Advancing Women in the Digital Economy

A Gender Equity Toolkit for Individual Leaders, Organizations, and Ecosystem Players

ICTC 🍁 CTIC

Research by

Women and Gender Equality Canada

Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada

PREFACE:

The Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC) is a not-for-profit, national centre of expertise for strengthening Canada's digital advantage in a global economy. Through trusted research, practical policy advice, and creative capacity-building programs, ICTC fosters globally competitive Canadian industries enabled by innovative and diverse digital talent. In partnership with an expansive network of industry leaders, academic partners, and policymakers from across Canada, ICTC has empowered a robust and inclusive digital economy for over 30 years.

TO CITE THIS REPORT:

DISCLAIMER:

Foreword

This toolkit is part of a larger, multi-year project by ICTC, funded by Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada. This project includes multiple phases and seeks to enhance gender equity in Canada's digital economy. The outputs of these phases include evidence-based research reports, capacity-building initiatives, and actionable advice.

Between 2021 and 2022, ICTC examined gender equity in Canada's technology sector within the scope of entry-level and mid-level roles. The research included a literature review, a women-in-tech survey (n=240), provincial focus groups with employers (n=50 tech), key informant interviews with people of marginalized genders in tech (n=12), and three meetings of an advisory committee comprising 19 leaders in this space across Canada. Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Mid-Level Talent detailed the current state of gender diversity in the digital economy, outlined key challenges, and presented opportunities for tech employers to better attract, retain, and support people of marginalized genders.[1] Results from this study were used to inform ICTC's Ambassador Program – an initiative that provided employers with a suite of practical tools to increase gender inclusivity in organizations.[2]

Recognizing that gender diversity in the digital economy also differs according to seniority, in 2022 and 2023, ICTC set out to better understand gender equity in senior and leadership-level roles. This work examined women's representation at senior levels, including managerial roles and senior leadership roles (e.g., senior management, executive, etc.). Research methods included a literature review, focus groups with women in tech and employers in the technology sector (n=42), a co-design workshop in Vancouver (n=29), and three meetings of an advisory committee comprising 13 leaders. Drawing from these insights, ICTC's 2022 Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential outlined systemic barriers to career advancement in the digital economy as faced by women and people of marginalized genders and highlighted strategies that change agents can take to overcome barriers and help women in tech advance in their careers.[3]

Building upon ICTC's body of work on gender equity in the digital economy, this toolkit details action items, strategies, considerations, resources, and stakeholder responsibilities in advancing women in Canada's digital economy.

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1   Maryna Ivus, Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Midlevel Talent," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem.

2   "ICTC Ambassador Program for Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem," ICTC, https://ictc-ctic.ca/our-impact/case-studies/ictc-ambassador-program-for-gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem#:~:text=ICTC's%20Ambassador%20Program%20focuses%20on,the%20resources%20to%20hire%20women.

3   Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

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Glossary of Terms

ALLIES: Women or men who become champions for advancing women in the workplace.[4]

C-SUITE/ SENIOR LEADERS: Refers to the top-most leadership with the most formal influence and decision-making authority within a company.

DIGITAL ECONOMY: both digital occupations and digital industries, comprised of tech workers (in all sectors) and (all) workers in the tech sector.[5]

DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION (DEI OR EDI): This refers to three separate but sometimes related ideas to improve an environment for various individuals. Diversity measures representation from different communities (including identity, background, and culture). Equity is "the promotion of fairness and justice that considers historical, social, systemic and structural issues."[6] Finally, inclusion refers to a sense of belonging, respect, and the ability to fully participate. "While an inclusive group is by definition diverse, a diverse group is not always inclusive."[7]

EMPLOYEES: All individuals working with a company in any capacity, such as on a full-time, part-time, or contract basis.

GENDER NON-CONFORMING (GNC): an expression of gender that does not adhere to either men's or women's norms, including individuals who present as gender fluid or nonbinary. Trans or transgender: a person whose gender identity differs from their designated sex at birth.

HUMAN RESOURCES: The department generally responsible for all personnel management and works in consultation with senior leadership to make people-related decisions for the company.

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4   The Kaleidoscope Group, "Advocates, Mentors & Sponsors: What Are They And Why Do They Matter?" 2020, https://kgdiversity.com/advocates-mentors-sponsors-what-are-they-and-why-do-they-matter/

5   Alexandra Cutean, Rosina Hamoni, Ryan MacLaughlin and Zhenzhen Ye, "Canada's Growth Currency: Digital Talent Outlook 2023," 2023, Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/canadas-growth-currency.

6   "Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion," University of Toronto, accessed July 2023, https://research.utoronto.ca/equity-diversity-inclusion/equity-diversity-inclusion.

7   Ibid.

LGBTQI2S+: An umbrella term that stands for Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, Queer (or Questioning), Intersex, and Two-Spirit.

PEOPLE LEADERS: A term used to refer to direct managers of employees.

PEOPLE OF MARGINALIZED GENDERS: people who experience marginalization due to their gender; a shared experience between trans women, as well as all trans, Two Spirit, gender nonconforming, and nonbinary people.[8]

WOMAN: a person who identifies as a woman, including cis and trans women.[9]

WOMEN IN TECH: A colloquial term used to describe women working in the digital economy. Women in tech are, therefore, inclusive of women working in digital occupations and digital industries and comprise women tech workers (in all sectors) and (all) women workers in the tech sector.

RACI MATRIX: A framework often used in project management to identify the assignment of roles across various project stakeholders. RACI stands for "responsible, accountable, consulted, and informed."

SPONSOR AND ADVOCATES: Leaders within an organization who use their reputation and influence to advance women in the workplace. Sponsors look for ways to expand an individual's visibility by putting their name on the table for a promotion or opportunities to showcase their leadership skills. Sponsors can advocate for women in tech by highlighting their positive performance, mentioning them in conversation when they are not present, and introducing them to their networks.[10]

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8 "What do we mean by 'people of marginalized genders?'" WAVAW Rape Crisis Centre, January 16, 2019, https://www.wavaw. ca/what-do-we-mean-by-people-of-marginalized-genders/; Maryna Ivus, Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Midlevel Talent," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem.

9 Maryna Ivus, Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Midlevel Talent," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem.

10 "Advocates, Mentors & Sponsors: What Are They And Why Do They Matter?," 2023, The Kaleidoscope Group.

