

# IF SHE CAN MAKE IT HERE



Sadie Nash Leadership Project

**AMPLIFY HER**<sup>®</sup>  
CHARITABLE FOUNDATION

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**OUR  
UNWAVERING  
BELIEF —**

# **WHEN WOMEN SUCCEED, WE ALL SUCCEED.**

The women of New York City are a force. For generations, they have been the backbone of the city—uplifting their communities, advocating for change, holding power to account, and so much more.

We see their power and impact. When women, particularly from underserved communities, step into positions of influence they bring everyone along with them, creating a ripple effect of positive change. Combining their lived experiences, proximity to key issues, passion, and determination, they create transformative change at scale. Today, too many barriers—systemic, institutional, and interpersonal—stand in the way of women’s pathway to leadership.

We see a future for New York City where women are ascendant in their leadership—holding formal and informal roles of influence and decision-making at every level of the city that affirm and increase their inherent agency and autonomy. But achieving this will require all of us to dismantle the barriers that limit women from underserved communities, replacing them with spaces that foster thriving.



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# INTRODUCTION



Black Sisters in STEM

# THE PROBLEM

**Today, women lag behind in leadership positions.**

Women make up approximately half of the formal labor force in New York City, but are routinely underpaid and underrepresented in managerial positions compared to men (NY Dept of Labor, 2023).

**Today, women-owned businesses are the most vulnerable to external setbacks.**

Between 2019-2021, women's unemployment in New York City nearly doubled from 4.2% to 8.2% (New York City Comptroller, 2020). These effects were compounded for women of color, as the COVID era saw a 2x or greater closure rate in Black, Latine, or AAPI-owned businesses relative to their white counterparts (New York City Comptroller, 2020).

**Today, funding towards women initiatives is profoundly lacking.**

Nationally, less than 2% of philanthropic funding goes towards women and girls (Sager, 2022) and of total small business dollars, only 4% goes to women (Lesonsky, 2023). In 2022, companies founded solely by women garnered just 2.1% of the total capital invested in venture-backed startups in the US (PitchBook, 2023).

# THIS REPORT & RESEARCH

While the trends, challenges, and marginalization of women's leadership is well-documented in data and statistics, there is limited research about the nuanced experiences of these women and girls—or the types of support they wish for.

In this report, our goal is to hear directly from girls, women, and the organizations who are at the forefront of serving them directly—shedding light on what's working well today and can be emboldened further, as well as sticky barriers that continue to limit progress.

The chapters ahead are filled with real stories from real women across New York City—across sectors, educational, and professional backgrounds, etc. They are inspiring. Gut wrenching. Thought provoking. There are hard truths about structural discrimination, and hopeful stories from women who are undaunted in their journeys and care for one another. Initially designed to inform Amplify Her® Foundation's grantmaking strategy, we hope this report—and the stories it contains—can also serve as a resource for the broader philanthropic and non-profit community, as well as anyone committed to standing alongside these women in their inevitable journey to transformative leadership.

# WHO IS BEHIND THIS WORK

Amplify Her® Foundation is collaborating with IDEO.org and The New York Women's Foundation on this research to hear directly from girls and women across New York City about their ambitions and aspirations, what is enabling their leadership, and what is getting in the way of them realizing their leadership and professional goals.



## **Amplify Her® Foundation**

Amplify Her® Foundation is a NYC-based grantmaking foundation created to support women and girls from underserved communities in becoming transformative changemakers.



## **The New York Women's Foundation**

The New York Women's Foundation creates an equitable and just future for women and families by uniting a cross cultural alliance that ignites action and invests in bold, community-led solutions across the city.



## **IDEO.org**

IDEO.org is a non-profit design studio committed to creating a more just and inclusive world.



# OUR PROCESS



Poderistas

# OUR PROCESS

IDEO.org uses Human-centered design, which is a creative problem solving approach that centers the people who are most impacted by the outcome to be involved throughout the design process. By listening deeply to what's working and what's not working for those who are directly impacted, we are able to create holistic solutions that truly work for the intended audiences and populations.

## DESIGN RESEARCH OVERVIEW

Human-centered design combines methods like ethnography and participatory research with design techniques such as rapid prototyping to understand human behaviors, attitudes, motivations and the bigger “why” beneath it all. Our research goals included understanding enablers and amplifiers, as well as the barriers and challenges towards advancing transformative leadership for girls and women from underserved communities in New York City. Additionally, we sought to learn how young girls, women, and the organizations who serve them define and perceive leadership as it pertains to

economic and social advancement, as well as what their ideas of success look like. Lastly, we looked to identify key players and organizations who are working to advance young girls and women's leadership and economic mobility.

In this project, women from underserved communities in New York refers to women of color and/or of low-socioeconomic status. Transformative change refers to women having positions of influence and decision-making and having increased autonomy and agency.

# RESEARCH PRINCIPLES

These guiding principles shaped our research approach and allowed us to be mindful of the dynamics that we created between the researcher and person being interviewed.

## RELATIONAL

We strive to make every research touchpoint an opportunity to build relationships with one another. This means conducting the research in a way that is dignified, two-way, and conversational.

## RECIPROCAL

We provide monetary compensation for people's time, and structure research activities in a way that brings participants social or emotional benefits.

## COMMUNITY-BUILDING

We create conditions for participants to connect with others who have similar lived experiences as them (e.g., workshops).





# RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

## In-Depth Interviews

Interviews enable us to go deep and hear directly from those who are most impacted by the outcomes of our work, or work closely with them. We conducted interviews with girls and women from underserved communities as well as community-based organizations and subject matter experts who work to advance the leadership of girls and women in New York City. The 60-minute interview included a blend of conversational Q&A and interactive activities.

## Workshops

Workshops allow us to bring together a small group of participants to share their individual stories and experiences, and build on each other's energy to discuss possible solutions and interventions. A total of 50 participants consisting of girls and women across New York City participated in our workshops. Our 90-minute sessions involved a group discussion as well as a card-sorting activity with sacrificial concepts. Sacrificial concepts are rough draft ideas. By making ideas into tangible concepts, we are able to get a sense of the types of interventions that resonate, don't resonate, and why. The goal of sacrificial concepts is not to validate any particular intervention, but instead to have a more in-depth conversation about people's needs and pain points.

## Survey

The Resolve Inc. survey provided an opportunity to complement and validate what we learned during the in-depth interviews and workshops. Leveraging the key insights generated by the qualitative work, we established a series of statements to which respondents indicated their level of agreement or disagreement, using a Likert scale—which enabled us to pressure test important findings. We also included a series of demographic questions that allowed us to understand differences between and among unique communities and populations, as well as free response questions to capture additional nuance. The survey was distributed electronically to women who live and/or work throughout the five boroughs—and ultimately over 1,000 responded, providing a robust, representative set of responses for our analysis.

# RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

## 1,000+ Girls and Women

Over 1,000 women who live and/or work in New York City responded to Resolve Inc.'s survey, representing all five boroughs and a wide range of income, educational, racial, and ethnic backgrounds. Over 50% of those who disclosed their race indicated that they are women of color. They represent over 30 industries and all levels of professional experience, from students to entrepreneurs to seasoned executives. Over 200 respondents are also parents of young girls, and provided insights about the experiences of young girls in New York City schools and communities.

IDEO.org engaged with over 50 girls and women across New York City for the focus groups. The majority of them are women of color - spanning Black, Afro-Latina, Latina, and AAPI identities. The women are at different stages of their career and represent a range of sectors. IDEO.org also engaged community-based organizations and subject matter experts who work directly with girls and women across New York City on their leadership.

**Bella Abzug Leadership Institute**

**Black Sisters in STEM**

**Community Voices Heard**

**Girls for Gender Equity**

**Grace Institute**

**Hot Bread Kitchen**

**The New York Women's Foundation**

**Sadie Nash Leadership Project**

**Women.NYC**

OUR PROCESS





# INSIGHTS



Paralegal Pathways Initiative

Insights are interpretations of the patterns we see in research that help us understand the why behind human behaviors, emotions, and beliefs—rather than stating simple observations or statistics. Insights can offer grantmakers and organizations working to advance the leadership of girls and women fresh perspectives, inspiration, and strategic direction.

#### INSIGHTS 1-4:

## SYSTEMS AND SOCIETY

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There are many barriers—systemic and societal—that get in the way of women from underserved communities becoming transformative changemakers.

#### INSIGHTS 5-6:

## THE LEADERSHIP PIPELINE

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Barriers for young girls are just as thorny. Misogyny and a lack of critical infrastructure rob girls early of the support, skill-building opportunities, and safety net that could propel their leadership journey.

#### INSIGHTS 7-8:

## OVERCOMING OBSTACLES

Enabling women to become transformative change makers requires a spectrum of holistic support and ability to tap into their existing power.

## The very skills that exemplify the power of women's leadership are used to undermine it — deemed “soft” by cultural conditioning.

The strength of a woman's leadership shows up everywhere from corporate boardrooms, to school board meetings—all kinds of workplace and community settings. Women who have stepped into leadership roles within their industries or communities often describe their leadership as an act of service—creating space or opportunities for someone other than themselves, and caring for those in their charge. They emphasize the importance of heart-led servant leadership as a means of fostering psychological safety, belonging, and inclusion for those around them. Women who embody this leadership style are motivated by collective uplift; they do not want those who come after them to experience the same hardships they did, and they see their role as making a greater impact in their sector ocommunity at large.

Evidence tells us that this style of leadership correlates to increased functional performance, like enhanced team creativity, resilience, innovation, and learning (Gallo, 2023). Despite this, women we spoke to for this research shared that these skills are often dismissed or minimized by peers and managers alike—relegated to the category of “soft skills,” a nice-to-have counterpart to the more lauded “hard skills” often associated with professional excellence. In a culture that continues to prioritize more traditional and male-centered leadership traits, women exercising “soft” leadership traits will continue to be actively undermined. Until we see sweeping cultural change, women's paths toward greater leadership positions will be littered with preventable obstacles that measure them against traditional standards.

“Not only do we need to unlearn what we have been taught about being ‘too emotional’ or ‘too sensitive,’ but we need to celebrate those traits! It's our ability to be sensitive and to empathize—that make us effective leaders.”

— Latina Woman, Technology Sector

“Over the years, my staff wished they could still work with me. They reach out, they remember the things I've done even if I don't remember. You have to be a servant leader.”

— Black Woman, Non-profit & Healthcare Sector

“When you talk about ‘soft skills,’ [funders and employers] don't see [the impact of] investment there. These skills are hard to measure. To measure outcomes in these types of skills, it takes years.”

— CBO Leader working to advance equitable representation of women across workplace sectors



## Societal messaging that devalues women's leadership creates a culture where women leaders are constantly proving their worth, which sows seeds of internal self-doubt.

In workplace settings, internalized patriarchy can manifest itself as overt, unnecessary humility. Across racial backgrounds, life stages, and workplace sectors, women shared that they feel a need to obtain advanced degrees to be taken seriously at work (despite often realizing that their male counterparts lack the same credentials but had nonetheless arrived at the same opportunities). Women also feel a need to do “extra credit” to earn the same recognition their male colleagues get for doing less, and they feel a need to name their shortcomings before presenting an idea, as if to “get ahead” of critique from their colleagues.

Since the 1980s, women have been earning more college degrees than men (Parker, 2021). And as of last year, women are now a majority of the college-educated workforce (Fry, 2022)—with Black women in particular receiving degrees at progressively higher rates for the last decade (NCES, 2020). But,

all these gains in academic performance have not translated to fair wages (Kochhar, 2023)—a trend only compounded by racism, as evidenced by wages and access to opportunity for Black, Latina, Southeast-Asian, and Indigenous women that lag significantly behind those of White women (Kochhar, 2023).

