
NORTH AMERICA STAKEHOLDER ANALYSIS REPORT



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ACRONYMS

CCL	Center for Creative Leadership
DEI	Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
HR	Human Resources
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organizations
KPIs	Key Performance Indicators
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
OECD	Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
WLGH	Women Leaders in Global Health

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION

WomenLift Health, through support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, aims to accelerate the involvement of women in global health leadership by investing in and elevating talented mid-career women to become global health leaders. To support evidence-driven growth, WomenLift Health has partnered with Bixal to conduct ongoing data collection, learning, and evaluations for the program. This report presents the results of a stakeholder analysis, which was conducted through interviews with senior and executive leaders in the field of global health, to look at the organizational and broader landscape of the field as it relates to women's leadership in North America. This assessment aimed to help the program address the most timely and relevant issues to advance women's leadership as the program grows and adapts. It also serves to complement routine data collection, annual evaluations, and a similar landscape assessment from mid-career women.

To this end, Bixal's research team reviewed literature about the global health sector in the United States (U.S.), Canada, and worldwide, and interviewed 30 senior-level global health professionals in the United States and Canada representing a range of sub-sectors, including international non-governmental organizations (INGOs), government agencies, academia, philanthropy, and the private sector. Readers of this report should keep the following limitations in mind: 1) several of the respondents, although based in the United States or Canada, have worked in various countries and sectors, so this wider perspective may inform their answers, and 2) the assessment was designed to inform the program and is not generalizable, especially given the underrepresentation of Canadians, men, and people of color in the sample.

FINDINGS

Research Question 1: What are the barriers and opportunities around women's leadership in public/global health to address in the program design?

Barriers

The assessment identified several barriers to women's leadership in North America, many of which are grounded in underlying patriarchal systems at various levels. At national and societal levels, respondents noted that despite laws in the United States and Canada preventing wage discrimination, gender pay gaps persist and contribute to discrepancies in career progression. They also cited the lack of a national paid family leave policy in the United States as a significant disadvantage, especially given the ongoing reality that women serve as primary caretakers at home. Relatedly, the stereotype that women be demure also contributes to "imposter syndrome" and likewise deters them from career advancement. Due to some of these barriers, women drop out of the workforce, and several respondents noted the resulting limited pipeline of qualified women candidates for leadership positions. At the organizational level, persistent "old boys' clubs," the limited and frequently toxic nature of leadership positions, and inequitable human resources practices keep women out of top leadership positions. Many specifically noted that all these barriers are felt even more acutely by women of color.

Opportunities

The assessment also uncovered several opportunities for increasing women's leadership. For example, in the absence of a national policy in the United States, there are increasing efforts among the federal government, some states, and other large employers to offer paid family leave policies, in some cases for both parents. In terms of organizational-level opportunities, many female respondents discussed the importance of male allyship, especially having men who serve as mentors and/or sponsors. Various others described systematic efforts their organizations have taken to develop talent, especially through formal mentorship, training, and coaching. Well-resourced organizations, e.g., private companies, philanthropies, and universities, tended to have greater ability to provide these programs to their staff. Women across sectors also discussed the importance of having opportunities for peer

learning, often through brown bag presentations and/or affinity groups because they provide safe spaces and access to potential role models or mentors. Finally, respondents discussed the need for greater visibility into the number of women leaders in the global health sector and suggested establishing key performance indicators to track this information publicly.

Research Question 2: What are current efforts that foster women’s leadership, diversity, and inclusion within organizations?

National and global movements—namely the racial justice movement and #MeToo—have helped raise collective consciousness about the need for greater diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at a societal level, but this has also trickled into individual employers. Most respondents described an uptick in DEI measures within their organizations in recent years. These primarily included establishing or refining DEI policies, monitoring diversity or establishing DEI key performance indicators, and designating full-time or part-time staff with DEI responsibilities. Some respondents noted that the heightened attention on the racial dimension of the DEI trend has shifted attention away from efforts needed to increase women’s leadership. Across sectors, respondents described reforms their organizations had taken to make workplaces more equitable. For example, many are being more intentional in efforts to recruit women and people of color. Since the COVID-19 pandemic, many have also allowed for remote work and flexible hours—while most people observed that this has been helpful for working parents, especially women, a few noted that this may increase the risk of proximity bias, i.e., the tendency for managers to advertently or inadvertently favor employees who are physically closer and more visible. Finally, a few respondents mentioned that their organizations had some additional benefits, e.g., on-site or support for childcare, which is particularly helpful for working parents in a sector where the need to travel internationally is common.

Research Question 3: What are the various ways organizations and the WomenLift program may work together?

Most respondents in the United States and Canada were open to potential partnerships with WomenLift Health and requested a meeting to discuss what a partnership could entail. Most commonly, they were interested in helping to increase the applicant pool, either by nominating potential fellows or sharing the application with their networks. A few also mentioned that their organization could benefit from training that could contribute to a supportive, inclusive environment for women and people of color. Members of WomenLift’s staff or Leadership Journey fellows and managers of those programs could consider guest speaking in each other’s courses, or even have a higher-level discussion about what has or has not worked well in running such programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment found that the Leadership Journey covers many of the most salient subjects for women in the field, and thus **should keep the core elements of its curriculum.**

However, as WomenLift plans for future cohorts in North America, it should **consider how it can bolster support for managing homelife** through the Leadership Journey and should **consider making additional accommodations for women of color** given the unique challenges they face.

