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# LEADERSHIP AND GIVING

*Leadership, to me, can be at any level and any form...if we encouraged women and girls to be [stronger] in their convictions, more confident, I just believe the world would be a better place.*

– Community Source

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**W**ashington State has a long history of female leadership, and currently ranks first in the nation for women’s political participation. In the Puget Sound region over 125,000 privately held, majority-women-owned businesses contribute billions of dollars in sales each year to the local economy. Over one-third of women in the state volunteer their time, and women in philanthropy are a major driving force for change in the region. When women take on leadership roles in politics, business, their communities, and philanthropy, they support causes and policies that help women and girls.<sup>184</sup>

Despite these impressive gains, women remain underrepresented among leaders in the political and business arenas, especially in public companies. When seeking conventionally male-dominated leadership positions, women still face discrimination and traditional expectations about women’s roles. Community sources highlighted the need to build women’s and girls’ self-confidence, noting that while men “assume they are leadership material,” women and girls are more likely to doubt their ability to lead. These challenges are compounded for women and girls of color, with low incomes, or of immigrant or refugee status, all of whom are least likely to be represented in politics and business. These women and girls do make substantial contributions to their communities and families, however, often through informal leadership roles that attract less public recognition.

Women in leadership positions tend to support female-friendly policies. This reality highlights the need for female leaders in all settings. Women business leaders and philanthropists in the four-county region said that key factors in their choice to pursue leadership and philanthropy included their education, their awareness of societal issues, their extensive social relationships, and the support of family and peers. They strongly believe in the importance of mentoring young women and girls to “find their voice” to become tomorrow’s leaders. The need for mentoring is especially acute for women and girls who, in addition to experiencing sexism, also confront racism, classism, and homophobia. Further, to overcome traditional stereotypes of women and girls, community sources highlighted the importance of engaging men and boys in discussion and including them as partners when creating leadership opportunities.

## POLITICAL INFLUENCE

In female political participation, Washington is first in the nation.<sup>185</sup> Our current governor, Christine Gregoire, is one of just nine female governors nationwide. Washington has three female elected officials in the U.S. legislature: Senators Patty Murray and Maria Cantwell, and Cathy McMorris, House Representative for Washington’s 5th Congressional District. Women comprise one-third of the state legislature (41 percent of the Senate and 29 percent of the House), the eighth-highest percentage in the nation.<sup>186</sup> Women also hold four of the nine positions on the Washington State Supreme Court.<sup>187</sup>

Across the U.S., women in political office overwhelmingly believe they have a special responsibility to represent women’s issues in the legislative process.<sup>188</sup> Actions supporting this belief have led to substantial gains for women and girls. Compared to their male counterparts, women from both parties are more likely to work on legislation intended to benefit women. Nationwide, both male and female legislators agree that increased participation of women in state politics has helped them address issues specific to women and girls and has resulted in passage of more legislation to address their needs.<sup>189</sup>

## BUSINESS LEADERSHIP

Both nationally and in Washington, women business owners are increasingly part of the economic landscape, with lucrative results. As of 2006, nearly one-third of all privately held firms in the state were at least majority-owned by women.<sup>190</sup> Women-owned firms in the Puget Sound<sup>191</sup> are responsible for much of this activity; among the top 50 metropolitan areas in the nation, the region ranks 15th in the number of privately held, majority-women-owned firms.<sup>192</sup> Nearly 127,000 women-owned firms generated \$23 billion in sales in 2006.<sup>193</sup>

Gains made by women business owners in the private sector have not spread to the executive ranks of Washington's largest public companies. Despite their "reaching the apex of Washington's political landscape,"<sup>194</sup> women are still underrepresented in executive offices and boardrooms. Washington's 73 top companies—those with at least \$100 million in market capitalization—can count only five women as CEOs and two as board chairs. Further, Washington women hold only 18 and 14 percent of executive and board positions, respectively. Fifteen of the 73 companies had no top-level female executives, 21 lacked a woman on the board, and seven had no women at either level.<sup>195</sup>