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Introduction

Despite making up nearly half (48%) of the Canadian workforce, women are underrepresented in the digital economy.[11] In 2023, women accounted for 34.8%[12] of individuals employed in Canada's digital economy.[13] This number is up from only 34.2% in 2013.[14] While this upward trajectory suggests an overall positive trend in employment participation, a further analysis by seniority reveals that this upward tick is largely attributed to women in entry-level roles or in the early stages of their careers.[15] Meanwhile, the gender gap is greater in the upper echelons of the digital economy, with men comprising most senior-level and leadership-level roles.[16]

"Maybe there is a 50/50 split between male and female, but then you dissect it further, and you realize that females are all at the entry level. Maybe [you have some] up to middle management, and once you hit a director level, you have no females anymore, or maybe you [only] have a handful to make it past the director level."
– ICTC Focus Group Participant[17]

11 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

12 Statistics Canada, monthly LFS data, 2023, ICTC's calculations.

13 Statistics Canada, monthly Labour Force Survey data, 2023, ICTC calculations.

14 Statistics Canada, monthly Labour Force Survey data, 2023, ICTC calculations.

15 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

16 2021 Canadian Census, "Occupation (training, education, experience and responsibility category - TEER) by mobility status five years ago, place of residence five years ago and labour force status: Canada, provinces and territories, census metropolitan areas and census agglomerations with parts," Statistics Canada, 2022, Table: 98-10-0450-01, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/cv.action?pid=9810045001; Andrew MacDougall, John Valley, and Jennifer Jeffrey, "Diversity Disclosure Practices: Diversity and leadership at Canadian public companies," 2022, https://www.osler.com/osler/media/Osler/reports/corporate-governance/Osler-Diversity-Disclosure-Practices-report-2022.pdf.

17 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

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Prior research indicates that women tend to leave science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) roles mid-career due to systemic challenges and a lack of diversity-enabling infrastructure.[18] Data from Statistics Canada highlights that over the course of 10 years (2006-2016), 13.7% of surveyed women STEM graduates left the workforce entirely (compared with 8.3% of men), and 75.4% moved to non-STEM roles, compared to 50.3% of men.[19] The study also found that many women STEM graduates who did not end up in STEM careers had simply never entered the STEM workforce at all (62.3% compared with 41.6% of men).[20] Similar trends have been observed outside of Canada; a study by Harvard Business Review finds that more than half (52%) of female scientists, technologists, and engineers drop out of their roles mid-career.[21]

Systemic challenges, including a lack of diversity-enabling infrastructure across the digital economy, contribute to women's underrepresentation in senior-level and leadership-level roles.[22] Among others, key challenges include limited visibility for women in tech, informal promotional structures, uneven implementation of organizational policies, and imposter syndrome.

Raising awareness about challenges is just one piece of the puzzle. This toolkit offers actions and strategies that individuals and organizations can take to help advance the careers of women in the digital economy. Section A of the toolkit outlines five calls to action, each of which includes two strategies. For each strategy, action items are provided, as well as considerations across people, processes, data, and technology factors. The section concludes with a RACI matrix, identifying which stakeholders should be responsible, accountable, consulted, or informed (signifying the acronym of this matrix) in the process of each intervention.

18 Ibid.

19 Kristyn Frank, " A Gender Analysis of the Occupational Pathways of STEM Graduates in Canada," Statistics Canada, Sept 2019, https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11f0019m/11f0019m2019017-eng.htm.

20 Ibid.

21 Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Carolyn Buck Luce, Lisa J. Servon, Laura Sherbin, Peggy Shiller, Eytan Sosnovich, Karen Sumberg, "The Athena Factor: Reversing the Brain Drain in Science, Engineering, and Technology," Harvard Business Review, May 22, 2008, https://hbsp.harvard.edu/product/10094-PDF-ENG.

22 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy

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Section B of this toolkit provides actions and strategies that ecosystem-level players can take to overcome systemic barriers across the entire technology landscape. This section offers two calls to action, each with two strategies. Associations, support organizations such as accelerators and incubators, academia, government, and investors are best able to implement these strategies. As ecosystem players are structured differently than individual organizations, this section does not offer specific roles and responsibilities, nor does it provide specific considerations for people, processes, data or technology. Instead, it seeks to inspire the technology ecosystem to work collaboratively to combat systemic barriers that affect women's ability to advance in their careers.

This toolkit is intended to serve as guidance and is not a one-size-fits-all solution. Organizations are encouraged to "pick and choose" the calls to action that best speak to their organizational needs. It is recommended that individuals and organizations begin small, outline a clear plan of action (including key performance indicators [KPIs]), and track progress over time.

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Actions and Strategies for Individuals and Organizations

Individual leaders and organizations in the digital economy have a critical role to play in ensuring people from all genders and intersectional identities have opportunities for career advancement. The success of equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) efforts is dependent not only on organizational commitments or policies but also on individuals within organizations who are dedicated to creative, inclusive, and equitable career advancement opportunities for all employees. When strong EDI policies and programs are paired with inclusive leadership, such as executives, directors, and managers willing to advocate for women in tech, the path to gender equity becomes more accessible.

This section details calls to action for individual leaders and organizations in the digital economy. Each call to action aims to address key challenges faced by women in tech—including informal promotional structures, uneven implementation of organizational policies, gender biases, the gender pay gap, isolation, tokenism, and challenges for parents.[23] The following five calls to action for individuals and organizations are explored:

1   **Providing equal access to opportunities for visibility, networking, and recognition**

2   **Building inclusive organizational cultures**

3   **Identifying and removing sources of bias in talent management processes**

4   **Creating work environments that foster self-expression and diversity**

5   **Fostering work-life balance through family-friendly values and processes**

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23   Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

Each call to action includes two key strategies: action items, and considerations across people, processes, and technology factors. These considerations are intended to help organizations and individuals build a foundation to support and sustain the calls to action. The people, process, and data and technology considerations are defined as:

- **Considerations for people:** These are considerations related to company culture and interpersonal dynamics that can impact the success of an initiative. Across all action items, open, transparent, and frequent communication is critical to ensuring action items have a positive and sustainable impact.

- **Considerations for processes:** These considerations offer guidance on the operational infrastructure that can help sustain new ways of working by providing clarity and structure for employees across the company.

- **Considerations for data and technology:** These considerations offer guidance on the types of digital technologies and informational databases that organizations can leverage in implementing action items. These technological platforms can help streamline processes and/or capture data to inform continuous improvement.

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CALL TO ACTION 1:
Provide equal access to opportunities for visibility, networking, and recognition.

As women in tech seek career advancement, many find themselves sidelined from leadership opportunities. While the reasons for this can vary and may be complex, one limiting factor is their limited visibility to current leaders across the organization. Despite a desire to be more visible or "known" within their organization, women consulted in ICTC's career advancement research noted often finding themselves excluded from workplace social gatherings or being unable to access sponsors, advocates, or allies to make their career goals known to senior leadership.[24] Many also believed that this lack of visibility was further amplified by the COVID-19 pandemic: as many organizations shifted to remote work, it became more challenging for managers and leaders to see which individuals were dedicating extra time or putting additional discretionary effort into their work.[25] As stated by some women, remote work environments can lead to an "out of sight, out of mind" mentality for leaders, and in turn, this lack of visibility can lead to a lack of recognition. Yet, a recent article by the Harvard Business Review, for example, notes that visibility and recognition are crucial for promotion and career progression.[26]

Organizations and individuals can adopt the following strategies to overcome challenges related to visibility and recognition:

1 Facilitate organic interactions and internal networking opportunities.

2 Provide thought leadership and external networking opportunities.

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24 Maryna Ivus, Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Midlevel Talent," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem.