Though women are regularly the most educated and qualified in the spaces they occupy, they report a persistent feeling of self-doubt. This has lasting effects on women's ability to achieve success in the workplace and realize their own goals. While these feelings are deeply personal, it's of the utmost importance to not lose sight of where these notions originate. Bias, exclusion, and toxic workplace culture fuel these perceptions. In light of this, in order to foster women's confidence, “professionals whose identities have been marginalized and discriminated against must experience a cultural shift writ large” (Burey & Tulshyan, 2021).

“I am getting a doctorate so that I can write a book. I feel like I need to do this, otherwise no one will take me seriously. As a woman of color, you have to be thrice as qualified. I'm broke because of it! Why can't we have funding for advanced degrees that we need to get a seat at those tables?”

— Latina Woman, Workforce Development Sector

“Did I need a degree? No! I have lived experience and professional expertise. I didn't need it, but I believed the myth that I needed this piece of paper. But it did open doors. Now I am in this big role, and no one has this piece of paper. There are so many contradictions for what women, especially women of color need to have.”

— Latina Woman, Healthcare Sector

“Black women have the highest interest rate in STEM, but they also have the highest dropout rate. Roughly 50% of Black women drop out in their sophomore year from STEM majors...much faster than any other group. [It is attributed to] how they feel: imposter syndrome, mansplaining, a lot of people treating them if they shouldn't be in that classroom, microaggressions. There are women in our community that have been laughed at when they said they wanted to do certain majors.”

— Nyamekye Wilson, Founder & CEO of Black Sisters in STEM

“Women constantly find themselves in scenarios where they are apologizing for their ambition, and I think compensation is one of the most material areas where that happens.”

— White Woman, Technology & Financial Services Sector

## For women from immigrant communities, the journey to leadership is often one without a map.

Immigrant women who are newer to the United States or grew up in communities that preserved the values of their home country's culture express surprise at the unspoken cultural norms that are commonplace for "getting ahead" in the US. AAPI and Latina women in particular shared that they didn't have a blueprint to guide them in understanding the implicit rules of American workplaces, such as a need to advocate for oneself when it comes to raises, promotions, taking on new responsibilities, or needing to build up their social network to advance within their sector.

Women name that having an immigrant parent or being part of an immigrant community often comes with under-recognized responsibilities, such as holding financial obligations for immediate or distant family members, becoming the de facto translator, and taking on caregiving roles for aging loved ones. Women share that these duties can be time-consuming, often taking up time that would otherwise be used to advance their

careers through networking, joining leadership programs, or taking financial risks like starting their own businesses. In conversations with CBO leaders, they shared that as newcomers, immigrant women lack a professional network to help them navigate the US job market. They also noted entrenched cultural norms about a woman's place outside of the home as an additional barrier that immigrant women face.

Even with a population of 3 million immigrants in New York City—making up 36 percent of the city's population and 43 percent of its workforce (Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, 2020)—there is a lack of socialization around the possibilities available for immigrant women in leadership positions (Vera Institute of Justice, 2020). Combined with an absence of structural support, many immigrant women struggle to chart a course to navigate the unwritten rules of workplaces in the US, balance family obligations, and seize opportunities to accelerate professional growth.

"The culture in the US is very much about going out there and networking and advocating for yourself. In my culture, it's a listening-first approach. I have had to learn that in my time here that if I want to move ahead in my career, I have to be the one making a case for it."

— South Asian Woman, Technology Sector

"We focus a lot on titles but there are examples of lowercase 'l' leadership, like taking a risk that other people are depending on you to do. I used to have to translate for my parents at the doctor's office when I was younger. Knowing how to facilitate conversations between groups of people who don't know each other and where there is a language barrier, that's a form of leadership."

— East Asian Woman, Philanthropy & Nonprofit Sector

"I'm always keeping up with Indian culture, I never want to forget my roots. Remembering that I'm still part of that, knowing that there's still a patriarchal structure there...my mom has always focused on academics, and I'm grateful to have a mom that did not force me into anything. But still, what comes with being from a family of immigrants is that they're not so aware of the social times."

— South Asian Woman, Law & Justice Sector

"I have never seen a Latina woman hold a leadership position in any of the companies I have ever worked at. It's hard to be it when you don't see it."

— Latina Woman, Technology Sector

## Childrearing is a vital, generational responsibility women hold, but remains unaccounted for in most workplaces — artificially holding women back from opportunities they rightly deserve.

Working mothers and caregivers desire a better future for their children—a North Star that, for many women, drives their professional and economic ambitions. Caregivers report not wanting their children to endure the same struggles they did, sharing that they dream of future generations experiencing greater autonomy and access. While they hope to be role models for the children in their lives, women report household costs, childcare, and workplace policies as their top barriers to reaching their professional aspirations.

Research shows that raising a child in New York City is becoming increasingly expensive, with rising housing, childcare, primary and secondary school, and healthcare costs. In New York State, families spend an average of 22.1% of their income on childcare (NYCEDC, 2021). Families with female heads of household experience poverty at more than 2x the rate of all families and 4x the rate of married couples (NY Office of Budget Policy and Analysis, 2022). Research also tells us that bearing

the brunt of unpaid household labor, coupled with workplace, educational, and communal responsibilities, as well as childrearing leads to burnout and poor health outcomes for women (Seedat & Rondon, 2021). All this inhibits women from accessing stability in their personal lives and it impedes women's ability to excel professionally.

As women nurture the next generation, workplaces need to create environments that enable them to excel both professionally and personally. This begins with employers paying family-supporting wages, the income a family needs to cover minimum necessary expenses, including food, childcare, healthcare, housing, and transportation (Family Forward NC, 2021). This also looks like flexible work arrangements, like hybrid or remote work options and paid family leave. Supporting female caregivers to stay in the workforce emboldens familial opportunity for economic mobility (Hotz, Johansson, Karimi, 2018).

"It's not like women don't do enough. It's that we do too much. Sometimes, you have your nine to five and then you keep working at home."

— Latina Woman, Technology Sector

"Childcare is a difficult nut to crack. It's expensive, hard to navigate, and a problem that's bigger than any one organization. We do our best to help our members get childcare."

— Cathy Kim, Chief Program Officer at Hot Bread Kitchen

"I remember going to class and having to pump every day in the bathroom. My son was a newborn and in daycare. I was determined to make something of myself, prove to my children you can make something of yourself."

— Black Woman, Public Policy Sector

## What should be nurturing ground for leadership development has instead become a breeding ground for mistreatment of young Black and Latina women.

Women and leaders of New York City-based community organizations repeatedly spoke about their experiences with misogynoir—a well-documented phenomenon that describes the pronounced and prejudiced mistreatment of Black women (Bailey, 2021). And for Latina women, prejudicial mistreatment often manifests as fetishization and hypersexualization (Lopez, 2014). These experiences are particularly prevalent in schools, where speaking up, asking questions, and being curious should be encouraged. But, when many Black and Latina young women exhibit these behaviors, their teachers, youth advisors, and coaches frequently rebuke and criminalize them.

The impact of this is profound, as it furthers the growth of the school-to-prison pipeline: Black girls are nearly six times more likely to be suspended and expelled than their White peers (NWLC, 2022). Black women are also overrepresented in the nation's carceral

system (Crenshaw, Ocen & Nanda, 2015). The same holds true for Latina girls; Latina young women are more likely to attend schools with a prominent police presence, thus increasing the potential for interaction with the carceral state (Whitaker, et al., 2019). And, distinct from their male classmates, Black and Latina young women experience hypersexualization, with school being a site for sexual harassment and abuse (Hurley, 2019 & Epstein, 2017). We see the effects of this borne out in teen suicide and pregnancy data; Black and Latina teen girls have the highest rates of both (Child Trends, 2022 & OASH, 2022). The very real persecution Black and Latina young women face, coupled with heightened instability due to the COVID-19 pandemic, has contributed to a full blown mental health crisis for Black and Latina young women. This crisis calls for a generously equipped workforce of educators and youth workers being offered the proper training to be able to hold space for the young people in their care.

“We see both gender and racial discrimination in [schools]. Many times, it's Black girls who are targeted. Speaking up, questioning rules, these types of behaviors—that are actually leadership qualities—are oftentimes criminalized in school spaces.”

— Tené Adero Howard, Executive Director of Sadie Nash Leadership Project

“[We heard from the young people], ‘These facilitators were facilitating at us, not with us, like you did.’ Part of teaching is acting, being an adult facilitator means being and acting prepared. That's coregulation. Based on youth feedback on these facilitators, we gave them additional support and training.”

— CBO Leader working with girls and gender expansive youth on gender equity

“ We have found that there is a lack of safe spaces. When they come to us, they have an opportunity to come together with girls who have lived through the same things in a safe environment, facilitated by women who have gone through our program, and they say it's life changing.”

— CBO Leader working with girls to advance leadership development

## With seamless and responsive interventions, moments of transition can be times of catalytic advancement for young women changemakers.

Transitions are challenging because women are stepping into situations, environments, and experiences that are new. This is especially true for women from underserved communities as they may be the first in their families to go to college, step into a leadership role in a workplace setting, or challenge cultural norms around women working outside of the home. Young women who were the first in their families to go to college reported that they either had to figure everything out on their own, or felt like after getting to college they lost the formal support systems they had previously built at their schools or communities.

Post-secondary education can open the door for so many opportunities that build the

foundation for a women's leadership, such as exchange programs and internships, but for those navigating it for the first time without familial or formal support, the process can be riddled with unspoken norms and cause anxiety.

On the outside, transitions can seem exciting and celebratory as they are markers of stepping into bigger and better opportunities. On the inside, transitions can be lonely and isolate women from those they feel closest to. There is a need for infrastructure to seal the gaps around these key transitions, providing seamless support for young women as they step into new phases of their lives.

“As much as I love my family, I had to do it on my own because they weren't able to guide me because they hadn't gone to college.”

— Latina Woman, Healthcare Sector

“There are cyclical issues to having a lack of exposure, lack of information, and a lack of social capital. With the lack of information, [women] don't know there is a recruiting cycle for different industries. Who tells you that for tech, you need to have a showcase of projects and work that you've done.”

— Nyamekye Wilson, Founder & CEO of Black Sisters in STEM

“When I was a young girl, no one was talking to me about being a leader of a whole organization... no one was talking to me about being an organizer. I knew I wanted to think about strategy [but] there was no one around me supporting me to do that... until I was in my 30s and 40s. What would've happened if this was presented to a younger me?”

— Juanita Lewis, Executive Director of Community Voices Heard



## Transformative leadership is forged through practice, so supporting women's journeys means recognizing and reinforcing their power at every step.

Nurturing transformative changemakers requires a mix of supports and ample opportunities for women to develop and practice their own personal style of leadership. Women report benefiting from both affirming and expansive supports. Affirming support includes being around those with shared identities or lived experiences that make women feel that they have a support system to build their confidence and self-esteem, providing thought partnership for challenges, and ensuring resourcing and support for unpaid care work that disproportionately falls to women, including childcare. Expansive support includes being exposed to situations where women are stretched outside their comfort zone or interacting with people outside their core communities (e.g., mixing socioeconomic status, co-ed groups). Through this type of support, women shared that they were able to build their network, become aware of opportunities they would have never known, or imagine a different life for themselves.

Additionally, women describe some of the most meaningful supports as those involving groups where each member is seen as having something

to offer and contribute, rather than someone to be helped or “saved”. This is prominent with several community-based organizations working with young women who not only encourage young people to conduct research and design new solutions for their communities, but also provide them with stipends, mental health support, and board positions. This is prevalent across settings and life stages, too. Women who may be more established in their careers but are still learning how to contribute to the betterment of their own communities find themselves engaged in more community-based initiatives, including food co-ops, community gardens, and lending libraries. In the process of giving back, they become both stewards and recipients of the goods being exchanged.

Transformative leadership isn't developed unidirectionally or in isolation; it's learned through practice, and the best programming ensures women are both receiving support and offering it to others.

“I remember thinking: I want this life for myself in the future. I have never been exposed to anything like this. Then I decided I have to go to college, so one day I can have this type of life.”