As in politics, female leaders in business "can be a force for demographic change"<sup>196</sup> and influence hiring and promotional decisions concerning women. Having more female leaders in the workplace can facilitate more collegial environments for women, increase opportunities for female leadership, and implement policies that help women succeed. The current shortage of women in business-leadership positions may translate into employer policies that fail to recognize what women need to succeed and become leaders (e.g., child care, family leave). Without representation at the highest levels of public companies, policies are unlikely to change to accommodate these needs.



Photo courtesy of Girls on the Run of Puget Sound

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*What drives me towards philanthropic giving is to make the world a better place than when I entered it...it doesn't matter to me whether it's political or social or environmental...as long as I'm trying to make a difference in a positive direction.*

~ Focus Group Participant

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## VOLUNTEERING

Over the last several decades, the percentage of people in the U.S. who volunteer their time and engage in civic activities has declined substantially. Americans also belong to fewer social and community organizations and attend fewer public meetings. "As a result, Americans have many fewer 'ties that bind;' hence, they lack the crucial "social capital" that contributes to building safe and healthy communities."<sup>204</sup> Efforts to build social capital through volunteering and civic participation can directly and positively affect a broad range of issues and challenges facing women and girls in the four-county region.

Despite the overall decline in civic participation, most women and girls still volunteer in some capacity. Nationally, 65 percent of women and 57 percent of girls in high school participate in the civic arena, compared to 59 percent of men and 47 percent of high school boys. While men and women are equally likely to volunteer in neighborhood, youth development, and art/cultural groups, women are more likely than men to participate in tutoring, educational activities, and civic activities for the elderly and poor.<sup>205</sup> Men and women with higher incomes and more education are more likely to volunteer, as are those who work for and/or belong to a religious organization.<sup>206</sup> Similarly, the children of highly educated parents are more likely to volunteer than children whose parents have less schooling. And, when they grow up, those who volunteered as children are twice as likely as those who didn't to become adult volunteers.<sup>207</sup>

Families and schools can play pivotal roles in increasing civic participation among youth. Community sources noted that family involvement in community service, as well as family expectations about contributing to the broader community, motivated them to become leaders in their own communities. Schools also create important volunteer opportunities. Schools that integrate community service into their curricula through service-learning programs increase rates of volunteer activity among both boys and girls.<sup>208</sup>

## FEMALE IMMIGRANT ENTREPRENEURS

*The common misperception about immigrants is that they drain our system when really its just the opposite...in fact, they bring in the new work ethic.*

– Community Source

Since the late 1800s, immigrant women have been more likely than women born in the U.S. to own their own businesses, and today they are one of the fastest growing groups of business owners in nation.<sup>197</sup> In 2000, 8.3 percent of employed immigrant women owned their own business compared to 6.2 percent of U.S.-born women.<sup>198</sup>

In the U.S., female immigrant business owners are more than 500,000 strong, with the majority in service-related industries such as child day-care centers, restaurants/food service, beauty salons, and real estate. Across the country, over 1,000 immigrant women serve as CEOs of non-profit organizations.<sup>199</sup> This level of participation is not surprising, as many immigrant and refugee women were activists in their home countries and are “ready to step into leadership positions as soon as they become

familiar with U.S. institutions and systems.”<sup>200</sup> Female immigrants often start their own businesses after becoming discouraged by experiences in the mainstream labor market, where cultural and language difficulties can pose significant barriers to achieving leadership status.<sup>201</sup>

Limited English proficiency limits leadership opportunities for immigrant and refugee women and girls.<sup>202</sup> Affordable English-as-a-Second-Language programs, if widely available, could help many immigrant and refugee women move into positions as leaders. Another way of nurturing the development of immigrant and refugee leaders is to make sure their communities are represented among elected and appointed officials. These officials serve as role models, demonstrating how community members can become recognized leaders.<sup>203</sup>