25 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

26 Shelley J. Correll, Lori Nishiura Mackenzie, "To Succeed in Tech, Women Need More Visibility," Harvard Business Review, September 13, 2016, https://hbr.org/2016/09/to-succeed-in-tech-women-need-more-visibility; Sylvia Ann Hewlett, Carolyn Buck Luce, Lisa J. Servon, Laura Sherbin, Peggy Shiller, Eytan Sosnovich, Karen Sumberg, "The Athena Factor: Reversing the Brain Drain in Science, Engineering, and Technology," Harvard Business Review, May 22, 2008, https://hbsp.harvard.edu/product/10094-PDF-ENG.

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Primary Accountability: Ensuring equal access to opportunities for visibility, networking, and recognition begins with the organizational culture and norms, which are often established at the leadership level. Senior leaders can actively demonstrate their commitment to inclusion by advocating for diverse high-potential talent and by allocating resources toward processes and tools that expand access to these opportunities. See the RACI matrix for more details (Table 11).

1 STRATEGY 1. FACILITATE ORGANIC INTERACTIONS AND INTERNAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES

Fostering connection and providing equal opportunities for networking requires the intentional design of work processes and norms. For online or hybrid work environments, check-ins or team activities, also known as "virtual watercoolers," can provide employees an opportunity to connect organically with one another, simulating the interactions that would normally take place in an in-person office setting.[27] Team activities and events – be they in-person or online – should be designed in a manner that is gender inclusive, as opposed to what can be considered "gender-coded events" such as golf or other sporting events.[28] Gender-inclusive team events help to ensure that women are not excluded from opportunities to connect with senior leaders both on and off-site. By facilitating inclusive networking opportunities, women can gain more visibility, expand their professional connections, and communicate their career goals to senior leaders, even when working remotely or in a hybrid setting.

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27 Prithwiraj Choudhury, Jacqueline N. Lane, and Iavor Bojinov, "Virtual Water Coolers: A Field Experiment on the Role of Virtual Interactions on Organizational Newcomer Performance," HBS Working Papers, 2023, https://www.hbs.edu/ris/Publication%20 Files/21-125_29ac1ced-8c51-4835-837a-542852328741.pdf

28 Maryna Ivus, Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Midlevel Talent," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem.

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TABLE 1. Action items and considerations for facilitating organic interactions and internal networking opportunities for women in tech.

| ACTIONS | CONSIDERATIONS | | |
	PEOPLE	PROCESS	DATA & TECHNOLOGY
• Develop "virtual watercoolers" for hybrid and online work environments. • Implement hybrid and online team activities to foster organic interaction. • Eliminate gender-coded networking events that exclude women. • Create opportunities for formal visibility by engaging women in meetings with senior leaders	• Instilling 1:1 check-ins and team connection as a core leadership competency for all people leaders. • Fostering psychological safety and trust so that all team members can engage meaningfully.	• Building 1:1 check-ins into day-to-day processes for teams. • Incorporating a mix of in-person and online opportunities for interaction. • Building accessibility and inclusion into the design of team activities.	• Adopting tools for ad-hoc online interaction. • Using technology in accessible and inclusive ways. • Adopting tools to track career goals and progress.

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RESOURCES TO HELP FACILITATE ORGANIC INTERACTIONS AND INTERNAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES FOR WOMEN IN TECH:

Kumospace is a customizable virtual office that mimics the experience of being in a physical office space. Free and paid options are available.

Virtual Communication Channels, such as **Microsoft Teams**, **Slack**, and **Google Meet**, offer a range of opportunities for organic interaction through chat and video and can be used to host virtual watercoolers. Free and paid options are available.

An integration for **Slack**, **Donut**, randomly pairs team members for virtual coffee meetings, encouraging informal chats and building relationships. This is a paid service.

Collaborative online whiteboard platforms, such as **Miro** or **MURAL**, can be used for brainstorming sessions, interactive workshops, and team-building exercises. Free and paid versions are available.

Virtual game platforms such as **Crowdparty** encourage coworkers to casually interact and have conversations in a fun and relaxed environment. This is a free service.

Tools like **Lattice** or **15Five** are helpful in establishing goals for regular 1:1 check-ins, goal tracking, and feedback between employees and managers to discuss career progression. These are paid services.

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2 STRATEGY 2: PROVIDE THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND EXTERNAL NETWORKING OPPORTUNITIES.

As detailed in ICTC's recent study, the underrepresentation of women in leadership roles across the digital economy is partially attributable to the limited number of leaders, advocates, and mentors to support new entrants or early-career women on their journeys.[29] While male leaders can and should serve as important mentors for women, some women in tech noted a desire to seek female role models and mentors. Organizations can encourage employees to seek external mentorship opportunities, including those that provide the opportunity to connect with women leaders in the technology sector.

One way to build this network is to attend women-in-tech events, panel discussions, and conferences. External events and conferences not only provide networking opportunities for women in tech, but they may also provide opportunities for individual thought leadership and skill development.

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29 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

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TABLE 2. Action items and considerations for providing women in tech opportunities for thought leadership and external networking

ACTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS		
	PEOPLE	PROCESS	DATA & TECHNOLOGY
• Prioritize opportunities to advocate for women employees and refer them to conferences, events or other forums to help expand their network and access thought leadership opportunities. • Encourage women employees to engage with grassroots and community organizations that can provide a supportive women-led network. • Promote the use of internal and external learning and development resources to encourage ongoing skills development	• Empowering employees to come forward with conferences and events they would like to attend or present at. • Showcase employee contributions to the industry internally to help strengthen their visibility and brand internally. • Promote the use of internal learning and development offerings.	• Incorporating learning and development budgets to support employees in attending professional development activities. • Recognize the completion of learning and skills development in performance review processes.	• Leverage human resources information systems (HRIS) to track employee learning enrollments and align learning with goals.

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RESOURCES TO PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR THOUGHT LEADERSHIP AND EXTERNAL NETWORKING:

Eventbrite, **Meetup**, and **Techmeme Events** are platforms to discover relevant events and opportunities. Organizations can allocate a budget to cover registration fees, travel, and accommodation expenses for women employees to attend key industry conferences, events, or forums. Free and paid options are available.

Platforms like **Speakerhub** and **Informed Opinions** help identify opportunities for speaking or panellist opportunities for employees at industry events.

Ten Thousand Coffees: a networking tool that facilitates matches for virtual or in-person coffee chats based on parameters set by the user. This is a paid service.

Toast is a membership-based community that offers networking opportunities for women in tech across Canada.

Women in Communications & Technology (WCT) is a non-profit organization that offers networking, professional development, mentorship, and more for women in tech.

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CALL TO ACTION 2:
Build inclusive organizational cultures.

For many years, it was believed that organizational diversity was needed to yield an inclusive workplace.[30] However, recent research suggests that, instead, inclusivity is needed to drive diversity. This research proposes that "inclusion is the starting place and determinant of success in creating a diverse workforce. If inclusion comes first and is followed by equitable treatment, then diversity naturally follows."[31]

Cultivating gender diversity, therefore, requires an inclusive work environment. From communication styles and practices to the way leaders and employees show up every day, inclusive organizations are characterized by leaders high in humility, emotional intelligence, empathy, curiosity, and collaboration.[32] Inclusive leadership also means taking an active role in supporting employee growth and development and serving as a partner in career pathing while suspending judgment and refraining from gender stereotyping. By creating an inclusive workplace where people from all backgrounds can thrive and grow, organizations will be able to foster diversity and advance women in tech.