— Latina Woman, Healthcare Sector

“What keeps them [women entrepreneurs] coming back is that we create community. Yes, this is about each member and their business, but it's also about creating community, social capital and networks.”

— Cathy Kim, Chief Program Officer at Hot Bread Kitchen

“We take in girls from higher and lower income levels. The fact that they are inter-relating, they often don't have this opportunity. They say, wow I didn't know some girls suffered this way. Or others say, wow I didn't know some girls could afford to live this way. We also mix middle aged young women with college age, this creates a lot of peer mentoring.”

— CBO Leader working with girls to advance leadership development

“Partnering training and education with material support for young people, for example stipends for their engagement or participation, is something we really believe in. Paying folks for their engagement and work creates a sense of “I am worth it” and they can take that energy into the rest of their lives.”

— Tené Adero Howard, Executive Director of Sadie Nash Leadership Project

## Women don't need "self-care" routines; they need the structural support that allows for real rest and stability.

Women are inundated with advice about activating their leadership by finding mentors, joining leadership programs, and building their networks. While this certainly helps, it puts the onus on the individual, rather than acknowledging the structural and systemic barriers at play. Women described how challenging it can be to have to prove their leadership when being handed "opportunities" that are not set up for them to succeed. Women of color also described how isolating it can be to step into leadership roles when they are the only ones who look like them. On top of already demanding leadership positions, women of color are often tasked with additional unpaid, DEI responsibilities in their workplaces—a "diversity tax" (Chrisopher & Iyer, 2023). Beyond the added emotional labor, some women described how these additional responsibilities can then get in the way of them being able to perform well in their core function or role.

We also heard from women nonprofit leaders who run community programs and provide critical infrastructure across the city to elevate women's leadership. Despite well-tracked

impact, these leaders and their programming are severely underinvested in. This generates an illusion of perpetual scarcity, facilitating quicker, intensified burnout and stress. Nonprofit leaders and staff are also frequently members of the communities they are serving, and just one paycheck away from being on the opposite end of service provision (Parrott, 2022). It is nearly impossible to care for your community when your own personal needs—stability, safety, support—are not being met.

In a society where we have created tropes around the "superwoman" and women who can do it all, many women are realizing that this hustle mentality is not serving them. Most women shared that what they truly need to do their best, most impactful and transformative work is simply: rest.

"We are over-mentored and under-resourced and under-funded. I don't necessarily need a lot more advice, a lot more perspective, a lot more help in mentorship. In that way, Black women need money...the best way to support a Black woman entrepreneur is to cut her a check."

— Black Woman, Technology & Entrepreneurship Sector

"If your basic needs are not met, you don't have the capacity to engage in social advancement. You are just trying to survive."

— Danae McLeod, Chief Executive Officer  
at Grace Institute



Community Voices Heard

# MAPPING THE BARRIERS AND ENABLERS



# TYPES OF BARRIERS & ENABLERS

The Socio-Ecological Model is a theory-based framework for understanding the multifaceted and interactive effects of individual, interpersonal, institutional, and societal factors that determine behaviors or conditions. It can be used to summarize and visualize the enablers and barriers as they pertain to advancing the leadership of girls and women from underserved communities in New York City. Additionally, it can serve as a tool to identify key leverage points that grantmakers as well as organizations serving girls and women from underserved communities can use as a starting point to ideate opportunity areas and interventions.

## **Individual and Interpersonal**

This level refers to individual skills, knowledge, attitude, and an individual's relationship with others (e.g., family & peers).

## **Institutional and Community**

This level refers to resources, organizations, and their relationship with one another. Examples include where people live, go to school, work, relax.

## **Societal and Policy**

This level refers to social and cultural norms as well as policies that influence or maintain certain conditions or behaviors.





# SOCIETAL AND POLICY

## BARRIERS

- Unwritten norms about US workplace culture
- Cultural norms in immigrant communities around women's work
- Childcare costs
- Mistreatment, adultification, and hypersexualization of Black & Latina girls
- Hustle culture
- Scarce funding for women and girls programming
- Unstable economic landscape

## ENABLERS

- Family supporting wages (e.g., raising minimum wage)
- Material support (e.g., stipends)
- Comprehensive and accessible health care, including mental health
- Restructuring traditional work to enable rest
- Trust-based philanthropic models
- Role models and awareness of pathways
- Restructuring traditional work to enable rest

# INSTITUTIONAL AND COMMUNITY

## BARRIERS

- Bias, exclusion and toxic workplace cultures
- Unsafe school environments
- Lack of social capital/connections to opportunities
- Diversity tax for women of color leaders
- Lack of safe spaces
- Lack of access to financial capital

## ENABLERS

- Flexible work arrangements for parents
- Training for educators and youth workers
- Safe and identity-affirming spaces
- Exposure and access to opportunities beyond own community

# INDIVIDUAL AND INTERPERSONAL

## BARRIERS

- Internalized patriarchy and lack of confidence
- Isolation during key transitions
- Lack of exposure to leadership advancing experiences

## ENABLERS

- Being seen as worthy & a leader from young age
- Mentorship & peer support
- Role models and awareness of pathways



# LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES



Hot Bread Kitchen

# LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES

Behavioral archetypes help us identify common motivations, goals, and needs that can inspire opportunities for design. They focus on behavioral characteristics such as what people do, when they do it, and why, rather than demographics. In this context, they can help grantmakers and organizations working to advance the leadership of girls and women to better understand their audience, and in turn make inclusive, strategic, and thoughtful choices about programs, services, and grants.

For this work, we developed six distinct archetypes that show the diversity of women leaders, their key motivators, goals, and the types of support they need to become successful changemakers. Using this 2x2 framework, we have highlighted key dimensions to distinguish between these archetypes.

The first dimension, mapped across the y-axis, shows the **scale at which they wish to effect change**. On one side, there are women who are aiming to create large-scale societal change. On the other side, there are women who are aiming to create localized change within their immediate communities or institutions (e.g., workplaces, schools).

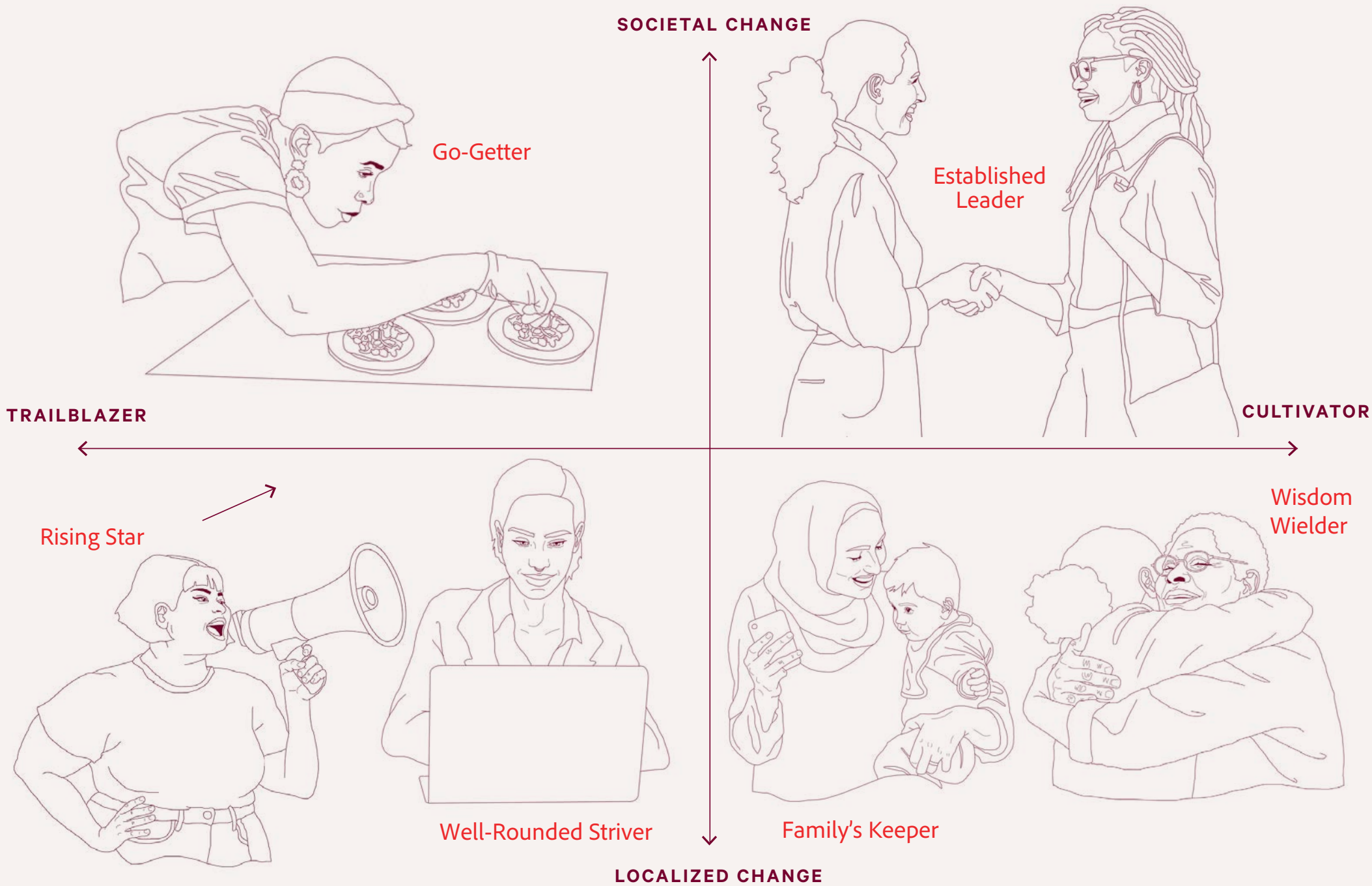
The second dimension, mapped across the x-axis, shows the **woman's positioning within that change**. On the one side, there are women who are cultivators, looking to create change within the environments they are familiar with or know deeply. On the other side, there are women who are trailblazers, entering the unknown to create change within an unfamiliar context, e.g., within an industry, sector, or organization.

The six archetypes are mapped against this framework to show the ways in which they are different or similar to each other. Note that the Rising Star archetype is one that may land in any one of these quadrants, as they become clearer on their own leadership ambition over time. It is helpful to think of the Rising Star as someone who is part of the leadership pipeline.





# LEADERSHIP ARCHETYPES



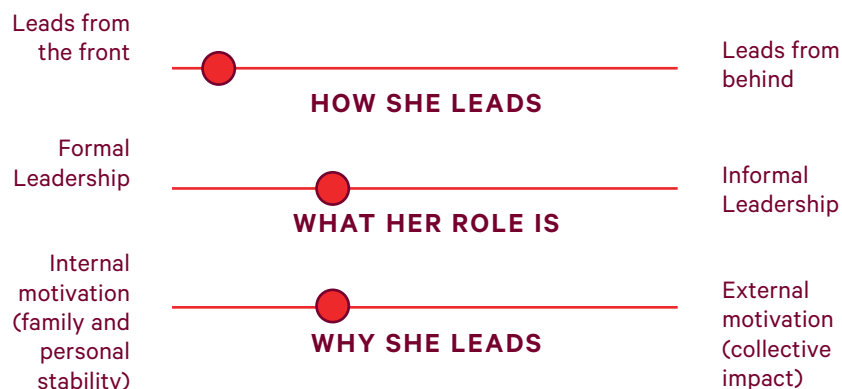
# GO-GETTER

Leadership for the Go-Getter means pursuing her dreams to the fullest, and demonstrating to other women that they can do it too. She hopes that one day she'll experience and achieve financial stability for herself and for her family, without having to compromise her own passions.

The Go-Getter recently launched her new business. She just took a big risk, leaving her stable job to become a full-time entrepreneur. She has a lot of the intangibles of entrepreneurship down and has always been called a “natural leader”, but lately, she's been struggling with getting funding and fulfilling the administrative aspects of the job. She needs thought partners and successful entrepreneurs to model her practices after and support her in filing the paperwork she needs to legitimize her business.