As WomenLift considers its role in enabling environment work, it should **promote the following good practices: formalize professional development opportunities, encourage structured peer learning, allow flexible work arrangements while mitigating for proximity bias, and establish equitable human resources (HR) policies that support working parents.**

WomenLift **should advocate for increased tracking of diversity in hiring/the global health sector.**

WomenLift should also **consider developing events or trainings that highlight how men can be effective allies and sponsors.**

INTRODUCTION

Program Overview

WomenLift Health, through support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, is committed to expanding the power and influence of talented women in global health and catalyzing systemic change to achieve gender equality in health leadership. WomenLift Health believes it is essential to contribute to transformative institutional- and societal-level change by raising awareness about the value of women's leadership and catalyzing change through a portfolio of scaled interventions.

WomenLift Health is developing, implementing, and learning from a range of interventions that span the individual, organizational, and societal levels. At the individual level, WomenLift Health implements a Leadership Journey for mid-career women leaders in global health, with partner Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) facilitating Leadership Journey activities and linking the women to coaches. WomenLift recently concluded the third Leadership Journey cohort in North America; 2022 saw the expansion of the Leadership Journey to East Africa and India. Institutional-level interventions include leadership projects the Leadership Journey participants (also called "women leaders" throughout this report) implement at their places of work, and a detailed strategy to effect institutional change in the longer term. At the societal level, WomenLift Health conducts the Women Leaders in Global Health (WLGH) Conference, PowerUp Workshops, elevates women leaders' voices, and works to integrate discussion of issues of women's leadership into broader public discourse.

Assessment Overview

To support evidence-driven growth, WomenLift Health has partnered with Bixal to conduct ongoing data collection, learning, and evaluations for the program. Bixal supports WomenLift's learning and adaptive management through continuous monitoring, annual evaluations, and timely landscape assessments. This report presents the results of a 2022 stakeholder analysis of senior-level global health professionals in the United States and Canada, henceforth "North America," to look at the organizational and broader landscape of global health as it relates to women's leadership. This assessment aimed to help the program address the most timely and relevant issues as it grows and adapts. It also serves to complement data collected through routine monitoring, annual evaluations, and through a similar landscape assessment from mid-career women.

METHODOLOGY

The assessment focused on three research questions:

1. What are the barriers and opportunities around women’s leadership in public/global health to address in the program design?
2. What are current efforts that foster women’s leadership, diversity, and inclusion within organizations?
3. What are the various ways organizations and the WomenLift program may work together?

To this end, the research team relied on two primary methods of data collection: first, a review of literature about the global health sector in the United States, Canada, and worldwide; second, the research team identified a list of the most influential organizations in global health categorized by five sub-sectors: government institutions, private philanthropies, non-governmental organizations, academia, and private companies. The list was prioritized to ensure diversity and to avoid duplication across other evaluation activities. The research team then identified men and women who held leadership positions in these organizations for interviews and sought a racially diverse sample. For a quantitative breakdown of the respondents, see Table 1. The research team identified 30 informants using the following methods: direct outreach to Bixal’s and WomenLift’s network, LinkedIn searches, cold outreach to organizations, and snowball sampling.

Table 1: Respondent Breakdown by Sector, Gender, and Country

	United States	Canada	Total
Total	25	5	30
Sector			
INGOs	6	2	8
Government	4	1	5
Academic	5	2	7
Private	6	0	6
Philanthropy	4	0	4
Multilaterals	0	0	0
Gender			
Female	22	5	27
Male	3	0	3

The research team conducted interviews using a secure, virtual platform, each taking approximately 45 minutes. The notes were transcribed and coded with unique IDs to ensure privacy of the respondent. The team reached saturation in the interviews and conducted qualitative analysis of the data using ATLAS.ti software. This report presents the findings of both the desk review and qualitative interviews.

Assessment Limitations

Readers of this report should keep two limitations in mind, both of which are common in this type of research.

Fluidity in participants’ locations and sectors: Given the nature of global health work, several **study participants have lived and worked in various countries and sectors**, so they were able to talk about their experiences across these locations and organization types. Thus, responses may inadvertently refer to circumstances that are not solely reflective of their home country or sector.

Limited generalizability: This assessment was primarily to inform WomenLift program design. A smaller, non-randomized sample was used so **results cannot be generalized to one country or sector**. Furthermore, the research team notes that men, Canadians, and people of color were underrepresented in the sample, and that academics and INGOs were overrepresented.

FINDINGS



Research Question 1: What are the barriers and opportunities around women's leadership in public/global health to address in the program design?

BARRIERS

1. National/Societal Level

1.1. Absence of and poor implementation of enabling policies

1.1.1 Unequal Pay for Equal Work

Like many other high-income Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) countries, the United States and Canada have nationally mandated equal pay for equal work. Regardless of the laws, pay gaps persist between men and women—especially within the health sector, where there are even larger discrepancies (Campbell and Tomei, 2022). Studies have found that such gaps tend to expand throughout women's careers, especially with disruptions due to family responsibilities (see section 1.2), and often drive loss of talent (World Health Organization, 2019).

The one big one that we haven't really mentioned yet, which underpins all of this, is pay equity and what are some places that have pay equity systems in place. There are some places that don't, and I think the ones that do have seen an uptick in how diverse their workforces are across the board, and gender equity is a part of that. It's the pay equity itself, but it's also transparency of pay and transparency of benefits. — United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

Canada is one of the few countries in the world that earned a perfect score on the World Bank's Women, Business and the Law index—a framework that measures legal protections and access to economic opportunities around the world. The World Bank's 2022 report notes that in Canada, “Studies show that women are still not remunerated equally with men, despite work of equal value. There are no restrictions on women working in any field, although systemic barriers continue to exist and women are underrepresented in many fields” (World Bank, 2022). A recent study found that Canadian women earn about 89 cents for every dollar earned by men (Moyser, 2019).