Organizations and individuals can leverage the following strategies to build inclusive organizational cultures that support career growth among women in tech:

1 Promote inclusive leadership principles in day-to-day practices.

2 Activate sponsors, advocates, and allies.

Primary Accountability: Building inclusive organizational cultures starts with senior leadership demonstrating desired behaviours consistently so they become the norm. Actively seeking diverse perspectives and practicing self-awareness are ways that leaders can establish a culture of inclusion. When leaders set the stage for inclusion, they also establish the foundation for people managers to be effective partners in career pathing and advancement. See the RACI matrix for more details (Table 11).

30 M. Russen, M. Dawson, "Which should come first? Examining diversity, equity and inclusion," International Journal of Contemporary Hospitality Management, Vol. 36 No. 1, pp. 25-40, (2024), https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCHM-09-2022-1184.

31 Ibid.

32 Maryna Ivus, Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Midlevel Talent," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem.

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1 STRATEGY 1: PROMOTE INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP PRINCIPLES IN DAY-TO-DAY PRACTICES.

Being an inclusive leader takes deliberate action to recognize and mitigate potential unconscious biases that may affect decision-making and career advancement opportunities for employees. That said, many leaders may not be aware their own biases or may not know how to activate their inclusive leadership skills. Organizations must, therefore, equip leaders with the tools and resources to achieve this, such as coaching and training that encourage self-reflection.

TABLE 3. Action items and considerations for promoting inclusive leadership in day-to-day practices.

ACTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS		
	PEOPLE	**PROCESS**	**DATA & TECHNOLOGY**
• Promote inclusive leadership training for all people leaders. • Set leadership goals that reflect inclusive leadership qualities such as humility, emotional intelligence, empathy, curiosity, and collaboration. • Define core leadership competencies aligned with company values and integrate inclusive leadership principles.	• Encourage voluntary participation in inclusive leadership training to foster a more genuine desire to adopt inclusive practices and ways of working. • Senior leaders to demonstrate inclusive leadership through their actions. • Normalize feedback and two-way dialogue between employees and leaders to foster continuous improvement. • Encourage shared learning experiences among leaders for a stronger connection to learning content and facilitating deeper self-reflection.	• Define inclusive company values and embed them in operations and processes. • Make training and resources readily available to leaders through one easy registration process. • Provide dedicated time for senior leaders and people managers to complete training.	• Adopt tracking systems to record completion rates of training and resources; this can inform future training efforts and communication strategies. • Provide channels for anonymous employee feedback and suggestions (e.g., employee satisfaction surveys). • Track goals and performance with human resources information systems (HRIS).

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RESOURCES FOR PROMOTING INCLUSIVE LEADERSHIP IN DAY-TO-DAY PRACTICES:

HR Technology such as **Workday**, **Lever**, **BambooHR**, and others can help track enrollment in inclusive leadership training alongside other employee data. These are paid services.

50:30 Challenge is an initiative to help organizations pledge to equity, diversity, and inclusion and access training and other supports to implement best practices. This is a free service offered by the Government of Canada.

Brightidea is an online employee suggestion box to capture ideas and suggestions from employees. This is a paid service.

LinkedIn Learning, **Udemy** and **Coursera** offer a wide range of inclusive leadership courses that employees can participate in voluntarily to enhance their understanding and skills. Free and paid courses are available.

BetterUp or **CoachHub** provide access to personalized coaching for leaders, focusing on developing core competencies around team connection and leadership.

Project Implicit offers tools and resources for understanding and mitigating unconscious bias. This is a free service.

Harvard ManageMentor is a tool for management and leadership skill development. This is a paid service.

Coalition of Innovation Leaders Against Racism (CILAR) offers group mentorship programs for tech and innovation leaders to gain best practices in anti-racism and inclusivity.

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2 STRATEGY 2: ACTIVATE SPONSORS, ADVOCATES AND ALLIES.

Fostering a positive work environment is a team effort that requires support from sponsors, advocates, and allies who can champion inclusivity. Sponsors, advocates, and allies can be employees or colleagues of any level within an organization and may hold formal or informal authority. Regardless of organizational position, the impact of sponsors, advocates, and allies comes from their personal actions in advancing gender equity. While these champions are needed at all levels of an organization, having a member of the senior leadership team serve as a sponsor, advocate, or ally can help set an organizational tone for equity and inclusion in the workplace while also leveraging their formal influence to sponsor women leaders, advocate for the advancement of women in tech, and be an ally to people of marginalized genders. Importantly, male leaders are encouraged to take on these roles and responsibilities – given that the technology sector is predominately comprised of men, this is critical.

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TABLE 4. Action items and considerations for activating sponsors, advocates, and allies.

ACTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS		
	PEOPLE	PROCESS	DATA & TECHNOLOGY
• Engage sponsors, advocates, and allies in professional development opportunities where they can better understand the diverse skill sets of women in tech. • Provide employees with the knowledge and tools to be effective advocates for women leaders in tech. • Promote unconscious bias training to help team members recognize and correct biases before they impact decision-making. • Promote participation in mentorship programs and opportunities.	• Fostering psychological safety so all employees feel comfortable advocating for themselves and each other. • Encouraging internal networking among employees to build connections. • Raising awareness of gender equity programs in the workplace and broader sector so that women can access them and allies can refer to them.	• Providing/ promoting resources to help employees access internal and external opportunities to be a mentor or mentee.	• Leveraging technology platforms to facilitate connection between sponsors, advocates, and allies with women employees.

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RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP TO ENLIST SPONSORS, ADVOCATES, AND ALLIES WITHIN AN ORGANIZATION:

Lean In Circles are small peer groups that support women in tech, offering programs specifically for sponsors and allies. This is a free service.

Ten Thousand Coffees is a platform that matches people for virtual or in-person "coffee chats" based on shared interests and goals.

MentorcliQ or **Chronus** are mentoring platforms that facilitate matching of women with sponsors and advocates in tech, providing structured environments for mentorship and sponsorship. These are paid services.

Officevibe, **SurveyMonkey**, **CultureAmp**, and **Worktango** are platforms for hosting pulse surveys which can help assess the level of psychological safety within teams and use insights to implement targeted improvements. Free and paid options are available.

BetterUp provides personalized coaching focused on building work environments where employees feel safe to advocate for themselves and others. This is a paid service.

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CALL TO ACTION 3:
Identify and remove sources of bias in talent management processes.

