics included employment status, organizational sector, company location, total number of employees within organization, position, and years of experience within current employment role. Participation in the study was voluntary and monetary compensation was not awarded for completion. We grouped individuals by industry sector to facilitate peer comparisons.

Individual and focus group interviews were conducted with 40 participants from April 12 to May 10 2022. Participation in interviews was voluntary and interviewees represented a variety of organizational affiliations, department levels, and demographic groups. The themes of interviews focused on personal workplace experiences in order to acquire a deeper understanding into the qualitative findings of the survey. All participants remained anonymous and any identifying information including individual and company names was kept strictly confidential. Personal quotes from these interviews disclosed in this report may have been edited for clarity and to protect the speaker's identity. Select participants were unable to participate in focus groups and chose to email their responses to interviewers.

Bridge to Gender Equality 2022 Advisory Summit

A national conference was hosted in Vernon, British Columbia by the Women in Leadership Foundation to bring together an advisory committee. The advisory committee consisted of 20 leading EDI experts, industry and employer participants, and community members from across Canada. Committee members shared their experiences and consulted on a wide range of themes relating to workplace gender equality including Covid-19 recovery, socio-economic impacts and opportunities, psychological safety, and work culture. Formal group presentations were conducted on the last day of the conference and excerpts derived from these presentations were thematically analyzed. Participants provided the project team with further resources to review in the preparation of this report. Secondary research, excerpts from the Summit, and subsequent sources identified by committee members all informed this report. Prior to the finalization of this report, committee members were provided with an opportunity to review the draft document and contribute further resources, information and corrections.

Best Practices Interviews

Medium to large size organizations were identified and interviewed regarding their best practices for diversity, equity, and inclusion. These interviews were conducted online and with the employee who was part of the practice development. The findings from these interviews are integrated into the Women in Leadership Foundation Policy Toolkit.

Appendix C: Survey Results

Please see attached file attachment to this report for detailed survey results.
If links do not work. copy and paste in web browser.

Bridge to Gender Equality Survey Report English

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1vael18dhHBY0DYtGA5ZY7SPO1ZEjZkBU/view>

Bridge to Gender Equality Survey Report French

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/10enGjvUr-BXhwwHgTiWaoG-kDZzXGr75/view>

Themes from Questions 24,25,26 from Survey

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1WRCzS-3NiCWtnTJuzVN2jCFtYzcwdksO1/view>

We thank you for your continued support in our efforts to create more inclusive, equitable workplaces.



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