The United States also earned a relatively high score on the Women, Business and the Law Index (World Bank, 2022). Although the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act increased existing protections for wage discrimination in 2009, women in the United States still earn only 82 cents for every dollar earned by their male counterparts, and this trend has remained consistent in the last 20 years (Aragão, 2023).

1.1.2 Unpaid Parental Leave

The United States is one of the few countries in the world with no law requiring some form of paid parental leave (Burtle and Bezruchka, 2016). The only related policy at the national level is the Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which guarantees 12 weeks of unpaid leave and protection of benefits for parents in companies that have at least 50 employees. Respondents in the stakeholder analysis commonly cited this gap as being a barrier for women's ascent to leadership positions.

There's been research done around what provides a supportive environment... there's things like support outside of work, like parental leave, generous benefits, and things like that. In my view, they should be universal. It shouldn't be up to [employers] to provide these things. They should just be required. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

Why are we in a system where we think that four weeks, six weeks is enough time to bond and care for a child that comes into your family when other countries give [both the mother and father] a year?... It's kind of nutty to think and then we expect folks to jump back in and do the work. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

In contrast to its southern neighbor, Canada offers 105 days for new mothers nationwide, paying an average of 55 percent of wages. Canada also offers smaller stipends mothers or fathers can access for up to 69 weeks through its national employment insurance scheme (Government of Canada). The Government of Canada is also expected to announce an extension of these benefits to individuals who become parents via surrogacy or adoption (Bergeron-Oliver, 2023). Some employers even supplement this allowance, creating fully or almost fully paid leave. In addition, one respondent noted that the province of Quebec provides subsidized childcare, and that other parts of the country may eventually replicate this.

I think that Canada's parental leave plan is very important because we can see the impact it has had on Canadian parents. Organizations that choose to top up parental leave, I was lucky to have that... I was lucky enough to work for an organization that topped up our pay to 97 percent of our salary. So, it's just a super supportive system and it allows people to be where they need to be. —Canada, Senior-level, Academia

I think policies like subsidized daycare are huge. I lived in Quebec at the time that my daughter was in daycare, and they have the best daycare subsidy program that the rest of the country is trying to emulate. That made a world of difference, it changed my life for sure. So, I think those sorts of government-level policies are important along with organizational policies. —Canada, Senior-level, Academia

1.2 Social Norms and Gender Stereotypes

1.2.1 Caregiving Roles

In North America, the social norm that women are the default caretakers in their home lives was a predominant theme when asked about barriers to career progression. This is especially acute for women immediately after their children's birth but also impacts them throughout child rearing as they need to spend time away from work to attend to family needs—whether it be short breaks to pump while breastfeeding or longer absences to handle illness or other issues. This need for flexibility, compounded with other factors, e.g., the tendency to prioritize male partners' (often higher-paying) jobs, often leads to women taking on part-time, lower-level jobs, or leaving the workforce altogether (World Health Organization, 2019). In addition, various respondents in the United States and Canada have shared that they or their peers have delayed marriage or childbearing to advance their careers.

Women are leaving the workforce and not coming back. My husband is a neuroscientist, and he struggles to drive forward the career of women. [One] got an offer for a great job, and then couldn't move because of her family. So, she is at a much lower position. This happens in every sector in most countries. —United States, Senior-level Staff, INGO

One respondent noted that women also undertake caregiving responsibilities for aging parents, and that there are few or no support systems in place for women in this position. There is growing awareness, especially in the United States, about the need for paid family leave and a need for a more inclusive legal support system for workers regardless of their stage in life or family structure, but action has been slow.

The adverse consequences of women's absences from the workforce during childbearing and rearing years

have been well-documented over the years, including the risk of proximity bias. Although many respondents discussed how the pandemic's normalization of remote and flexible work arrangements have greatly benefited women (see section 7.2.2), a few noted that taking advantage of these policies may have the unintended effect of increasing the risk of proximity bias.

I don't think we know enough about how [remote work] is going to affect the bias against women. So, I don't think enough research has been done on hybrid work environments to know whether it's going to be better or not for women... Proximity is important. That exposure, people don't communicate with words. People communicate with their full bodies, with their energy, and that's what builds trust. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

80 percent of people who are remote working are women. If you look at it, proximity bias is real. I fly back to Washington every quarter to be seen. If I am not seen, I am forgotten. I know other women who are young and ahead of the curve. Working from home gives flexibility, but there is a problem there for women. I know you have to play the game. [My organization] has a return-to-office plan, but some people are not coming back. How do we have equity in this space? —United States, Senior-level, INGO

1.2.2 Misogyny and Racism

Although discrimination is outlawed by five national laws in the United States and the Canadian Human Rights Act, several respondents described how misogyny—both outward and internalized—is still pervasive and shows up in various presentations that keep women from advancing in their organizations and more broadly in the health sector (Federal Trade Commission; Government of Canada).

I think part of it is the misogynistic views around women, and so women do the hard work in between, but we'll never get to that top layer because that's not a woman's space. —Canada, Senior-level, Academia

There's a lot of expertise out there and there's a lot of places where if some of these decision-making tables were structured a little bit differently, you would see the input from women who are experts being taken more seriously, being given the headlines and things that grant attention, whatever the thing is that sets them up for success. I think a lot of it is gender bias. I think a lot of it is internalized misogyny. That is not so much the expertise itself is not from women, it is that it is not well-received and is not acted on. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

A few also noted that likewise, racism often influences people's thinking and treatment of women of color, who face even greater hurdles to being taken seriously as leaders in the sector.