## Her Leadership Characteristics



## Her Needs

### PHYSICAL

- Access to stable, affordable and safe housing so she can focus on her ventures
- Physical space for her business (e.g., office, warehouse, storefront)

### SOCIOEMOTIONAL

- Peer support or community of practice of women entrepreneurs
- Access to network to build business relationships and social capital

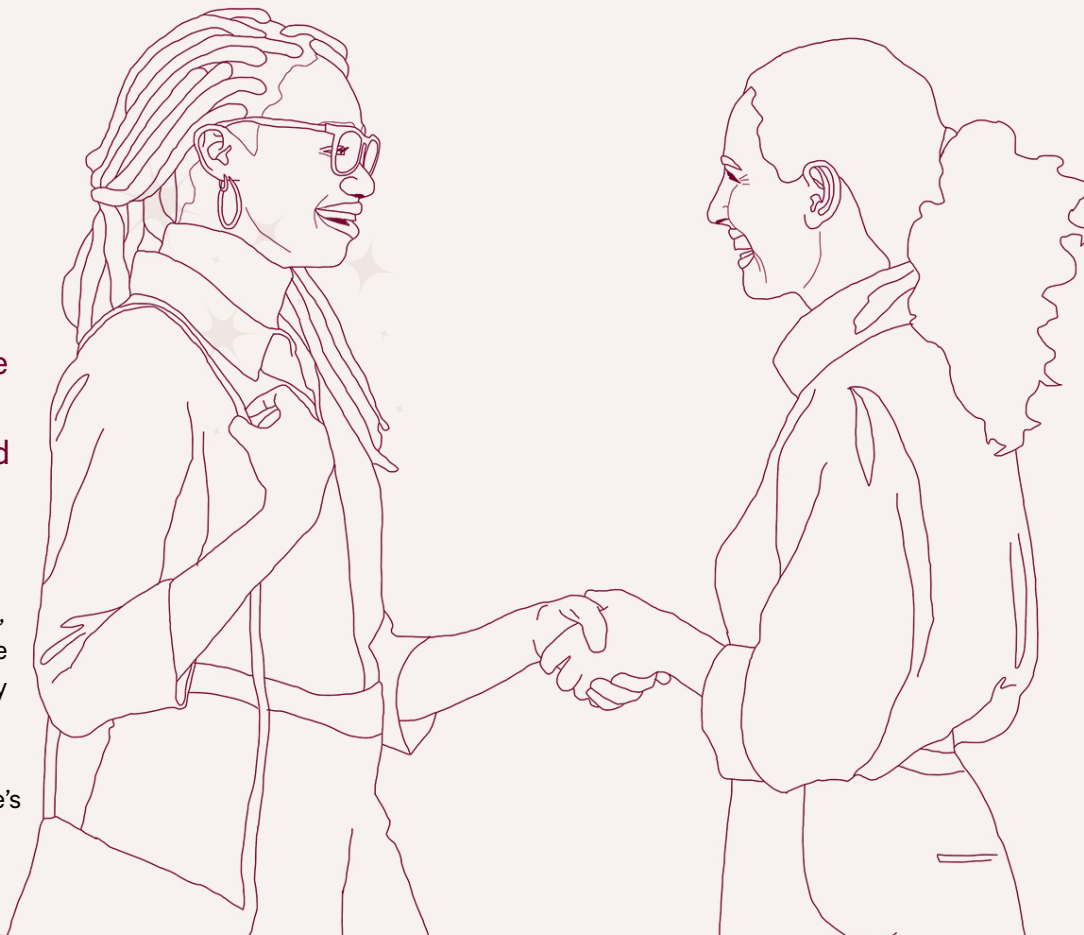
### FINANCIAL

- Incubator program to support with technical assistance
- Access to financial capital and business coaching

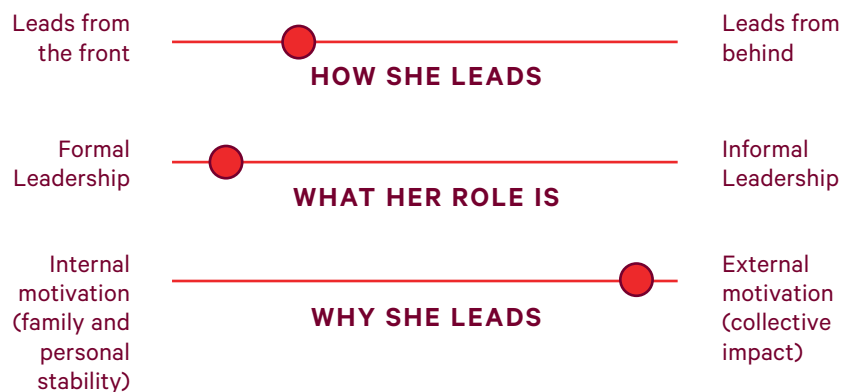
# ESTABLISHED LEADER

Leadership for the Established Leader looks like being at the head of the table to drive real change. She hopes that one day she'll have an activated network of thought partners and change agents to push for justice.

The Established Leader is a company executive who has forged a path for herself and is driven by her desire to see real systemic change in her lifetime, after many personal experiences of inequity. She's become more aware of the impact she can have on an institutional level, and aims to truly shape the way her city makes decisions about resources and policies. Though typically the only woman in her meetings, she's built up her confidence throughout the years, holding on to a deep knowing that all her hard work will pay off. As she's ascended into more formal leadership positions, she's struggled to maintain connections with peers who share similar interests and goals.



## Her Leadership Characteristics



## Her Needs

### PHYSICAL

- Time off to rest and recharge
- Safe space to work from and build community

### SOCIOEMOTIONAL

- An established network of women leaders to collaborate with and activate change on a societal scale
- Access and entry to spaces where decisions are made

### FINANCIAL

- Access to capital for scaling her work and impact



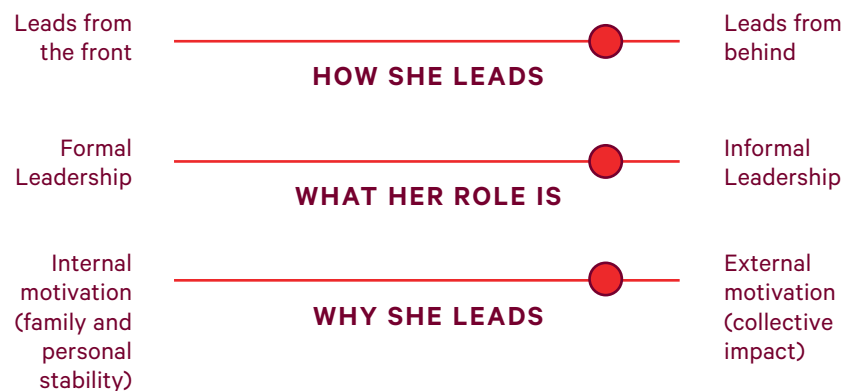
# WISDOM WIELDER

Leadership for the Wisdom Wielder looks like providing interpersonal and intergenerational care, and always being available and ready to support others. She hopes to live in a future where her neighbors and friends can afford to stay in their gentrifying neighborhood, and wants to empower others to organize for the community and their loved ones.

The Wisdom Wielder is a trusted community gatherer and the neighborhood's go-to source for support. She often accompanies neighbors to court for housing disputes, or creates safe spaces for young people in her housing complex. She wants to formalize her community work into a business and has applied to several programs and grants, but has not been accepted into any. She recognizes her leadership and the impact of her work, and wonders when care work—traditionally done by women of color—will be societally valued and resourced.



## Her Leadership Characteristics



## Her Needs

### PHYSICAL

- Access to important and key services in her own neighborhood (e.g., primary care physician)

### SOCIOEMOTIONAL

- Time to fulfill personal needs and pursue areas of interest, outside of work

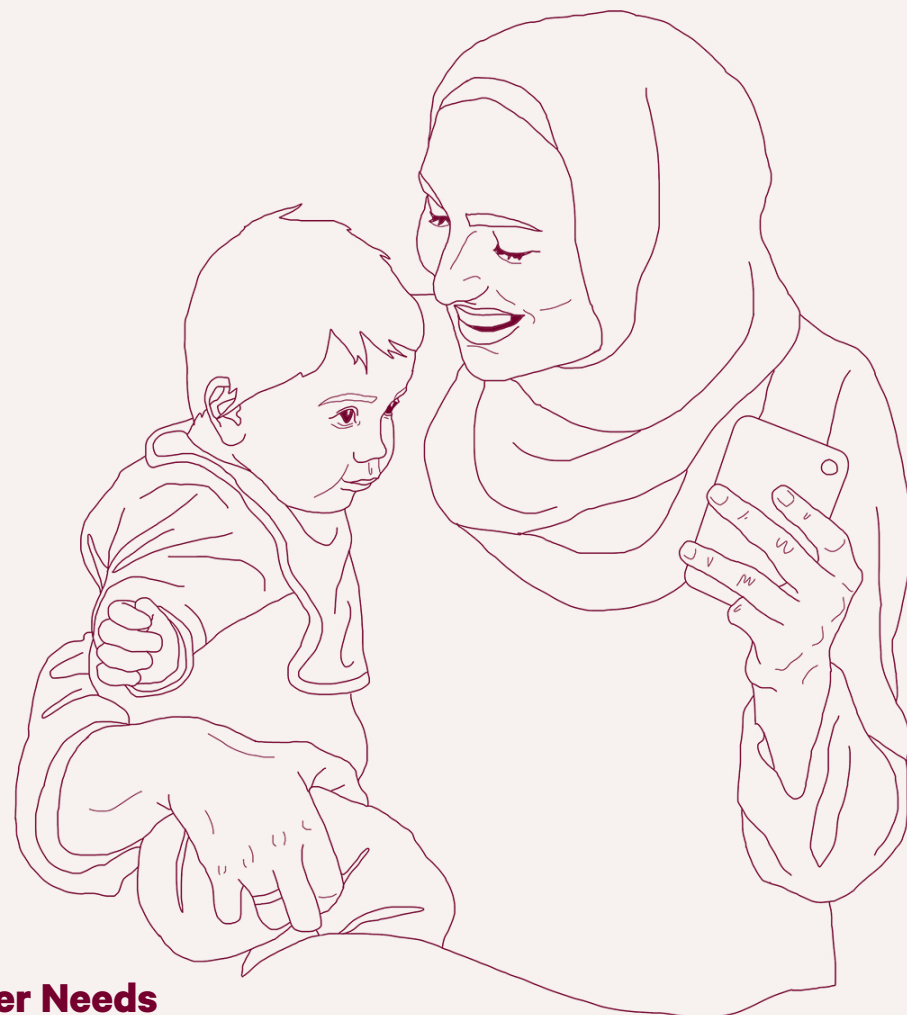
### FINANCIAL

- Support to formalize community work into a business
- Financial stability

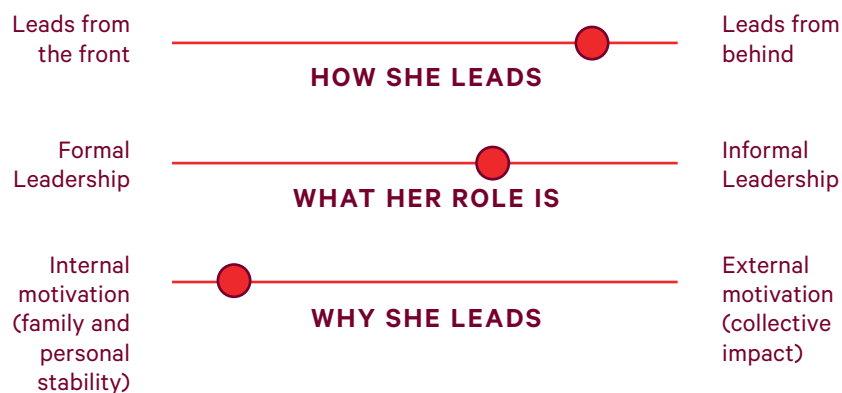
# FAMILY'S KEEPER

Leadership for the Family's Keeper shows up in how she cares for and stewards her family. She hopes to honor her family's legacy and create generational wealth by obtaining a respectable career that aligns with her values and interests.