Women in tech consulted by ICTC reported sentiments of bias and a perceived lack of fairness in hiring, promotions, and task distribution. These all pose barriers to career advancement for women in tech.[33] Unconscious biases often manifest when organizational policies and processes lack enforcement, implementation, or standardization. When performance evaluations lack structure, gender biases can influence feedback given to employees. For example, one woman engineer consulted by ICTC discussed her male manager, who avoided giving her direct feedback or constructive criticism because he did not want to "hurt her feelings."[34] This individual also noted that the opposite appeared to be true for her male counterparts, who frequently received direct feedback, which ultimately helped them grow professionally. A broader body of literature shows various examples of bias in performance reviews, instances that adversely impact many women and have pronounced impacts on women of colour.[35] For example, gender bias contributes to the gender pay gap as much as it affects the ability of women to advance in their careers.[36]

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33   Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

34   Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

35   Jeffrey H. Greenhaus, Saroj Parasuraman and Wayne M. Wormley, "Effects of Race on Organizational Experiences, Job Performance Evaluations, and Career Outcomes," Academy of Management Journal, 2017 https://journals.aom.org/doi/abs/10.5465/256352; Magid Igbaria and Jack J. Baroudi, "The Impact of Job Performance Evaluations on Career Advancement Prospects: An Examination of Gender Differences in the IS Workplace," MIS Quartely, 1995, https://www.jstor.org/stable/249713; Jeffrey H. Greenhaus, Saroj Parasuraman and Wayne M. Wormley, "Effects of Race on Organizational Experiences, Job Performance Evaluations, and Career Outcomes," Academy of Management Journal, 2017, https://journals.aom.org/doi/abs/10.5465/256352; Magid Igbaria, Jack J. Baroudi, "The Impact of Job Performance Evaluations on Career Advancement Prospects: An Examination of Gender Differences in the IS Workplace," MIS Quartely, 1995, https://www.jstor.org/stable/249713.

36   Jessica Schieder and Elise Gould, "'Women's work' and the gender pay gap: How discrimination, societal norms, and other forces affect women's occupational choices—and their pay," Economic Policy Institute, July 2016, https://www.epi.org/publication/womens-work-and-the-gender-pay-gap-how-discrimination-societal-norms-and-other-forces-affect-womens-occupational-choices-and-their-pay/

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When gender biases are left unchecked, they may result in discrimination. As detailed in the Canadian Human Rights Act, discrimination based on protected grounds such as sexual orientation, sex, gender identity, and gender expression can have serious legal repercussions.[37] Workplace discrimination can create a working atmosphere that hinders productivity, innovation, and creativity.

Addressing unconscious bias in talent management processes and ensuring discrimination is avoided altogether requires a two-pronged approach, as described in the following strategies:

1 Conduct audits on talent management processes to identify biases

2 Address biases through training and talent management transparency

Primary Accountability: The development and implementation of organizational policies related to internal mobility, compensation, and succession planning starts at the leadership level. While HR and legal professionals develop robust policies, senior leaders and team-level managers are accountable for implementing policies consistently and transparently within their teams. People leaders must also work to eliminate potential sources of bias that could influence decision-making processes. See the RACI matrix for more details (Table 11).

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37   Canadian Human Rights Commission, "What is Discrimination?" n.d., https://www.chrc-ccdp.gc.ca/en/about-human-rights/what-discrimination

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1 STRATEGY 1. CONDUCT AUDITS ON TALENT MANAGEMENT PROCESSES.

Periodic audits of policies and processes can help organizations identify systemic challenges, examine issues raised by staff, and comply with applicable employment legislation. These audits can identify risks related to talent management processes and can help mitigate potential biases that could create unfair career pathways.

TABLE 5. Action items and considerations for conducting audits on talent management processes to identify biases.

ACTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS		
	PEOPLE	**PROCESS**	**DATA & TECHNOLOGY**
• Conduct audits for gender equity and implement recommendations to address barriers. This may include quantifying gendered data on promotion rates, surveying employees, and identify factors that may be limiting career progression for women in tech. • Use gender-neutral language in corporate documents and policies. • Engage diverse perspectives when making talent decisions to mitigate potential bias in decision-making. • Ensure compliance with applicable employment legislation pertaining to gender discrimination. • Publish salary ranges in job postings in line with applicable regional employment legislation. • Conduct pay equity audits and implement equitable adjustments. • Publish gendered information on employee pay.	• Consider diverse perspectives when making talent management decisions to reflect diverse roles, experiences and demographics. • Communicate the intent of audits and how data will be used to inform action.	• Establish a commitment to action following the audit. • Establish policies that ensure audits are conducted regularly and are not a "one-off" activity. Audits should be used annually or bi-annually to monitor progress and make necessary adjustments.	• Leverage data to identify systemic barriers and potential opportunities for women employees. • Conduct benchmarking against external data, such as regional and sectoral trends. • Leverage employee experience survey data to assess progress.

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RESOURCES TO SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL AUDITS AND IDENTIFY SYSTEMIC CHALLENGES:

Equi'Vision is a Government of Canada Employment Equity tool that provides easily comparable data on representation rates and pay gaps of four designated groups. This is a free resource.

Software like **Syndio** provides solutions for conducting pay equity audits, identifying pay gaps and actionable recommendations to address these disparities. This is a paid service.

Textio is an augmented writing platform that helps incorporate gender-neutral language in job descriptions and corporate documents. This is a paid service.

HireVue provides skill-based hiring focusing on competencies through structured video interviewing, skills testing and assessments for multiple roles using AI. This is a paid service.

Gamified recruitment tools like The Talent Games, provide assessment and video interview capabilities in gamified contexts which can help mitigate bias in recruitment. This is a paid service.

Lattice is a performance-management software product that facilitates 360-degree feedback, goal setting, and performance reviews. This is a paid service.

The Gender Equity in the Digital Economy Assessment Tool provides organizations with an opportunity to audit their current levels of gender equity and tailor EDI recommendations for their organizations.

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2 STRATEGY 2: ADDRESS BIASES THROUGH TRAINING AND TALENT MANAGEMENT TRANSPARENCY.

Many women in tech consulted by ICTC noted a perceived lack of transparency in career-growth opportunities and talent management processes. When talent management lacks transparency, it can be easy for people managers to "cut corners" in processes, leading to uneven implementation of organizational policies or processes. This can result in unconscious biases affecting promotional decision-making and decreased engagement among women employees.

It is critical that organizations and individual leaders work together to create transparency in talent management processes. To do this, organizations should develop and implement standardized processes for talent management and communicate such processes to all staff. By pairing transparency with unconscious bias training, organizations in the digital economy will be able to create talent management processes that are fair and inclusive for all employees.

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TABLE 6. Action items and considerations for addressing biases through training and talent management transparency.

ACTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS		
	PEOPLE	PROCESS	DATA & TECHNOLOGY
• Build formal job matrices that identify the various job levels in the organization and the progressive levels of accountability and skills required at each level. • Leverage 360-degree feedback when assessing performance and potential. • Build pay equity using job evaluation methodologies that align job complexity with the job matrix. • Leverage organizational audits to inform the direction of unconscious bias training. • Establish goals for regular 1:1 check-ins between employees and people leaders to expand the discussion beyond projects and tasks to career goals and progression.	• Using job matrices and data-driven job evaluation methodologies to make objective decisions about role changes and promotions. • Ensuring feedback collected during 360 review processes is communicated to employees. • Setting goals and targets between people managers and employees to leverage 360 feedback for professional development. • Engaging in self-reflection and training to mitigate unconscious biases. • Normalizing career development conversations throughout the year, not only at set milestones in the performance cycle.	• Training people leaders on how to get the most value out of 360-degree feedback. • Equipping people leaders with the ability to use job matrices and other tools to guide conversations about career development and pathways. • Making job matrices accessible to all employees for greater transparency. • Hosting annual, organization-wide unconscious bias training. • Clarifying the role of leaders and individual employees in supporting employee career growth.	• Leveraging technology to capture 360-degree feedback. • Leveraging market data and tools to inform salary ranges.