## CHARITABLE GIVING

Women have become a substantial force in the U.S. economy. Over a third of the wealthiest Americans are women, with a combined net worth of several trillion dollars.<sup>209</sup> Women-owned businesses in the U.S. earn trillions of dollars each year, and these companies are growing one-and-a-half to two times faster than companies in general. Because women live longer than men, they will eventually control much of the \$41 trillion that is expected to pass from generation to generation over the next 50 years.<sup>210</sup>

Women's increased economic power translates into increased philanthropy. Women comprise a significant proportion of charitable donors in the U.S.; in 2004, three of the nation's top five philanthropic contributors were women.<sup>211</sup> Single women are more likely to make a philanthropic gift than single men, and married women exert substantial influence on the size and pattern of their family's charitable contributions.<sup>212</sup>

The pattern of women's philanthropic giving differs from that of men. When making a gift, women take more time and consideration than men,<sup>213</sup> and are more likely to give to health, education, or human-services charities, especially those serving children.<sup>214</sup> Their philanthropic decisions are often based on personal commitment to social causes. Once they make a gift, they continue to provide financial support for organizations' long-term goals.<sup>215</sup>

Women philanthropists in the four-county region indicated that sometimes they get involved in philanthropy because they feel important issues might not otherwise be addressed:

*There is a real hostility towards the traditional issues that affect women and girls. We're not really investing in poverty issues in this country. It's an easier sell to save [the environment], which I definitely spend energy and resources on. That's a far more sexy topic than helping poor families, which are predominantly women and children.*

*A lot of what drew me to [philanthropic involvement] is that [the organization was] funding areas of need that a lot of people didn't really want to talk about, hear about, didn't really want to know about.*

They also reported that social relationships strongly influence their participation in philanthropy. Community sources and focus group participants said events like giving circles and house parties are great ways to get involved. Women motivate each other to give and connect each other to worthy organizations.

Families also play a pivotal role in getting women involved in charitable giving. Parents pass philanthropic values on to their children, increasing the likelihood children will continue the family tradition. A focus group participant reflected on the importance of family in her decision to give back to her community, and on some simple ways of giving:

*Both of my parents were very adamant that you treat others the way you want to be treated, and you go out of your way to be respectful and give back to the community.... When you're a kid, it can be as simple as picking up trash, or raking the leaves, or learning not to litter....It can be a thousand different things.*

## CHARITABLE GIVING AMONG IMMIGRANTS AND REFUGEES

Charitable giving among immigrant and refugee women is often informal, and may not be picked up by conventional methods of tracking donations. This is partially due to the fact that immigrants are more likely to engage in "private transfer networks"—transfers of money and goods to individuals living outside the household<sup>216</sup>—than through formal charitable giving venues.<sup>217</sup>

Latin American immigrants "allocate anywhere from 15 percent to 30 percent of their income to relatives who don't

even live in the same household. The majority of them transfer money to loved ones abroad in the form of remittances at least eight times a year," averaging about \$2,500 per immigrant.<sup>218</sup> In the U.S., millions of immigrants live "in 'urban poverty'...in order for their family members to get out of poverty in Latin America."<sup>219</sup> Last year, Latin Americans in the U.S. sent approximately "\$50 billion to loved ones, an amount well above combined foreign aid and direct private investment."<sup>220</sup>



## BARRIERS TO LEADERSHIP

One barrier to women's and girls' leadership is the belief that leadership only comes in certain forms. However, leadership comes in many forms; some more recognized than others. In community settings, for example, women and girls often lead in ways that are both less formal and less visible than leadership positions in politics and business. Informal leadership roles are frequently tied to community cultural or spiritual beliefs that may not be recognized by mainstream society. Community sources stressed the importance of acknowledging the cultural context of leadership, as well as creating opportunities for different styles of leadership in mainstream settings.