Family's Keeper wants to ensure her own family, be it her children, cousins, parents, and grandparents, are well taken care of. She wishes to make everyone's lives easier and more comfortable—making sure her children have it easier than she did, or that her parents are comfortable in their old age. Participating in opportunities to advance her leadership has been challenging with her familial responsibilities, as many programs are not designed to be family-friendly. She's trying to balance it all—caring for her family, volunteering in her community, striving at work, and pursuing her passions—but feels herself buckling under the weight of societal pressure.



## Her Leadership Characteristics



## Her Needs

### PHYSICAL

- Lifelong, multigenerational family home

### SOCIOEMOTIONAL

- Access and invitation to a support group for working moms

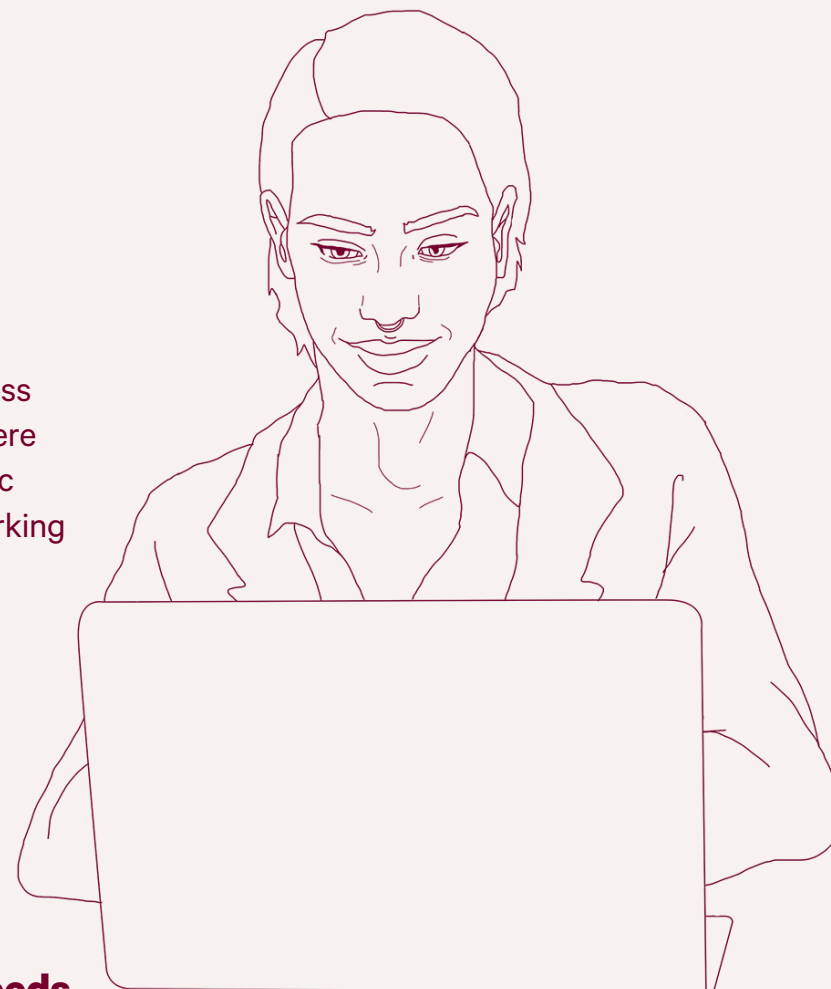
### FINANCIAL

- Access to quality/ high-paying jobs to promote economic stability
- Workplace policies that support her in taking personal leave when needed to care for her parents or children

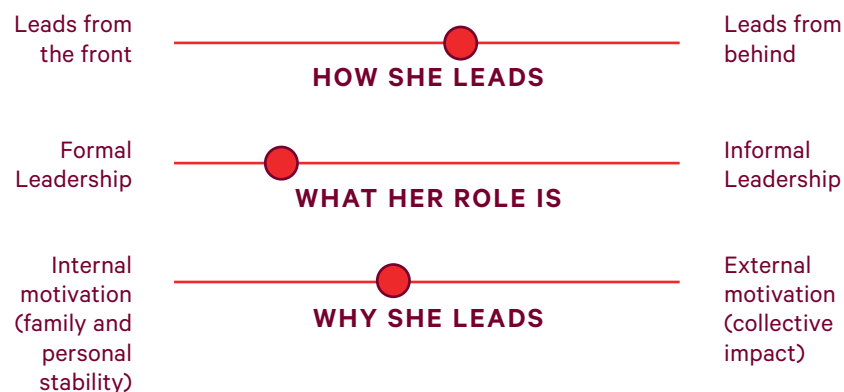
# WELL-ROUNDED STRIVER

Leadership for the Well-Rounded Striver looks like supporting workplace wellness leaders to improve workplace culture for women, especially in sectors where there are few women and even fewer women of color. She hopes to maintain economic stability for herself and contribute to creating a safer, happier, and healthier working environment for others like her.

The Well-Rounded Striver is a diligent leader involved in many activities. She excels at work, volunteers at the local elementary school, serves on the board of a housing nonprofit, and leads her company's Employee Resource Group (ERG). Heading the ERG is an unpaid leadership role, but after joining one meeting she saw an opportunity to create a supportive environment for the women at her job. Leading this group has activated her desire to support the wellbeing of women in and outside their workplaces.



## Her Leadership Characteristics



## Her Needs

### PHYSICAL

- Safe and affirming work environment (vs. toxic culture, “boys club”)

### SOCIOEMOTIONAL

- Leadership coaching to activate confidence to spearhead transformative, organization-wide culture change
- Access to social events to build supportive network of like-minded changemakers

### FINANCIAL

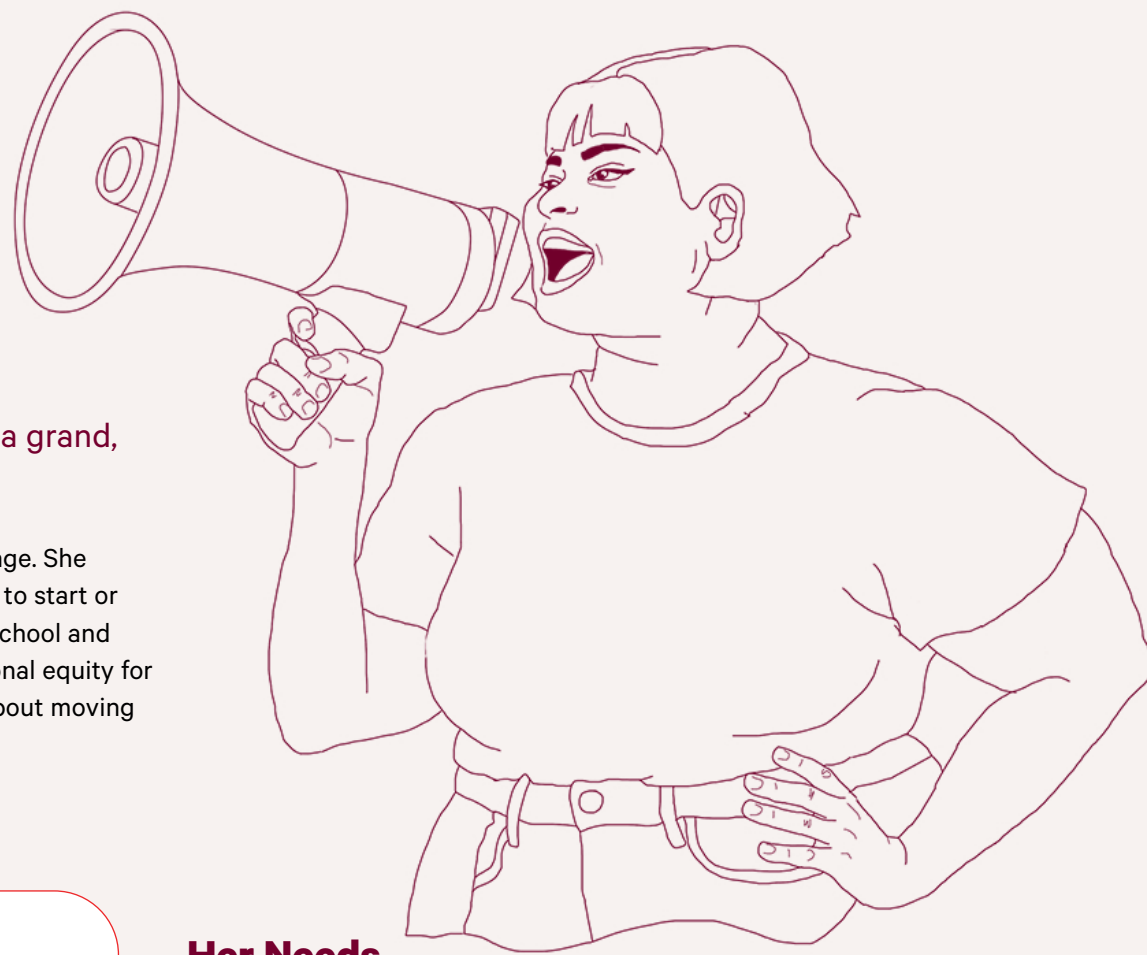
- Incubator program to support with technical assistance
- Access to financial capital and business coaching



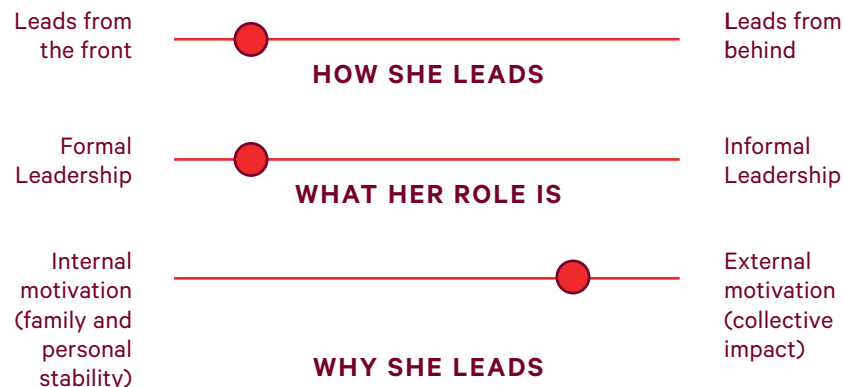
# RISING STAR

Leadership for the Rising Star looks like seizing every opportunity to excel and setting an example for those around her. She hopes that one day she'll unlock her full potential by having a positive impact on a grand, societal scale.

The Rising Star is an ambitious leader passionate about making a change. She knows the kind of impact she wants to have, but isn't quite sure where to start or how to do it. She holds lots of leadership titles and responsibilities at school and wants to begin narrowing her focus on a particular cause, like educational equity for Black students in her neighborhood. She's very excited and nervous about moving out of state and being away from her.



## Her Leadership Characteristics



## Her Needs

### PHYSICAL

- Safe, identity-affirming spaces to build community and grow leadership skills

### SOCIOEMOTIONAL

- Access to mentors and role models in sectors or companies she is interested in
- Access to networking opportunities to build social capital

### FINANCIAL

- Access to experiences and programs that build skills and expand perspective (e.g., internships, fellowships, exchange programs)
- Financial aid resources and loan counseling to be able to complete college with minimal debt

Girls for Gender Equity



CREATE A CITYWIDE SCHOOL  
DRESS CODE THAT CELEBRATES  
BODY DIVERSITY, RACIAL, RELIGIOUS  
AND GENDER EXPRESSION.