Let's talk about Black women, with an African name, with dark skin too. We not only have a problem with women, but women of color have so many barriers. —United States, Senior-level, INGO

1.2.3 Limited Pipeline

Several respondents described how their attempts to hire women into leadership positions have been thwarted by a lack of willing, qualified candidates (see section 2.2 for factors that detract from willingness). Due largely to systemic bias in its various presentations, they mentioned that the supply of potential women executives—especially women of color—was insufficient to meet the heightened demand that has resulted from the recent racial justice movements in North America.

We had a search for a [prestigious] fellowship, this is a big position. I had an excellent search committee. We struggled to get women to apply, so the pipeline was a real issue. Finally, despite all of our efforts, it went to a good person, who was a man. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

Currently right now with women in management, we continue to see the broken rung... But it's more exacerbated, I should say, for women of color. So, if it's a small step for general women, it's a much steeper step for both Hispanic and Black women. We continue to notice that, and that's an area that every company that has an agenda should be focused on. What we are now [more] challenged on is how to find women versus how to find women of color. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

2. Organizational Level

2.1 Old Boys' Club

Respondents frequently mentioned the persistence of “old boys’ clubs” as being barriers to women breaking into leadership positions. They noted how the tendency of men in these environments to provide a supportive network to their male peers perpetuates male dominance of executive and board positions, even when organizations have expressed intentions to diversify leadership.

Across the board, the pipeline reinforces itself. So, when you have mostly men at the top, mostly white men from the Global North at the top, and those people were trained in certain places and came up through certain organizations or certain lines of leadership paths, they bring up the people behind them. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

It sometimes becomes an “old boys’ club” in [my organization]. They have a board and a committee [that often is determined based on] who do you know, so if people have more transparency and open competition, then it will be better. More can be done at places like [my organization] that are over-relying on the people they know. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

Several respondents also talked about a similar dynamic not only in the selection of leaders but also in creating space for women to demonstrate leadership qualities in their normal course of work, e.g., being allowed to share their perspectives, having their expertise valued, and getting credit for their contributions.

I think the old boy network exists to this day. I can't name one American man who has promoted me and brought me up with him. I say American because I've had male mentors from different countries that have brought me up. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

2.2. Nature of Leadership Positions

2.2.1 Limited Number of Seats

In the United States and Canada, respondents also pointed to the limited number of positions at the top in their organizations as being a challenge to women’s career progression. Most organizations have some hierarchy, meaning there are only a few executive positions available—even in an industry where women vastly outnumber men, not all women can reach the highest positions.

We are a large organization, but we are not that large. People have to eventually grow out of the organization. If you are a junior evaluator, then you have room to grow, but if you are senior staff like me, then the only room to grow is the executive team and those don't open up often and don't always come internally so there is less room to grow. —United States, Senior-level, INGO

Furthermore, several pointed out that due to factors like old boys’ clubs and relatedly, men’s disproportionately high level of confidence (see section 3.1), men often position themselves best for those positions in what is ultimately a zero-sum game.

Leadership is a pyramid, though, and there are not that many opportunities. Not everyone can be a leader at the university, so identifying the opportunities can be a challenge. Not all leadership opportunities are out there, it can be a bit of a black box. Men seem to be more socialized to know how to be on top. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

2.2.2 Toxicity of Leadership Roles

Limited availability notwithstanding, several respondents noted that many women do not actually aspire to such positions because of the heavy demands that come with them. Respondents cited that the high levels of politics and toxicity that executives face serve as deterrents from seeking out leadership positions in the workplace, especially for those who have children or other family responsibilities. As noted above, these women often seek out less-demanding positions in the interest of having the flexibility needed to accommodate their needs outside of work. Others simply prefer to avoid such stressful situations and personalities in their day-to-day work.

There is a question that isn't so politically correct. We want women to have access to those positions. But it's not necessarily "success" to be in that position. Not everyone wants it. I don't know if women see success in a different way. So yes, there are women who want to be in those positions. They should have the opportunity to do that. [However], not all women are interested in that sort of thing. —United States, Senior-level, Government

2.3 Human Resources Policies and Practices

Several respondents noted that HR policies and practices at their organizations—even well-meaning ones—fail to address inequities or worse, perpetuate them. Examples of these are often related to processes regarding recruitment, salary negotiations, and pathways to advancement. They reasoned that a lack of transparency or commitments to diversity fails to address the adverse consequences of imposter syndrome and old boys' clubs, i.e., pay gaps, selection of male candidates for top positions, and female attrition. Ultimately, this keeps women, especially women of color, out of leadership.

My organization has had a transition within the last year of CEO, as did the task force, many of us noted with disappointment, that white men were promoted into the positions rather than looking externally or looking at candidates of color or diversity in gender. If there are other criteria for search committees, it would be great. It is a disappointing pattern. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

With the training and professional development, that's where I think the sector can learn from business and from the private sector. Where they are just really robust and solid models for how to advance and [outline] what is the training that you need to advance. Whereas in global health and philanthropy, it can often just be like free-for-all, like just figure it out on your own... more structure around that can make it transparent for everyone and then that also helps with equity as well as when everyone sees the process, it is more fair. —United States, Senior-level, INGO

A few respondents observed that the trend of organizations updating their HR policies with a focus on DEI and race specifically has had some unintentional negative effects on gender efforts to get more women into leadership positions (see section 7.1.4).

3. Personal Level

3.1 Imposter Syndrome

Respondents commonly cited a lack of confidence and imposter syndrome as a barrier to women's career advancement, especially relative to men. Research has shown that men often promote themselves and apply for leadership positions and roles that are highly visible whereas women tend to take smaller risks and have been found to only apply to roles when they exceed qualifications. Respondents shared various anecdotes that illustrate this finding.