Sexism and gender stereotypes remain significant obstacles to women and girls assuming leadership roles in the four-county region. Community sources said men are assumed to be competent, but women must prove their competence and intelligence. Furthermore, prescribed norms for "appropriate" female behavior interfere with their recognition as leaders. As one woman put it, "if you're too feminine, you're not credible, and, if you're under-feminine, you're not a real woman."

A community source noted that women and girls also have trouble recognizing their own leadership potential:

*One of the biggest challenges is getting [women and girls] to recognize themselves as potential leaders. Boys and men are much more likely to presume or assume that they are leadership material with or without the experience. Women and girls are much more likely to doubt that, with or without the experience.*

Improving leadership opportunities is particularly critical for women and girls of color, including immigrants and refugees and those with low incomes. With adequate representation in leadership positions, they would be able to draw attention and support to the unique needs of their communities. Community sources highlighted the importance of breaking down institutionalized racism and oppression while carrying on the struggle against sexism, particularly in business and politics:

*Institutional oppression is a major barrier. There isn't a lot... about gender justice [that includes] breaking down racism for women of color.*

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*It is challenging for people to realize that indigenous people have a different world view than the mainstream.... We take a different approach to leadership. We approach our decisions differently based on our values. Leadership is about holding intact that what makes us Indian.*

~Community Source

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## MOVING FORWARD

In this section we have highlighted the tremendous importance of supporting women and girls in leadership and philanthropic activities. When women and girls are involved in leadership roles, issues important for their well-being gain attention and support in politics, business, and communities. Similarly, when women engage in philanthropy, they support programs and services critical to the overall well-being of women and girls. Increasing leadership and philanthropic activity is particularly important for women and girls who have traditionally been marginalized from mainstream leadership positions, including low-income women and girls, those of color, immigrants, refugees, lesbians, bisexual women, and transgendered people.

Community sources recommended the following ideas for policymakers, educators, program directors, and businesses to consider in their attempts to increase access to leadership positions and promote philanthropic activities among women and girls.

### Program and Service Improvements

- **Expand individual leadership programs** that build women's and girls' skills and self-esteem. One community source suggested developing "transformation leadership courses" focusing on self-awareness and identifying passions early as first steps in building leadership skills.
- **Develop leadership programs with a community focus.** These programs would bring women and girls together with their communities and introduce them to opportunities to take the lead in making local changes.
- **Begin mentoring girls when they are young.** The earlier girls understand the importance of giving back to their communities and become involved in volunteer activities, the more likely they are to engage in such activities as adults. Programs that bring women and girls together to build self-esteem may be especially effective in increasing girls' leadership.
- **Provide a forum for policymakers** to solicit input from and engage racial and ethnic communities to build cross-cultural communication and gain insight into their specific needs.
- **Incorporate diversity within leadership and mentoring programs** to increase opportunities for women and girls traditionally marginalized from leadership roles, including women and girls of color, lesbians, bisexual women, transgendered people, and immigrants and refugees.
- **Develop "Philanthropy 101" courses** to teach girls, young women, and their families about financial literacy, networking, and social capital.

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*We all need to be leaders...in  
our schools, in our lives,  
in our states. If we all try, we  
can make a difference.*

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– Community Source

### Public Policy Considerations

- **Increase access to higher education.** Female community leaders and philanthropists said their educational experiences were crucial in providing them with the knowledge and awareness that motivated them to get involved in leadership roles.
- **Increase voter education and registration** among immigrant and refugee populations.

### Strategies for Social Change

- **Enlist female philanthropic leaders to teach young women and girls** about the power of philanthropy and the difference it has made in their lives.
- **Engage male allies and community partners** in discussions about the importance of investing in issues facing women and girls.
- **Expand civic and political opportunities** for leadership by women and girls. While programs for leadership development are common in business, support for leadership development on the civic and political fronts is lacking.