SCHOOL GIRLS DESERVE REPORT  
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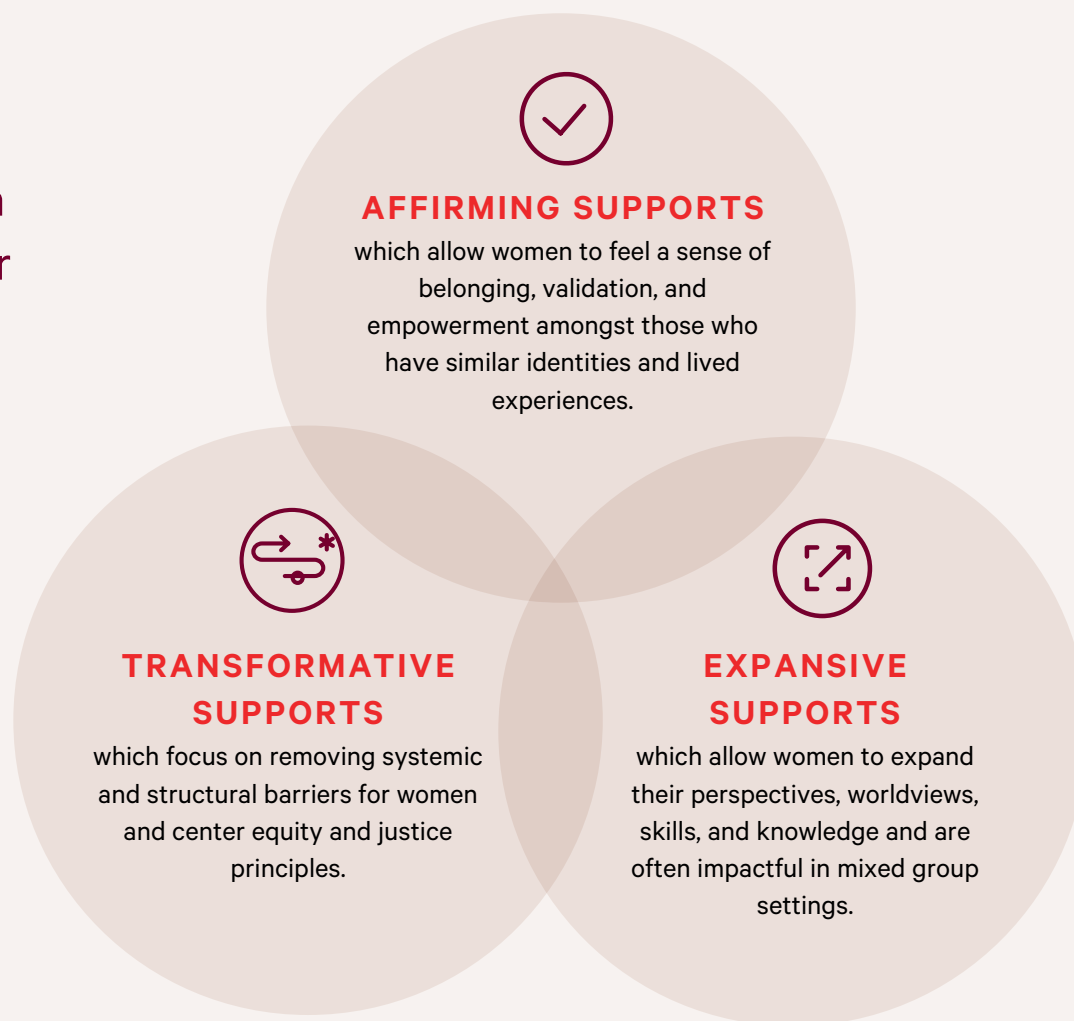
# OPPORTUNITY AREAS

# OPPORTUNITY AREAS

Opportunity Areas articulate potential directions for innovation or addressing unmet needs. Drawn from a culmination of the insights and behavioral archetypes, opportunity areas provide a foundation for exploring new solutions that are grounded in what we heard from real people.

The five following opportunity areas are an invitation to the public, private, and philanthropic sectors in New York City to bolster support for women's transformative leadership, in three key ways:

In each opportunity area, we include a description of what the future can hold for women from underserved communities if they are supported to become transformative changemakers. In addition, we identified several grantmaking considerations that can propel us towards this future. Each consideration is marked by the type of support it correlated to, [e.g., (A) for affirming, (E) for expansive, and (T) for transformative].





## 01

# EMBOLDEN ESTABLISHED LEADERS

Imagine a future where a woman from an underserved community steps into her first big leadership position feeling rested and supported. She is invited to join a cohort of first-time women leaders on a sabbatical before stepping into this new role, allowing her to rest her body, clear her mind, and set her priorities before making this huge shift. After the sabbatical, this group of women leaders continue to meet yearly for a retreat, building their own community of practice and providing each other with both technical and emotional support. This allows women to show up to big leadership positions feeling rested, confident, and with the knowledge that they have a powerful support squad who will have their backs.

## Grantmaking Considerations

FROM ISOLATED &amp; TIRED



TO SUPPORTED &amp; RESTED

### Invest in sabbaticals for women from underserved communities.

Consider giving grants to organizations working with established leaders to take rest before or during a big leadership transition. While it may seem that women in these positions have already “made it” and may not need financial support during a rest period, it is important to remember that many women from underserved communities have intergenerational financial responsibilities and many organizations in this space may not have the discretionary funds to support sabbaticals for their leaders.

Creating the space and permission for them to rest, build community, and receive support also signals a recognition of the extra barriers they have likely faced to get to this position. (A, T)

**Invest in community building interventions that create a community of practice.** Consider giving grants to organizations that are bringing together established leaders to build community amongst each other, share best practices, problem solve together, and become each other’s support system. Programs or initiatives that

build community over time with an engaged alumni network are also meaningful ways of expanding the support system over time. (A, E)

**Invest in supports that direct funding to nonprofit leaders, staff, and programming.** Consider giving grants to community-based organizations that serve young girls and women via social service provision, leadership development, educational programming, capacity building, etc. These nonprofit leaders do critical, irreplaceable work for and with their communities that is both increasingly difficult in our

current political landscape and gravely undercompensated. These social sector leaders often share demographic characteristics with the people they’re serving (ex. women experiencing financial struggle) and need the same support they spend their days giving to others. Funding that directly benefits them, their basic operational needs, their staff’s professional growth, and their organizations’ priorities would serve both the organizations and their communities collectively. (A, T)

## 02

# UPLIFT ASPIRING LEADERS

Imagine a future where a woman from an underserved community feels confident and reassured as she takes a big leap of faith to start something on her own. Before even taking a big step, she has access to a coach who helps her understand the landscape of programs, resources, and funding streams she can utilize as she gets started. In this future, there are tailored supports for all types of emerging leaders—women who are looking to open a retail store, build a technology empire, or start a boutique consulting firm. The support continues beyond a woman launching her business, and she feels assured knowing that there are plenty of resources designed specifically to help her bounce back should something happen.

## Grantmaking Considerations

FROM UNSURE &amp; NERVOUS



TO CONFIDENT &amp; REASSURED

**Invest in coaching programs that help women take the first step and get connected to relevant programs & funding to build out their ventures.**

Consider giving grants to organizations that are meeting women at the “contemplation” phase—when they have the seedling of an idea to launch a business, or when they have already been doing some work informally and recognize that it could be something more. Identify initiatives that build women’s confidence by showing them the relevant programs, resources, and funding streams that already exist and how they can best start to utilize those. (A, E)

**Invest in organizations that are building responsive and tailored incubator programs across different industry sectors.**

Consider giving grants to organizations that are creating business incubator programs that help women understand the unique specifications and nuances of different industry sectors. Identify programs that not only help women get clearer about their business idea, but also connect them to social capital and sources of funding. (E)

**Invest in initiatives that are building an open-source database of all available resources for women entrepreneurs and business**

**owners.** Consider giving grants to organizations or programs that are helping build and maintain open-source databases about all the available resources women entrepreneurs and business owners can tap into, especially at different stages of their journey. (E)

**Invest in organizations that intentionally create family-friendly programming.** Consider giving grants to organizations that create multi-generational programming to make it more accessible for women who have caregiving responsibilities (e.g., child or elder care). This may include providing childcare on site, participation

stipends, travel reimbursement, food, and any additional benefits that make seizing these opportunities accessible and inclusive. (T)

**Create a resiliency fund for women-owned businesses that are accessible and equitable.**

Consider funding a resiliency fund for businesses owned by women from underserved communities. This can include direct emergency funds, as well as financial coaching and navigation support to identify other funding streams such as grants and loans when a woman-owned business is affected by a crisis or going through a downturn. (T)

## 03

# BUILD THE LEADERS OF TOMORROW

Imagine a future where a young girl from an underserved community feels safe and vouched for as she navigates the major transition of leaving a community she knows to step into something brand new, like college. While she knows things will be different, she has spent much of her youth participating in programs that have exposed her to new ideas, people, and experiences and built up her confidence. She knows that she may not have the same socioeconomic status as some of the other students at her college, but she also knows that she has a support system that will make sure she has access to everything she needs to make her college experience the best it can be.

## Grantmaking Considerations

FROM UNSAFE &amp; ANXIOUS



TO SAFE &amp; SECURE

### Invest in resources to support young girls' transitions from high school to college.

Consider giving grants to organizations that work to create a seamless transition between high school and college—particularly for those who are the first in their family to go to college, or those who are majoring in subjects where women tend to be underrepresented and have a higher dropout rate (e.g., STEM subjects). This may include covering college application costs, moving expenses, test fees, room & board, to name a few. (A)

### Invest in organizations that create affirming and inclusive spaces for young girls.

Consider giving grants

to organizations that are actively creating “third spaces” outside of school and home for young girls from underserved communities to spend time. Look for organizations that promote girl-led solutions, build community and agency, provide mentorship (formal, peer-to-peer, informal), and create a safe environment for young girls to speak up, express themselves, and share their experiences with one another. (A)

### Invest in programs that expose young girls to new experiences, ideas, skills, and people.

Consider giving grants to programs that are enabling young girls from underserved communities to step

outside of their comfort zones in a safe and productive way. This may include having new experiences through field trips or summer camps outside of their city, building new skills through debate training or social justice advocacy, or being around people who have different identities or lived experiences. Additionally, look for programs that provide stipends for participation. (E)

### Invest in scholarship funds for young girls to pursue higher education, especially in sectors where there is underrepresentation of women.

Consider giving grants to organizations that are providing scholarships to young girls to

further their education, especially in subject areas where there is an underrepresentation of women. Identify organizations that provide scholarships for tuition, but also provide financial support for all the additional experiences that set up college students for success (e.g. exchange programs, field trips, conferences, social clubs). (E, T)

### Invest in training for school staff and staff at community-based organizations.

Consider giving grants to train the staff who are working more directly with young girls from underserved communities in areas such as anti-racism and trauma- and healing-informed facilitation. (T)



## 04

# INVEST IN WOMEN'S WORKPLACE SAFE AND WELLNESS

Imagine a future where a woman from an underserved community feels like she can be her full self at work. Women who are caregivers are not penalized for their household or familial responsibilities; in fact, these responsibilities are celebrated at the office. Workplaces uphold their values by providing generous paid family leave policies, caregiver health benefits, and accommodating office culture and design. Women who see the opportunity for organizational improvement are encouraged to name and take those opportunities to transform their workplace for the better. Any diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging (DEIB) efforts a woman takes on to foster belonging for the collective are paid and highlighted in performance reviews. Across workplace sectors, women's needs are honored and their skills are celebrated.