Men are always in leadership positions because either women don't put themselves up for these positions or aren't selected for them. We women always feel like imposters in this space and it is amplified for women of color so the statistics is significantly lower. I can only think of two women of color who are leaders of large global health organizations, which is really depressing. —United States, Senior-level, INGO

There was a new person who was male who came into the environment, and he assumed I wouldn't be in charge. There is something about our gender, because we don't walk into the space and act like that. The men just assume they should be in charge, just act like [they] are deserving of leadership. —United States, Senior-level, Government

OPPORTUNITIES

4. National/Societal Level

4.1 Policies

Despite a lack of federally mandated leave in the United States, certain sectors and organizations have introduced their own policies namely to attract and retain talent. Nationwide, approximately 55 percent of employers offer maternity leave and 45 percent offer paternity leave (Society for Human Resources Management, 2020). However, the length and terms of the leave tends to vary based on available resources or lack thereof. For example, a 2020 amendment to the FMLA created paid leave for federal employees only during the three-month window covered by this law. Respondents from the private, academic, and philanthropic sectors reported that their organizations offered at least three months paid leave for mothers. Additionally, 13 states and the District of Columbia have enacted paid family leave laws, and more are on the way (Bipartisan Policy Center, 2023).

A few INGOs mentioned improvements to parental leave policies in recent years, though the amounts offered tend to lag behind the other sectors, often because they are less resourced—a theme that applies to most of the other barriers and opportunities discussed in this report. However, it is worth noting that the INGO respondents came from relatively large and influential INGOs, so these policies may not be representative of the wider sector.

When I first started out, there was a big issue where you had to work for a certain amount of time before you could get leave, and these organizations had to reflect quickly because how could we work on the development of mothers and children but not offer a supportive environment for our own staff. —United States Senior-level, INGO

Two or three times we have improved our parental policy, but it's still not the best. We took away co-funding, extended time, etc. There is a penalty that women take still, I have two kids and I know. It is really funding that is the issue. We tend to accommodate people's leave, but we don't bring in additional staff... it puts more burden on other staff. —United States Senior-level, INGO

However, leave for the non-birthing parent is also important. One study found that “two weeks of paid paternity leave can increase a mother’s probability of reemployment shortly after childbirth,” though research on the long-term effects on women’s labor participation is limited and thus far inconclusive (World Bank, 2022). All the organizations from the private, academic, and philanthropic sectors interviewed have at least some paid leave for the non-birthing parent, and usually some benefit related to childcare.

5. Organizational Level

5.1 Male Allies

Most respondents agreed that men are essential to supporting women's career advancement, and many female respondents shared examples of men who supported their own career trajectories. These examples often included descriptions of both mentorship and sponsorship, though few respondents made those distinctions. According to the *Harvard Business Review*, "whereas mentorship focuses on help that a mentor can provide directly, such as guidance, advice, feedback on skills, and coaching, sponsorship entails externally facing support, such as advocacy, visibility, promotion, and connections" (Chow, 2021). Most of the descriptions of allies that respondents shared would qualify as sponsorship, according to this definition, especially helping to elevate and amplify women's voices.

Sponsorship is the one that really moves the needle. Women need more than allyship... They need the ally in their room for when the man's mansplaining them and talking over them to kind of be there, their ally, and do that kind of stuff. So allyship is definitely very important. Sponsorship is even more when it comes to the top of the house. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

I think they can be allies for things beyond "women in leadership" ... we need allies to put ideas on the table, and the natural leader (women or men) will take those forward. Usually, people won't hear women and people of color. So, it takes a white man or woman to say something. Where allyship is helpful is to not co-opt. When someone says, "Actually [she] had a good idea..." facilitate the entry, attribute the idea. —United States, Senior-level, Philanthropy

Likewise, many descriptions of allies involved creating or sharing opportunities for growth and exposure with women, especially opportunities women might not have otherwise known about.

I have two incredible male mentors. What makes them stand out is that they are both in positions of power, they have benefited so much, and have so many opportunities. They let go of their opportunities to enable us to climb the ladder to leadership positions. Because they realize these opportunities will build up other people, they are already tenured and don't need them. [One of my mentors] said he was going to put my name forward for an opportunity. And they reached out to me and put me [in that role], that would not have been possible if he hadn't championed for me to do that. —Canada, Senior-level, Academia

It's just opening doors, making sure that women are raised for opportunities in closed-door settings. When there are opportunities that come up, putting a woman's name forward for that opportunity. And I've certainly had that happen to me in my career, but then I've also had the opposite. —United States, Senior-level, Philanthropic

5.2 Talent Development

Recognizing the need to diversify leadership, organizations in all sectors described efforts to strengthen the capacities of current and future leaders through formal mentorship, training, and other methods. As with other benefits, the organizations with greater resources, e.g., the private sector, philanthropy, and government, tended to have more robust or organization-specific programs. With a few notable exceptions, most of these efforts were not specific to women but do ultimately benefit women, according to respondents.

Several private sector respondents described how their companies take systematic approaches to professionally developing their staff, especially in response to a broader recognition in the sector about the importance and business case for diversity. Though this was sometimes in the form of trainings, they also shared examples of other ways staff are encouraged to develop the skills and networks needed for advancement.