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RESOURCES TO HELP ADDRESS UNCONSCIOUS BIASES THROUGH TRAINING AND TALENT MANAGEMENT TRANSPARENCY:

CompAnalyst by **Salary.com** is a tool for job analysis, documentation, and evaluation to create job matrices that align with organizational structures and compensation strategies. This is a paid service.

HR Technology such as **Workday**, **Lever**, **BambooHR**, and others can help track performance and career goals alongside other employee data to maintain a consistent record of employee career progression and identify systemic barriers. These are paid services.

Fuel Diversity and **Become a Better You** is a paid course offered by Udemy for leaders looking to identify and mitigate unconscious biases, improve workplace relationships, and build more inclusive workplaces.

The Canadian Diversity Initiative offers paid online courses on Unconscious Bias.

NonprofitReady.Org offers a free 30-minute course on unconscious bias that provides a high-level introduction to unconscious bias.

LinkedIn Learning also offers several training courses on unconscious bias, including the following:

- Unconscious Bias: Why identify your bias? by Stacey Gordon, Founder and CEO of Rework Work

- Confronting Bias: Thriving Across Our Differences by Arianna Huffington and Vernā Myers

- Addressing Unconscious Bias as a Leader by Stacey Gordon, Founder and CEO of Rework Work

- Nano Tips for Checking Your Bias: Becoming a People Advocate by Madison Butler

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CALL TO ACTION 4:
Create work environments that foster self-expression and diversity.

Employees are sometimes encouraged to bring their "whole selves" to work, but in reality, workplace practices and policies are not necessarily structured to effectively support this. In some cases, company health benefits may not meet diverse needs, such as gender affirmation support or mental health support, which can impact how individuals show up and perform at work. Described as the "lavender ceiling," systemic barriers for 2SLGBTQI+ individuals in the workplace can limit their professional advancement.

Through more inclusive practices that foster self-expression and diversity, companies can help dismantle barriers for diverse workers. When done effectively, employee resource groups (ERGs) can provide employees a safe space to share feedback and co-create policies and practices that encourage self-expression. 2SLGBTGI+ individuals engaged and consulted by ICTC especially highlighted the importance of enhancements to group health benefits for fostering self-expression in the workplace.[38]

Organizations can adopt two key strategies to proactively create work environments that foster self-expression and diversity:

1 Establish policies and practices that address the diverse needs of employees.

2 Implement mechanisms to achieve equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) goals.

Primary Accountability: HR teams, in partnership with leadership, are instrumental in building policies and practices that enable employees to bring their whole and best selves to work. Senior leaders can also play a role by sponsoring the development of ERGs, which ensure that company policies and benefits are developed collaboratively with impacted groups (e.g., 2SLGBTGI+). That said, smaller companies may be limited in their ability to customize benefits plans, which can be interpreted as a reflection of the need for broader system-level change. See the RACI matrix for more details (Table 11).

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38   Maryna Ivus, Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Midlevel Talent," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/gender-equity-in-canadas-tech-ecosystem.

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1 STRATEGY 1: ESTABLISH POLICIES THAT ADDRESS THE DIVERSE NEEDS OF EMPLOYEES.

Some workplace policies and practices are built with assumptions about gender norms and associated needs. For some employees, these assumptions can impact their sense of belonging in the workplace and overall job satisfaction.[39]

TABLE 7. Action items and considerations for establishing policies that address diverse needs.

ACTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS		
	PEOPLE	PROCESS	DATA & TECHNOLOGY
• Develop policies that address gender identity and expression in the workplace. • Ensure benefits are relevant to the needs of 2SLGBTQI+ employees, such as ensuring parental leave is gender inclusive and not only for mothers. • Support gender transitions in the workplace.	• Engage diverse perspectives in the development and execution of policies and procedures to ensure that they don't limit self-expression (e.g., dress codes). • Provide guidance to people leaders on best practices for supporting employees undergoing gender transitions.	• Work with external benefit providers to access benefits that are relevant to the needs of 2SLGBTQI+ employees where possible. • Consider providing health spending accounts or other more flexible health benefit funds to support needs that are not covered through the group benefits provider.	• Leveraging technology to promote resources and tools that can address employees' needs and provide access to support.

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39   Mara Cadinu, Anne Maass, Alessandra Rosabianca, & Jeff Kiesner, "Why do women underperform under stereotype threat? Evidence for the role of negative thinking," Psychological Science, Vol. 16, pp. 572 – 578, July 2005, https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih. gov/16008792/; Claude Steele, Steven Spencer, & Joshua Aronson, J. "Contending with group image: The psychology of stereotype and social identity threat," In M. Zanna (Ed.), Advances in Experimental Social Psychology, 2002, Vol. 23, pp. 379 – 440, New York: Academic Press

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RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF INCLUSIVE WORKPLACE POLICIES:

Federal 2SlGBTQI+ Action Plan... Building our future with pride is an action plan developed by Women and Gender Equality (WAGE) Canada outlining commitments to advancing rights for 2SLGBTQI+ Canadians. This action plan is informed by extensive engagement with 2SLGBTQI+ Canadians and provides actionable items relevant to the private and public sectors.

Gender-based Analysis Plus is a free course offered by the Government of Canada, which teaches gender-based analysis, which is a systems-based and intersectional approach to research, program, and policy development. Principles outlined in the course can be leveraged by organizations to ensure new policies meet the needs of gender-diverse individuals.

League is a health benefits platform that offers flexible health benefits for employees. This is a paid service.

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2 STRATEGY 2: IMPLEMENT BEST PRACTICES TO ACHIEVE EDI GOALS.

Equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) goals are only effective when backed by an actionable plan and organization-wide support. The action plan should detail a "roadmap" that is informed by minority groups, such as women in tech, people of colour, and 2SLGBTGI+ individuals. Importantly, EDI goals should not be viewed by the organization or its employees as "just another box to check."[40] Instead, EDI goals must be backed by a genuine commitment, especially from senior leaders.

The ways EDI goals are developed, communicated, and acted on are critical to their success. For instance, the rhetoric and framing of EDI goals is a determining factor in their success. A 2016 study published by the Harvard Business Review explained that prescriptive strategies that use "command and control" rhetoric that force employees to change can backfire.[41] Instead of "blame and shame" rhetoric that blames men for a toxic culture, communication strategies for EDI goals should highlight the positive impacts of gender equity strategies.[42] By framing EDI goals related to gender equity in a positive manner, organizations will have higher chances of achieving such goals.[43]

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40 Maryna Ivus, Maya Watson, "Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem: Attracting, Retaining, and Supporting Entry- and Mid-Level Talent," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), May 2022, Gender Equity in Canada's Tech Ecosystem | ICTC (ictc-ctic.ca).

41 Frank Dobbin and Alexandra Kalev, "Why Diversity Programs Fail," Harvard Business Review, July 1, 2016, https://hbr.org/2016/07/why-diversity-programs-fail.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid.

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TABLE 8. Action items and considerations for implementing best practices and achieve EDI goals.

ACTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS		
	PEOPLE	PROCESS	DATA & TECHNOLOGY
• Build open communication through employee resource groups (ERGs). • Create action plans to deliver on equity, diversity, and inclusion (EDI) strategies and set associated targets. • Develop a positive communications strategy related to EDI goals.	• Clearly communicating the intent of ERGs and their scope of responsibility within the organization. • Clearly communicating the reasoning and intended outcomes of EDI goals.	• Developing a clear process for ERG formation and participation. • Leveraging feedback from ERGs when creating action plans. • Developing a frequently asked questions (FAQ) document for employees to better understand the intention behind EDI goals and action plans. • Providing communications templates and guidelines for leaders and managers to ensure a unified front on EDI strategies.	• Leveraging project management tools and intranets to share progress on EDI priorities and upcoming EDI-related initiatives.

RESOURCES THAT CAN SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONS IN ADOPTING BEST PRACTICES TO ACHIEVE EDI GOALS:

Monday.com is a project management tool which can be used to outline and track EDI action plans and to manage different ERGs by setting clear objectives, assigning tasks, setting deadlines, and monitoring progress toward achieving EDI targets.

A More Equitable Rebound: Inclusive Career Mobility and Advancement Beyond COVID-19 details a step-by-step process of EDI strategy development for transparent career advancement among equity-deserving groups. This is a publicly available report offered by ICTC.

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CALL TO ACTION 5:

Foster work–life balance through family–friendly values and processes.

Technology companies are sometimes characterized by "hustle culture" and "burnout culture," neither of which are conducive to work–life balance or parenthood.[44] Mothers in science, technology, mathematics, and engineering (STEM) consulted by ICTC noted that oftentimes, career progression can stall or stop after becoming a mother.[45] Some mothers noted that it was challenging to balance caregiving duties with work responsibilities. Others explained that taking career gaps to prioritize motherhood was frowned upon in the industry and often questioned when trying to return to work.[46]

A 2021 survey by the STEM Moms Network took a deeper look into the experiences of STEM mothers across Canada. The survey found that, upon returning to work from maternity leave, many women had to revert to a junior position, lacked the energy needed to reclimb the corporate ladder, lost touch with professional networks, and were not notified about opportunities for career progression.[47] Some surveyed mothers said they had trouble finding STEM positions that met their work–life balance needs and ended up leaving the STEM workforce to work in a non–technical role.[48]

44 Julie Hawco, "Is the Transition to Motherhood Correlated to the Issue of Retention for Mid-career Women in STEM?" STEM Moms Project, September 2023, https://stemmomsproject.com/.

45 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

46 Ibid.

47 Julie Hawco, "Is the Transition to Motherhood Correlated to the Issue of Retention for Mid-career Women in STEM?" STEM Moms Project, September 2023, https://stemmomsproject.com/.

48 Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy ; https://stemmomsproject.com/.

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To help more women remain in their STEM careers upon becoming a parent, it is critical that organizations and leaders encourage family-friendly values and work-life balance. This can be achieved through the following strategies:

1   Implement family-friendly policies and standard operating procedures.

2   Create work environments that encourage mental well-being and work-life balance.

Primary Accountability: Leadership and Human Resources must work together to design family-friendly workplace policies practices, and cultural norms. Senior leaders should also be willing to lead by example by practicing healthy work-life balance themselves and encouraging their teams to balance work and personal responsibilities. See RACI matrix for more details (Table 11).

1 STRATEGY 1: IMPLEMENT FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES AND STANDARD OPERATING PROCEDURES.

It is common for employees to experience changes in their personal lives, such as a transition to parenthood or a transition back to the workforce following a career gap. Limited workplace support can add avoidable stress and concerns for these employees. With effective family-friendly policies and standard operating procedures, organizations can ensure that guidance and support are provided during such times. Policies may relate to benefits, while procedures may relate to formalized plans and to ensure employees have smooth transitions to and from parental leave.

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TABLE 9. Action items and considerations for implementing family-friendly policies and standard operating procedures.

ACTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS		
	PEOPLE	PROCESS	DATA & TECHNOLOGY
• Review policies to ensure they prioritize family-friendly values, work-life balance, and mental well-being. • Facilitate a smooth transition to parental leave by completing performance reviews, offboarding plans, and hiring a replacement prior to the start of parental leave. • During parental leave, maintain connection with employees to ensure they have the option to participate in workplace events and are notified of new job opportunities. • Schedule a pre-return meeting, which should address return-to-work plans, provide opportunities for flexible work options and update health and benefits if needed. • Provide holistic family planning policies and benefits that support all potential stages and paths, such as adoption, surrogacy, assisted reproductive procedures, and miscarriages. • Offer hybrid, remote, and in-person flexibility. • Include mental health supports in employee benefits.	• Using non-gendered ways of communicating about parental leave, i.e., avoiding terminology like "maternal" or "paternal." • Setting clear accountabilities for employees and people leaders throughout the process so that employees know how they will be supported and what is expected of them.	• Implementing review cycles to ensure policies and standard operating procedures align with the evolving needs of employees and the external landscape. • Host routine meetings or lunch and learn sessions with people leaders to ensure new policies and standard operating procedures are understood and correctly applied.	• Leverage human resources information systems (HRIS) to capture leave related data in an official employee record.

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RESOURCES TO SUPPORT THE IMPLEMENTATION OF FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES AND BEST PRACTICES:

When I Work is a tool to manage and communicate about flexible schedules. This is a paid service.

Platforms like **Mailchimp** or **Workshop** or email can be used to communicate with employees on leave and ensure these employees are aware of important updates, achievements, and opportunities within the company. These are paid services.

Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential report by ICTC offers additional guidance on best practices for supporting parents in their transitions to and from parental leave or other career gaps.

STEM Moms Final Report: Is the transition to motherhood correlated to the issue of retention for mid-career Women in STEM? This report is researched and written by Julie Hawco, P. Eng and STEM Mother. It draws upon primary data collected from STEM mothers across Canada and outlines key recommendations for policies and procedures that can help support STEM mothers.

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2 STRATEGY 2: CREATE WORK ENVIRONMENTS THAT ENCOURAGE MENTAL WELL-BEING AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE.

While formal policies and procedures can help set a precedent, lasting impacts typically come from day-to-day practices and norms. Through collaborative efforts, organizations and individuals in the digital economy can work together to create a positive work environment that encourages employees to prioritize mental well-being and work-life balance. Providing this balance is critical in ensuring that women in tech do not have to choose between motherhood and career progression.

TABLE 10. Action items and considerations for creating work environments that encourage mental well-being and work-life balance.

ACTIONS	CONSIDERATIONS		
	PEOPLE	PROCESS	DATA & TECHNOLOGY
• Ensure professional development and networking opportunities take place during regular working hours. • Encourage flexibility in work hours, such as "flex hours," to allow parents to have the time to attend to caregiving duties in the mornings or afternoons.	• Leadership by example with leaders not responding to emails or messages while on vacation. • Raising awareness of mental health resources and other supports that employees can access confidentially.	• Equipping people leaders with clear guidance and direction on how to execute key steps and documentation required as an employee transitions into and/or returns from parental leave. • Promoting mental well-being day-to-day by encouraging employees to set focus time and commute times (as applicable) in their calendars. • Encouraging the use of vacation time and establishing norms for disconnecting from work such as preparing a delegate team member while on vacation.	• Encouraging employees to turn on automatic email replies when they are "out of office." • Leveraging technology platforms for employees to access confidential and timely mental health support.