## Grantmaking Considerations

FROM STUCK &amp; PENALIZED



TO FULFILLED &amp; CELEBRATED

**Invest in fellowships or scholarships for mid-career professionals to obtain further education.** Consider giving grants to organizations who help mid-career women obtain higher education (e.g., certifications, Masters, MBA, or PhD). Consider funding options for further education that are not only about obtaining advanced degrees for promotions, but to nurture women's curiosity, desire to learn, and help them become experts in subjects of their choosing. (E, T)

**Invest in coaching programs that help women map out their career interests and personal ambitions.** Consider giving grants to organizations that are focused on women's professional growth, but are wholly independent from their current employer. When women are struggling with which next career step to take, they have a team of peer partners and mentors to guide them, rather than just their current boss at work. Identify initiatives that build women's confidence in their own competencies and foster their sense of purpose. (A, E)

**Invest in organizations with explicit and progressive policies that support caregiving responsibilities.** Consider giving grants to organizations providing basic needs support, workplace training, and capacity building programming to working caregivers. When a woman is struggling with negotiating paid family leave policies, for example, these organizations could provide technical assistance and coaching to ensure they get the institutional support they need. (A)

**Invest in organizations that honor rest and joy.** Consider giving grants to organizations that have a high percentage of women on staff and are looking to experiment with shorter work weeks, co-leadership models, generous vacation policies, employee wellness initiatives that prioritize external professional and personal development to enable their staff to show up as their full selves. (T)

## 05

# INVEST IN ADVOCACY & RESEARCH

Imagine a future where our society deeply appreciates and understands women's unique ability to lead and create transformational change. Women from underserved communities are met with equitable opportunities, practices, and policies throughout their life—at home, at school and university, and in the workplace. They feel that the invisible work done by generations of women before them is now finally recognized and they can step into the future their ancestors dreamed for them.

## Grantmaking Considerations

FROM UNRECOGNIZED &amp; IGNORED



TO HONORED &amp; CULTIVATED

**Invest in advocacy efforts that mandate institutions to remove barriers for women from underserved communities to become a part of leadership.**

Consider funding efforts that focus on organizations having to change their own culture, practices, and policies to be more inclusive and equitable. For example, this may include mandating that organizations across different sectors must have a certain percentage of women in their leadership team who are from underserved communities. (T)

**Invest in advocacy that creates a culture shift within schools that have predominantly underserved students.** Consider funding efforts that strive to make school a safer environment for young girls and create the conditions for them to step into their leadership. For example, this may include creating accountability mechanisms and ensuring students have decision-making power at their schools. (E, T)

**Invest in asset-based research that highlights the unique value that women from underserved communities bring.** Consider funding research that highlights what women of color and women from underserved communities do differently when they step into leadership roles, and the impact it has in their organizations or at a societal level. (A, T)

**Invest in organizations that are leading advocacy efforts around what women need in the workplace.** Consider giving grants to organizations that are changing the standard about what women need to thrive in professional settings. These could be organizations that are invested in fostering enabling environments for working caregivers or organizations focusing on demystifying corporate workplace culture for women early in their careers. (T)



# SURVEY

# OVERVIEW

To supplement the insights revealed during our interviews and workshops, we conducted a survey of over 1,000 women who live and/or work in New York City, representing all five boroughs and a range of backgrounds. The findings from this survey echo what we heard in 1:1 conversations and small groups women in New York City still face significant challenges as they seek leadership opportunities.

- **Over half of the New York City women surveyed in our study reported that they face gender-based discrimination** in the workplace.
- **In addition to discrimination, women face a number of specific challenges in the workplace**, including finding role models who look like them, being taken seriously at work, accessing affordable childcare, and balancing their work and personal lives.
- **These challenges start early** – parents of young girls are “often” worried that their daughters are not being treated fairly at school.
- **And these challenges are not felt equitably** - women from underrepresented backgrounds or communities are more likely to report experiencing or facing these challenges throughout their careers.

However, there is also much to be hopeful about. Women told us about the challenges they’ve faced—but also about the people and moments that inspired them, empowered them, and changed the trajectories of their lives. They told stories of supportive mentors who poured into them, leadership programs that revitalized them, and communities that lifted them up.

These stories provide a blueprint for Amplify Her® Foundation and our partners as we look to establish grantmaking priorities and fund organizations that truly make a difference in the lives of New York City women.





# CHALLENGES

## Women of all backgrounds still face discrimination in the workplace.

A key finding of this report is that, despite the significant progress that has been made over the last few decades to advance women's rights in the workplace, women still reported gender discrimination at work.

Research from Pew revealed that 40% women had experienced at least one of eight specific forms of gender discrimination at work. **More than half of the women in our survey reported experiencing gender-based discrimination at work.**

When examining the data through the lenses of race, ethnicity, income, and educational background, it was clear that gender-based discrimination was felt across all backgrounds. More than half of the Black, Asian, and white women who responded to the survey reported facing sexism or gender-based discrimination.

It is important to note that women from underrepresented backgrounds experience layered, intersecting forms of discrimination that were not the focus of this survey.

## MORE THAN HALF OF NYC WOMEN REPORT EXPERIENCING GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION AT WORK.



# Despite having made significant progress in their own leadership journeys, those with more education and/or higher incomes still reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace.

While reports of gender-based discrimination cut across race, ethnicity, income, education, and professional experience, some differences emerged among senior professional women.<sup>1</sup>

Notably:

- Those who identified as “senior” or “experienced professionals” were 15% more likely to report experiencing gender-based discrimination at work than the group of women who identified as “entry-level,” “management” or “mid-career”
- Nearly 70% of women who earn over \$150,000 reported experiencing discrimination in the workplace

Despite having made significant strides in their own leadership journeys, they continue to face discrimination.

An important question which future research might explore is what drives this difference: is it that the glass ceiling persists, and women are increasingly likely to experience discrimination as they advance in their careers? Or is it that women with more education, income, and experience are more likely to identify sexist behavior as such in the workplace?

While these questions are beyond the scope of this survey, they present an important pathway for further research.

**NEARLY 70%  
OF WOMEN WHO  
EARN OVER  
\$150,000 REPORTED  
EXPERIENCING  
DISCRIMINATION IN  
THE WORKPLACE**

<sup>1</sup> Note that these differences lessened when comparing by age – indicating that the difference is not simply due to the factor of time.

# Women do not feel supported in carrying out their caregiving responsibilities. 45% of the respondents reported that they fear repercussions if they share personal challenges at work — and many specifically called out the challenges of finding affordable childcare.

Research suggests that one of the most critical challenges that women experience in the workplace is that they are penalized for the caregiving roles they play within their families. Indeed, even in a pre-pandemic world, the childcare crisis in particular was acutely felt. As a Center for American Progress study reported:

Whether due to high cost, limited availability, or inconvenient program hours, child care challenges are driving parents out of the workforce at an alarming rate. In fact, in 2016 alone, an estimated 2 million parents made career sacrifices due to problems with child care.

The pandemic exacerbated these challenges significantly—and expanded the “sandwich generation.” According to a New York Life report:

The Sandwich Generation, named for the population of Americans caring for both their school-aged children and an aging parent/relative, has been uniquely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic. This is largely due to an enhanced demand on the typical type of care the generation provides as a result of the coronavirus’ impact on schooling, healthcare, and changes to everyday work and life... When it comes to those caring for both an aging relative and children, it’s largely women and Millennials who are shouldering the burden...

These findings echoed those in Insight 04: Childrearing is a vital, generational responsibility women hold, but remains unaccounted for in most workplaces—artificially holding women back from opportunities they rightly deserve.

... the systemic barriers—the cost of child care chief among them—have been the most pernicious. I think that the lack of affordable child care in this city has a huge impact on women across the income spectrum. Even in relatively well-resourced, progressive families like mine, it’s been the major barrier to my professional ascension.

I’ve even turned down a promotion, and often avoided taking on additional opportunities at work—opportunities I would have loved to pursue and would have in a heartbeat, pre-kids.

It also expanded on this finding, indicating challenges in caregiving and work-life balance beyond childrearing.

Both the qualitative and quantitative findings of the survey confirmed that this challenge is broadly felt. Unfortunately, less than half of respondents who have started a family reported feeling supported at work during that time.

However, we know that starting a family is not the only personal, caregiving challenge that women face. Indeed, nearly half of those who have experienced challenges that they might have to share at work agreed that they were reluctant to do so because they feared repercussions.

As one respondent shared in a more descriptive response: “Pregnancy was impossible in the workplace and I was so sick that my employers thought I was hungover. There weren’t supports for this and I considered termination and/or quitting fairly regularly.”

# Women often feel like they are not taken seriously at work – and are constantly on a mission to “prove themselves.”

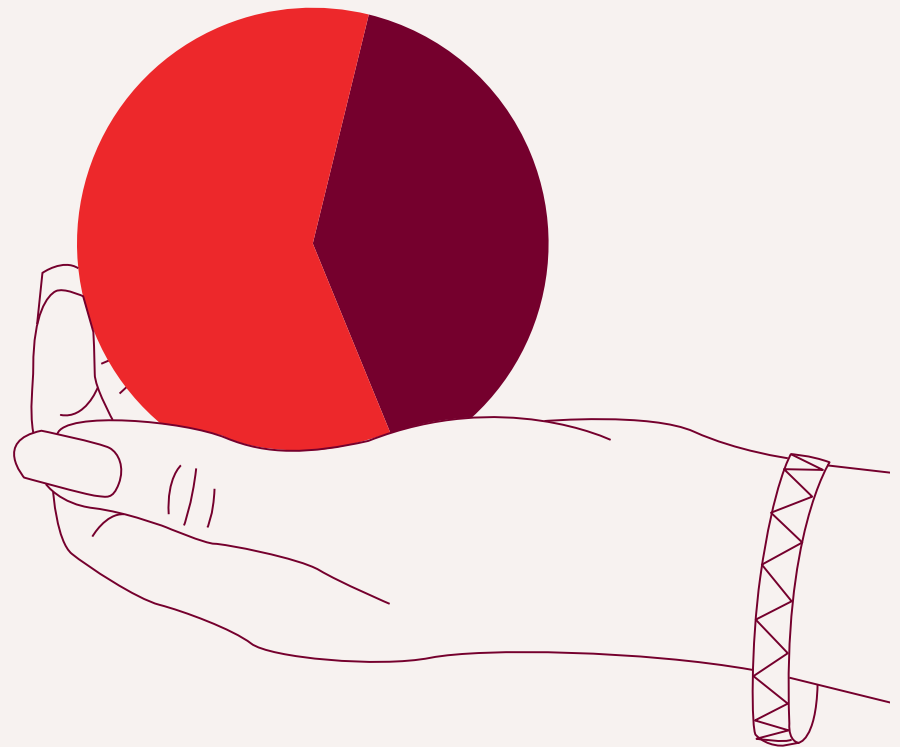
As we learned in Insight 02, societal messaging that devalues women’s leadership creates a culture where women leaders are constantly proving their worth, which sows seeds of internal self-doubt.

61% of survey respondents indicated that they constantly feel like they needed to “prove themselves” to be taken seriously.

In fact, many women in our survey identified a lack of confidence and “imposter syndrome” as major barriers to their pursuit of leadership roles in the workplace – and research suggests they are not alone. As a 2023 Forbes article reports:

A KPMG study finds 75% of female executives across industries have experienced imposter syndrome in their careers, which is a feeling of inadequacy and self-doubt that makes them continuously doubt if they are qualified enough for the job.

**61%** OF WOMEN CONSTANTLY FEEL LIKE THEY NEED TO PROVE THEMSELVES TO BE TAKEN SERIOUSLY.





**Nearly 58% of respondents indicated that they did not apply for promotional opportunities unless they met all or most of the criteria.**

## **WOMEN APPLY FOR 20% FEWER JOBS THAN MEN DESPITE SIMILAR JOB SEARCH BEHAVIORS**

Research has shown that that men are more likely than women to apply for roles where they do not meet all of the listed qualifications. In fact, they are more likely to apply for more jobs, period. As a 2021 FastCompany article reports:

Women apply for 20% fewer jobs than men despite similar job search behaviors, according to a LinkedIn Gender Insights Report. In other words, women talk themselves out of jobs before they even apply. This makes sense given the often-cited stat: unlike their male counterparts, female professionals apply to jobs only if they are 100% qualified.