The company places a huge emphasis on talent and growth. I don't know if it is specific to women, although there are affinity groups for women leaders. There are ample opportunities, what is called "grow assignments" to learn about other parts of the company, and "stretch assignments." There is mentorship to work with senior leaders in the company. I just find that overall, a very deliberate focus on growth, talent, and retention in the company. —United States Senior-level, Private Sector

Our CEO is really interested in moving people around. We have what we call zig-zag opportunity, which allows people to move around and get exposure to the organization so they can move up into leadership positions. This shakes things up. —United States Senior-level, Private Sector

In the United States and Canada, respondents affirmed the importance of coaching and mentorship for helping women grow and develop as leaders. Those respondents who had worked with coaches often remarked that it was expensive, but ultimately very worthwhile, especially given that the coaching had usually been subsidized by their employers.

I have also worked with leadership coaches over the years, and the university paid for that. It's super expensive but having someone who is basically a professional therapist, who helped me with difficult situations and was on my side [was really helpful]. They pointed out things I could be doing differently. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

It's hard for me to tell if the coaching was specific to me being a woman or if it was everyone. But I was able to work with her for 6–8 months. I was suspicious of her at first, that they were turning me into what they wanted, but trusted her after working with her and it was the most valuable thing I have done. —United States, Senior-level, INGO

Respondents also described a range of mentorship arrangements, including several targeted at women. These included a wide range of structures and levels of formality. They were universally described as helpful, regardless of whether the mentors were men or women.

5.3 Peer Learning

Respondents from all sectors commonly noted that opportunities to hear from women leaders within their organizations helped facilitate a supportive environment at work. In particular, they valued the opportunity to meet potential mentors or role models, learn how other women manage similar challenges, and gain access to helpful resources. Some of the formats respondents described as being useful included brown bag presentations, affinity groups, or even informal, unstructured exchanges.

There's a women's employee resource group at the company. There's lots of women because of the size of the company... Every year around International Women's Day, they put on a big, day-long workshop for all the women at the company and they bring in coaches and speakers. From my cynical perspective, it's actually a fairly well-run workshop because it's both interactive as well as hearing from thought leaders out there... They also have programming throughout the year. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

There was a Women in Leadership brown bag series. Mostly they interviewed internal leaders and invited everyone, women and men, to come... that was when I had first joined, and I found that to be incredibly

inspirational, because I would hear about how there was a senior leader in the federal government... and she had multiple children. So, she talked about how she managed her childcare with her leadership positions. It was just fascinating to hear those very practical details of how women had managed their multiple roles with family and work and such. That really helped me develop more of a vision for leadership. —United States, Senior-level, Government

5.4 Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Various respondents from academia, INGOs, and government noted that having more data about the number of women in leadership—or lack thereof—would be useful, whether at the organizational level or sector-wide.

I wish they would look at the numbers more often. How many women are in leadership positions or in this C-suite? We don't have the numbers. Now we look at DEI numbers. We don't know how we are doing unless we measure it. It is not always clear to me during re orgs or restructuring, how much effort they look at profiles of positions. There are no quotas and [I am] not sure people even talk about it. —United States, Senior-level, INGO

I think that intentional efforts... whether it's a tracking of indicators (how many women are in your leadership positions). And having companies or the federal government assessed and to have some sort of accountability [is helpful]. —United States, Senior-level, Government

KPIs are reportedly already in use and delivering results in the private sector (see section 7.1.2).



Research Question 2: What are current efforts that foster women's leadership, diversity, and inclusion within organizations?

6. National/Societal Level

6.1 National and Global Movements

6.1.1 Racial Justice and Decolonization

Although progress has been made in advancing women and minorities' equality in North America since the feminist and civil rights movements of the 1960s and 1970s, the pace of change has accelerated considerably since 2020 in the wake of the revived racial justice movement in the United States. Various respondents noted how the murder of George Floyd and its aftermath prompted their organizations to take DEI more seriously and adopt or refine their DEI practices (see section 7.1).

We see an image of a Black man dying in the media and that has galvanized the nation. We have to think about system changes. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

Notably, Canadian respondents mentioned the effect of the racial justice movement carrying over from the United States, but also spoke more about addressing the legacies of colonialism. Though this was sometimes in reference to their own internal operations and the dynamic with Indigenous people in Canada, these respondents often drew connections to their international health work.

I'm in a settler colony of Canada... so, all of the global health work that's come out of Canada is growing up in that system and yet we don't talk about that. So, it's the early colonial mind patterns, ways of knowing and thinking and doing that give rise to heteronormativity and cisnormativity and sexism, and patriarchy. That lands us in the situation we're in now. —Canada, Senior-level, Academia

6.1.2 #MeToo

The influence of the #MeToo movement also arose in a couple of interviews as being another catalyst for organizational reforms that aim to benefit women. Interestingly, a few respondents noted unintended, adverse effects of the movement, namely that some men now feel uncomfortable engaging with women out of fear that their interactions could be misconstrued as inappropriate or even result in accusations of harassment.

I'm concerned about sexual harassment and discrimination... that the pendulum is swinging too far the other way and I have seen male colleagues avoid women in fear that they will make a mistake or be accused of harassment... That has been a transformational change that has also meant cultural change... We need to work to [do] a lot more to help each other understand what's positive, acceptable. Not working across the gender gap because you're afraid [isn't ok]. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

7. Organizational Level

7.1 DEI-Focused Policies and Practices

Though some organizations had clear DEI policies and practices in place prior to 2020, these measures became ubiquitous in the awakening following the George Floyd murder. When asked what their organizations do to promote DEI, respondents described that efforts generally fall into several categories: DEI policies, DEI targets and tracking, or DEI-focused positions.

7.1.1 DEI Policies

Practically every respondent mentioned the DEI policies their organizations have as the driving force of DEI efforts, whether they were established prior to 2020 or introduced or strengthened since then.

Like every other global health organization, we also had its “come to Jesus” moment after George Floyd and opened our eyes to our own history, what we are doing. It escalated our own growth and self-reflection and helped accelerate the talent development program. It led us to review our HR and performance policies. We also recently hired a DEI director. —United States, Senior-level INGO

When I became chair, we had a strategic planning process. We had 40–50 faculty identifying three areas we want to work on [including DEI]. When George Floyd was murdered... we ramped up our work. We were right on it, we organized something for the next week. We formed in our division an action team, we dedicated resources, we changed our hiring policies. Our school implemented an anti-racism policy. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

7.1.2 DEI Targets and Tracking

Several respondents shared that their organizations have monitored DEI issues—including efforts specifically looking at women, whether they be self-reflection exercises or formal DEI assessments.

At the highest level, we analyze things on DEI (to look at gender balance—at one point, we needed men more). We have women at each level of leadership, management. We provide internship opportunities, women leadership, and gender work. We have engaged women leaders in our programs. That is how we all think at the organization, although we need to continue to work on it. —United States, Senior-level, Non-Governmental Organization (NGO)

Several respondents from the private sector shared how setting goals and corresponding KPIs have helped keep their companies accountable to diversifying leadership, including getting more women into top positions. They reasoned that by setting goals and tracking progress against those goals, their organization made concrete commitments that tended to yield the intended results. Furthermore, establishing KPIs is commonplace in the sector, making it a natural and effective tool in companies' DEI toolbox.

The organization has made a very clear commitment that we want to achieve 50–50 representation at all levels and we will not stop until we get there. Back in 2015, the former CEO set the first-ever representation goals for the organization, and we met those goals five years later. Now we're on a new path for goals. We're currently at 42.7 percent women in management and at 38 percent for women in vice president positions. So, we take goals around representation very seriously. We also do a lot of work in our inclusion index. But then we also look at differentiation between how men and women and other dimensions of diversity feel in the index. And then in 2020, we linked all our executives, so every vice president and above, 10 percent of their bonus payout is linked to DEI goals. That's how seriously we take it. —United States Senior-level, Private Sector

As with many things in global health, if you track it, people pay attention to it. The company does track such metrics and they report on them internally and to leadership. I don't know that they report on them externally... But it is something that, at the more senior levels of management, is a metric that is looked at as far as your performance as a manager... There are things around building diverse communities and that doesn't necessarily mean hiring diversity. That is just one aspect. Being a health product person, I have a wide array of opinions on how that can be met, but there are things like those checks, checks built in terms of monitoring, which is a behavioral incentive to meet. So, it's formalized in that way. Are the goals as high as they could be in terms of thresholds for how the company is meeting those goals? That's up for discussion, I think. —United States Senior-level, Private Sector

One way I have seen that done, is that in our annual ratings and performance reviews, there are trainings and courses through our training platform, and we are held accountable to how we are incorporating into our performance. The ratings process is focused around what we've accomplished and how we've accomplished it. —United States Senior-level, Private Sector

7.1.3 DEI-focused Positions

Still, others described how having dedicated staff helps facilitate their DEI goals. As with the policies, in several cases, these positions pre-dated 2020.

In the school of public health, before COVID-19 struck, our dean was very supportive of DEI. He created an assistant dean for DEI. This was a position that was created to address all the stakeholders (faculty, staff, students, departments). At the university level, we have a vice provost for DEI. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

The number and mandates of these staff varied widely, even within sectors. For example, one INGO respondent shared how there was only one staff member to cover their entire organization, whereas another INGO respondent said their organization designated DEI points of contact in each of their country offices.

7.1.4 Consequences of DEI Policies and Practices

In several interviews, respondents mentioned that the heightened attention on race in the last few years has come at the expense of much-needed attention to women's issues. Whereas some respondents expressed frustration about this phenomenon—especially those who were part of earlier feminist movements—others

celebrated it as an opportunity to take a more holistic, intersectional approach to feminism. Increased awareness about how women of color have been systemically denied opportunities for advancement has contributed commitment among organizations in all sectors to increase their representation in leadership positions.

My students aren't really interested in talking about feminism, they are interested in talking about racism. It feels passé. But [sexism] is still there. —United States, Senior-level, Academia

I think it is important to articulate that the goal isn't just to get women in leadership positions. What would be helpful would be to think about DEI adding colonization, adding a C. The question isn't getting women there, they could make decisions that do not support decolonization or equity. We have to get beyond the discussion of women in leadership positions, it is the decisions that we are making that are actually benefiting/changing the equity decision. I would challenge if we are asking the right question. —United States, Senior-level, Philanthropy

7.2 Human Resources Policies and Practices

In addition to the practices described above, respondents across all sectors described reforms that their organizations have taken to institutionalize DEI through their administrative systems.

7.2.1 Hiring Practices

When asked about how their organizations are promoting DEI or women's leadership, respondents often mentioned efforts to expand their recruitment to attract women and people of color. Examples included ensuring a diverse set of interview candidates and more diverse hiring panels, and in one case, re-credentialing positions. In many cases, respondents noted that these have resulted in increased hiring of these groups.

We're trying to integrate and redesign the processes so that it yields the result we want. So, we don't require people to hire women, we require them to have a diverse slate for every hire. We require that every open position needs to be posted and have a diverse slate and a diverse panel. So, we're engineering the processes so that when you do the process effectively over time, it yields that kind of result. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

We have seen progression because of George Floyd, it is happening at the mercy of people having to die because of our systems... working here has been very good and I have seen their commitment to DEI. They hired 12 new Black tenure track hires. We have an increase in Indigenous faculty... I came into my department, I was one of the first women and [racial minority group] people. Women in leadership positions is common, but they are all white in my department. —Canada, Senior-level, Staff, Academia

7.2.2 Flexible and Remote Work

The risk of proximity bias notwithstanding (see section 1.2.1), many respondents also discussed how the COVID-19 pandemic normalized remote work and flexible hours, which is available to most or all employees. Respondents agreed remote work is of particular benefit to women in caretaking roles in terms of allowing them to continue participating in the workforce post-partum, though the extent to which these accommodations directly facilitate career growth is unclear.