A 2022 article by Chief highlights research that suggests one systemic reason for this: that hiring managers are more likely to hire on potential for men – and performance for women.

A study by Frontiers in Psychology shows that when it comes to getting promoted, men just need to show potential, while women have to prove performance. In this study, participants had to evaluate four resumes, two which highlighted an applicant's past success, and two which emphasized an applicant's potential. Participants valued potential for men candidates, while preferring the performance for women candidates. <sup>6</sup>

**The challenges around equity and discrimination that many women in New York City face unfortunately begin long before they have started their professional journeys. Many parents of young girls who responded to the survey reported that they “often” worried about their daughters being treated fairly at school.**

**TWO OUT OF THREE  
PARENTS OF YOUNG GIRLS  
OFTEN WORRY ABOUT THEIR  
DAUGHTERS BEING TREATED  
FAIRLY IN SCHOOL**

A study by The Brookings Institution revealed that outcomes begin to diverge early for girls in school:

... we found that no average gender gap in math tests scores existed when boys and girls entered kindergarten, but a gap of nearly 0.25 standard deviations developed in favor of the boys by around second or third grade.

The researchers suspected that teachers’ beliefs likely contributed to this gap in outcomes:

When faced with a boy and girl of the same race and socio-economic status who performed equally well on math tests and whom the teacher rated equally well in behaving and engaging with school, the teacher rated the boy as more mathematically able—an alarming pattern that replicated in a separate data set collected over a decade later.

Parents in New York City seem to understand this reality: 2 in 3 reported that they “often” worry about their daughters being treated fairly in school.

This is particularly felt by the parents of young Black and Latina daughters who experience heightened levels of prejudice and other forms of racial discrimination in school. The result is increased levels of school pushout and exclusionary discipline for young girls of color, resulting in lost critical learning and leadership development opportunities.

This was one of the key insights that emerged from our qualitative research analysis and is supported by the results of this survey.

# Asian women in our survey were significantly more likely to report that they did not feel as confident as men than their white or Black peers.

While over half (52%) of all respondents reported that they did not feel as confident as their equally-qualified male peers, Asian women were significantly more likely to report this issue than white or Black respondents.

Unfortunately, there are systemic barriers standing in their way: Asian American women do experience a more precipitous drop-off as they advance through corporate leadership. As reported by Forbes in 2022:

New analysis released by the management consulting company McKinsey found that while Asian Americans are heavily represented in corporate jobs, their presence drops off significantly at the board of director level, with Asian American women experiencing a particularly severe drop, at 80%...

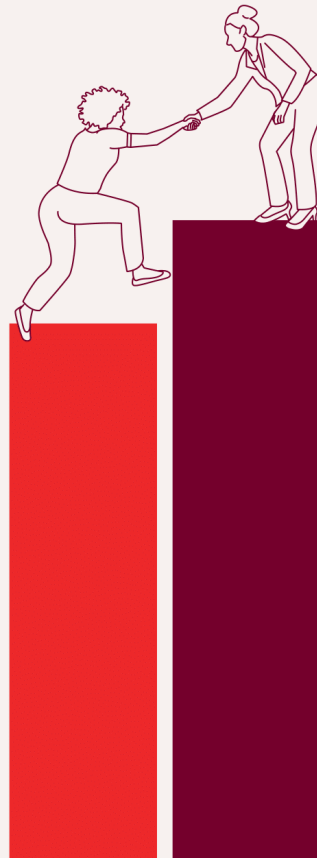
Even though they start off overrepresented by more than two times compared to their share of the population at the entry level, Asian American representation drops off by more than half overall at the board of director level.

**ASIAN WOMEN ARE  
26% MORE LIKELY  
THAN WHITE WOMEN AND  
50% MORE LIKELY  
THAN BLACK WOMEN  
TO REPORT THAT  
THEY DO NOT FEEL AS  
CONFIDENT AS THEIR  
EQUALLY-QUALIFIED  
MALE PEERS**



**While some challenges were universally felt by participants, others uniquely impacted those from underrepresented backgrounds.**

**BLACK WOMEN ARE**  
**15% LESS LIKELY**  
**THAN THEIR WHITE**  
**PEERS TO REPORT**  
**THAT THEY HAVE ROLE**  
**MODELS THAT HAVE**  
**SHOWN THEM HOW**  
**TO ACHIEVE THEIR**  
**LEADERSHIP GOALS**



Black women who completed our survey were more likely to report experiencing challenges in the workplace, including:

- Lack of leadership role models
- Lack of perceived value for their skills and perspectives

Unfortunately, this aligns findings from other research studies, including a 2020 Lean In report that shared: “Women of color, and Black women in particular, tend to receive less support and encouragement from their managers. Compared to white women, Black women are less likely to have managers showcase their work, advocate for new opportunities for them, or give them opportunities to manage people and projects.”

These sentiments—and the lack of equity—were echoed by those in our survey who shared their more in-depth experiences.

One respondent shared the unique challenges she has faced as a Black woman: “As a Black woman, your opinion or expression is considered angry or too emotional.”

And we know that representation matters. Another shared that one of the biggest hurdles she had faced throughout her career was “always being the only Black woman in my leadership circles.”



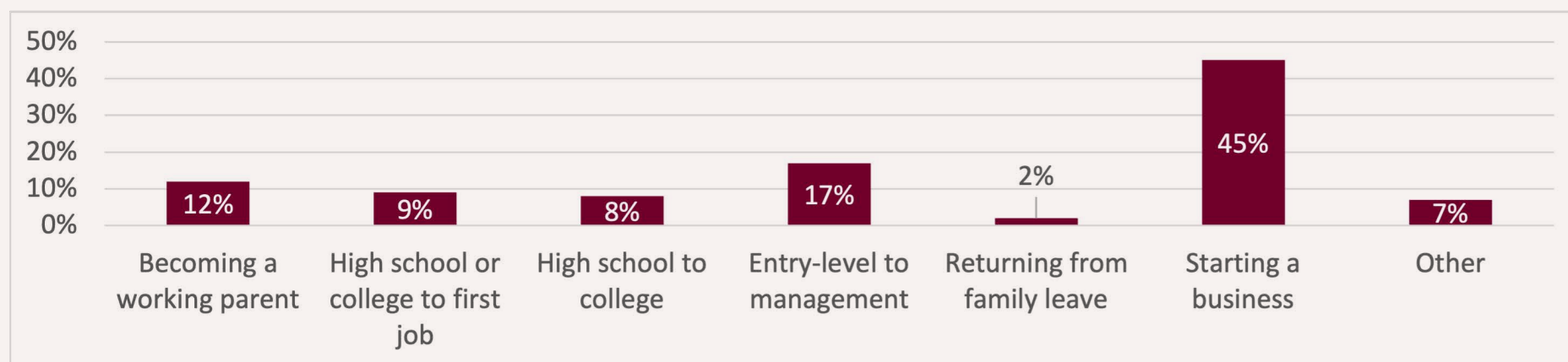
# Transitions — professional and personal — can be critical junctures for women. Notably, for solopreneurs and entrepreneurs, starting their businesses was by far the most challenging transition.

Transitions are often critical moments in which women need support from their families, friends, communities, and professional networks as they navigate new environments and unique challenges.

Across the board, respondents to our survey cited the two biggest transitions as (1) transitioning into their first job and (2) transition from entry-level to management. As expected, there were differences by age: among those under 35, the biggest transition was into their first job, while among those over 35, the biggest transitions were into management or starting a business.

Among entrepreneurs of all ages, starting a business was by far the most challenging transition—more so than corporate transitions between roles or starting a family.

## Transitions requiring the most support, identified by entrepreneurs.



# OPPORTUNITIES

While women still face many challenges as they seek to lead in the workplace, one of the goals of this survey was to uncover the types of supports that have—or could—have the greatest impact.

## HOW WE CAN SUPPORT WOMEN IN NYC

Respondents identified these supports as most useful

**65%** Mentorships / network in industry

**62%** Leadership development programs

**45%** Specialized industry training programs

**42%** Database of resources / opportunities



## Respondents identified mentorship and leadership development programs as being the most useful to their development.

When asked which supports would most benefit them during challenging moments, nearly 2 in 3 survey respondents identified both mentorships and networks within their industry—as well as leadership development programs, emphasizing the importance of building both community and skills.

Nearly half of respondents also identified specialized industry training programs and databases of resources and opportunities as being potentially useful, suggesting that women in NYC would benefit from a holistic approach to their development that included formal training, informal networking/ community-building, and increased access to resources.

# Many women cited the role of mentorship, role models, and networks as key points in their leadership journeys.

Research shows that mentors and role models are critical to women seeking leadership opportunities—particularly in fields where they are underrepresented relative to men. Girls Who Code found that a lack of women in active leadership roles contributed to negative experiences among women seeking internships:

In 5-10 interviews that I've done, I haven't once had a female interviewer, which makes me more intimidated to work at the workplace.

When I went to the in-person interview I had six different interviews. Throughout the day, I only saw one female engineer. She interviewed me at the same time as two male engineers, and she barely spoke the entire time.

Mentorship was a recurring theme throughout our survey: women cited the lack of it as a key challenge—and indicated that having it had been or would be a tremendous benefit on their professional journey.

## WHAT OUTSIDE SUPPORT, HELP, OR PROGRAM HAS MADE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE TO YOU ON YOUR LEADERSHIP JOURNEY SO FAR?

"My peer group of Black women entrepreneurs and coaches."

"Formal and informal networks of other women in similar roles as mine."

"Having the right mentors."

"Coaching and leadership programs (especially led by Black women)."

"Other women who make themselves available for informational interviews and offer connections and support."

**In addition to the benefits of building community through networking and mentorship, many women also highlighted the need for formal training –both to strengthen their general leadership and management capacity, as well as industry-specific skills.**

**WHAT OUTSIDE SUPPORT, HELP, OR PROGRAM COULD MAKE THE BIGGEST DIFFERENCE TO YOU ON YOUR LEADERSHIP JOURNEY?**

“Affordable or free leadership training.”

“Programs where you can have hands on and engaging learning from women.”

“Access to training programs.”

“More free leadership training programs around specific topics.”

“I would love a program helped middle-aged women reenter the workforce after being home for years with the kids.”

“Additional training opportunities and funding to support them.”

There is no doubt that formal leadership programming supports women as they seek leadership roles in the workplace—and many women in our survey specifically highlighted their interest in attending that type of programming. Some called out the need for affordable (low-cost or no-cost) programs—while others described unique types of programs that would be helpful (e.g., a program that helped middle-aged women reenter the workforce).

A recent piece from Harvard underscores the significant benefits of leadership development programs specifically for women: they result in “higher promotion rates, higher retention, increased sponsorship, broader networks, increased knowledge and confidence, and better understanding of organizational structure and processes.”



# While parents of young girls worry about their daughters being treated fairly in school, they also had hopeful advice for those who want to support girls early in their leadership journeys — including regularly instilling in them their value and combating cultural messages that they aren't good enough.

Parents of young girls provided advice about ways to support their daughters and other young women, to prepare them for leadership. In addition to suggestions that we continually inculcate a message of value and equity—and enhance their confidence and self-esteem, they also offered these suggestions:

- Role model equity in household chores
- Offer paid internships
- Offer after school activities that promote leadership in an engaging way
- Provide access to women in different industries and roles so they can understand the many opportunities and paths

IF YOU ARE A PARENT OF GIRL(S), WHAT IS THE SINGLE MOST IMPORTANT THING THAT COULD BE DONE TO SUPPORT YOUR GIRLS IN ADVANCING THEIR LEADERSHIP?

“Helping them discover what natural talents they have and cultivating and nurturing those skills in a manner that will be beneficial to them as they are the next generation of leaders.”

“Sending them for leadership training and encourage them not to feel inferior anywhere.”

“To always believe in themselves that they can achieve anything they want to.”

“Letting them know that they can do whatever they set their minds to.”

“Enhancing their confidence and communication.”

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