Giving you control of your day helps give you control of your career. Women have additional pressure at home that sometimes guys don't have... We have a bunch of people that work either 80 percent or 60 percent. When we bring people on board, it's about their schedules and their needs. If a person says they need Monday and Wednesday after 2 p.m. off, we respect that. —United States, Senior-level, INGO

There's flexibility in terms of time off and things like that, that are not necessarily directly geared at women specifically, but they do enable a wider array of different types of people to be part of the company. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

7.2.3 Other Benefits

Though paid parental leave and flexible schedules are major boons to working parents, other complementary benefits can make the balance of work and family more achievable, like the provision of on-site childcare or childcare subsidies.

Though a few respondents from the academic, philanthropic, and private sectors mentioned that their employers offer at least one of these benefits, most respondents, regardless of sector, did not have access to them but mentioned they would be a helpful addition.

The foundation offers paid family leave of six months. Flexible schedules and childcare support as well. We don't have in-house daycare, that is an area where we can improve. —United States, Senior-level, Philanthropy

Flexible work schedules [allow parents] to plan life. Backup childcare is offered at [my company], which is really helpful. You don't always want to feel like the exception, so providing flexibility and structures to support staff is helpful. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector

Another common theme was that the high amount of travel typically required in global health jobs puts an additional strain on parents working in this sector. Only one respondent mentioned having benefits that address this challenge.

One other observation is the amount of travel required in global health roles. How do you support a career and a family when you're constantly on a plane or on the road?... Balancing the travel with family responsibilities is difficult. There are good support systems here, they do ship breast milk back home for example. They provide backup childcare options if they are needed. —United States, Senior-level, Private Sector



Research Question 3: What are the various ways organizations and the WomenLift program may work together?

8. Potential Collaborations

Most respondents in the United States and Canada were open to potential partnerships with WomenLift Health. Though most did not know exactly what such a partnership would or could entail, they were keen to discuss possibilities directly with WomenLift. Respondents either proposed or agreed to a few different partnership options.

Most commonly, they were interested in helping to increase the applicant pool, either by nominating potential fellows or sharing the application with their networks.

A few also mentioned that their organization could benefit from training that could contribute to a supportive, inclusive environment for women and/or people of color. This was especially true for respondents working in places where they described having a tough organizational culture—these respondents sometimes expressed interest in seeing what types of “enabling environment” work WomenLift will undertake in the coming years.

Members of WomenLift’s staff or Leadership Journey fellows and managers of those programs could consider guest speaking in each other’s courses, or even have a higher-level discussion about what has or has not worked well in running such programs.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The assessment found that the Leadership Journey is covering many of the most salient subjects for women in the field, and thus **should keep the core elements of its curriculum**. However, as WomenLift plans for future cohorts in North America, it should consider how to strengthen or address the following issues:

- A main theme across interviews was the double burden many women shoulder as the primary caregiver at home, in addition to their full-time position. While there are societal-level changes that need to happen, WomenLift Health can **continue to help women navigate these challenges in practical ways in the near term**, e.g., through ongoing peer support via WhatsApp groups, life coaching, and distribution of books, blogs, or other resources.
- Additional support **for women of color specifically** to address their unique challenges that were noted during interviews. This would include finding women of color to serve as mentors, speakers for the mid-career women to help foster their ongoing career, touchpoints that focus on the unique experiences of women of color, or separate WhatsApp chats for these fellows where they can speak candidly among themselves about these experiences.

As WomenLift considers its role in enabling environment work, it should promote the following good practices, either directly with partner organizations or advocating more broadly in the global health sector:

- **Professional development:** Encourage organizations that do not already have formalized leadership training programs or cannot create such programs due to resource constraints, to adopt practices that afford women and other underrepresented groups to get cross-training and develop leadership skills, e.g., job sharing, rotations, and stretch assignments. Also, employers should establish clear pathways to advancements if these do not already exist.
- **Peer learning:** Encourage organizations to create structured or semi-structured spaces, e.g., brown bag series and affinity groups where women can discuss their careers and how they have managed to balance them with home life.
- **Flexible work arrangements:** Encourage organizations to allow flexible work schedules as an option to share leadership positions. However, managers should receive training or guidance about proximity bias and how to mitigate it. Likewise, the Leadership Journey should include guidance on how to manage flexible work arrangements in ways that proactively mitigate against this bias.
- **Caregiver Benefits:** Encourage organizations to establish equitable paid family leave policies to the greatest extent possible—not just for new parents, but also for people with aging parents, sick spouses, or other family members.

WomenLift should advocate for **increased tracking diversity in hiring/the sector**. WomenLift can do this either by aggregating and disseminating best practices or case studies regarding this kind of tracking. Alternatively, WomenLift can consider developing a brief survey for global health organizations that are willing to share data about their diversity and publish it as appropriate, or partner with other organizations that are doing similar evaluative work.

WomenLift should also consider **developing events or trainings that highlight how men can be effective allies**. This could include modules for the Leadership Journey that help fellows to understand the different types of allyship (e.g., mentorship, sponsorship), identify potential allies, or effectively leverage allies. WomenLift could also consider developing a panel on the subject at an upcoming conference. Alternatively, as WomenLift extends its enabling environment work, it could develop a training for men on how to serve as effective allies.

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