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RESOURCES THAT CAN HELP CREATE WORK ENVIRONMENTS THAT ENCOURAGE MENTAL WELL-BEING AND WORK-LIFE BALANCE:

Headspace and **LinkedIn** have teamed up to provide meditation and life skills centred around work. This is a paid service.

Microsoft Viva Insights is a tool that is integrated within Microsoft Office365 and offers employees confidential insights into their well-being at work and suggests and holds focus time on the Outlook calendar. This is a paid service.

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ASSIGNING RESPONSIBILITIES:
A RACI Matrix for Tech Organizations

RACI is an acronym which stands for "Responsible, Accountable, Consulted, Informed" and is commonly used in project management in the form of a matrix.[49] RACI matrices are used to delineate roles and responsibilities across various stakeholder groups involved in the development and delivery of a project (Figure 1).

R

RESPONSIBLE: These individuals are responsible for executing the action item or delivering tasks for a project.

A

ACCOUNTABLE: These individuals answer for the project's success and are generally the face of the work to all other stakeholders.

C

CONSULTED: These individuals are engaged in the project or action item as needed for their input or subject matter expertise.

I

INFORMED: These stakeholders hold the lightest level of involvement in the project. They should be provided with updates on the project's progress or key outcomes but are not responsible for any deliverables.

FIGURE 1. Outlining the principles of RACI: what does it mean to be responsible, accountable, consulted, or informed in a project?

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49   Dana Miranda, Rob Watts, "What Is A RACI Chart? How This Project Management Tool Can Boost Your Productivity," Forbes Advisor, December 14, 2022, https://www.forbes.com/advisor/business/raci-chart/.

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As seen in Section A of this report, building equitable career advancement opportunities for women in tech requires efforts from many individuals within technology ecosystems. Some actions are better carried out by human resources departments, while others may have more impact coming from senior leaders or people managers. To ensure clarity on the roles and responsibilities of each action item, ICTC has developed a RACI matrix to guide the implementation of each "call to action" directed toward individuals and organizations (Table 11).

The RACI matrix identifies the distribution of expected roles and accountabilities across four main stakeholder groups: C-Suite/ Senior Leaders, People Leaders, Human Resources, and Employees. C-Suite/Senior Leaders refer to the top-most level of leadership within the company who have decision-making authority and hold formal and informal influence. People Leaders refer to direct managers who provide day-to-day guidance for individual employees. "Human Resources" refers to an individual or team responsible for personnel-related processes and guidance and typically works in partnership with senior leaders and people leaders to implement best practices that protect the needs of employees as well as the company. "Employees" refer to all individuals retained by the company on a full-time, part-time, or contract basis and include women employees as well as their colleagues.

The RACI matrix provides the expected distribution of roles and responsibilities for a typical technology company. Across most calls to action, the C-suite/senior leaders hold accountability, while human resources hold responsibility for executing action items. Meanwhile, people leaders and employees should typically be consulted and informed. This structure of responsibility helps build and sustain cultural changes by having the leadership set the tone for the organization. In many instances, senior leaders are also recommended to take responsibility for executing action items, which may include acting as a role model or champion for EDI initiatives. In other instances, the responsibility resides with human resources or people leaders. Throughout all calls to action, it is recommended that technology organizations consult and inform employees.

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For a given project or action item, one stakeholder can hold multiple roles, and one role can be spread across multiple stakeholders. For example, multiple stakeholders or individuals could be consulted on the project and be responsible for executing it. Additionally, one stakeholder could hold accountability and responsibility for a project. That said, it is best to have only one individual or stakeholder accountable for the project to help maintain clear ownership and accountability for the work.

TABLE 11. RACI matrix, which outlines which stakeholders should be responsible (R), accountable (A), Consulted (C), Informed (I) in the implementation of each "call to action" and strategy outlined in this toolkit. This RACI matrix is designed specifically for technology organizations who seek to create equitable pathways for women and other people of marginalized genders to grow and advance in the tech sector.

	ORGANIZATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS				
CALLS TO ACTION	**STRATEGIES**	**C-SUITE/SENIOR LEADERS**	**PEOPLE LEADERS**	**HUMAN RESOURCES**	**EMPLOYEES**
Provide equal access to opportunities for visibility, networking, and recognition	Facilitate organic interactions and internal networking opportunities	A/I	C	R	C
	Provide thought leadership and external networking opportunities	A/R	R	C/I	C
Build inclusive organizational cultures	Promote inclusive leadership principles in day-to-day practices	A/R	R	C/I	I
	Activate sponsors, advocates, and allies	A/R	R	R/C	C/I

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	ORGANIZATIONAL STAKEHOLDERS				
CALLS TO ACTION	STRATEGIES	C-SUITE/SENIOR LEADERS	PEOPLE LEADERS	HUMAN RESOURCES	EMPLOYEES
Identify and remove sources of bias in talent management processes	Conduct audits on talent management processes	A	C	R	I
	Address biases through training and talent management transparency	A/R	C	R	C/I
Create work environments that foster self-expression and diversity	Establish policies that address the diverse needs of employees	A	C	R	C/I
	Implement best practices to achieve EDI goals	A	C	R	C/I
Foster work-life balance through family-friendly values and processes	Implement family-friendly policies and standard operating procedures	A	C	R	C/I
	Create work environments that encourage mental well-being and work-life balance	A	C	R	C/I

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SECTION B
Closing the Gender Gap: Actions and Strategies for Ecosystem Players

While organizations and individuals can make meaningful contributions to advancing gender equity, some challenges exist systemically and are better addressed at the ecosystem level. For example, gender stereotypes are often perpetuated by social systems. These stereotypes can lead to young women having preconceived notions about tech leadership and may result in self-selection out of higher-level roles or entrepreneurial pathways.

By taking meaningful and collaborative action, players at the ecosystem level can serve as catalysts for gender equity across the digital economy. This section details two calls to action directed at ecosystem players, including the following:

1 **Call to Action 1: Address gender stereotypes by elevating and supporting women in tech.**

2 **Call to Action 2: Close the gender gap among founders.**

Ecosystem-level players differ in structure and operations from individual organizations. As such, this section does not mirror Section A, which provides operational considerations and a RACI matrix outlining the roles and responsibilities of each stakeholder group. Instead, this section provides a broader overview of action items to advance women in tech at the ecosystem level. It is intended to inspire flexible actions, which can be tailored depending on the ecosystem-level group (e.g., government, technology accelerators, or investors). Importantly, it is recommended the technology ecosystem work collaboratively with one another to enact meaningful change.

CALL TO ACTION 1:
Address gender stereotypes by elevating and supporting women in tech.

Several women consulted by ICTC noted that gender stereotypes about women in tech and women in leadership prevail today.[50] The proliferation of these stereotypes can cause young women to opt out of the technology sector and out of leadership roles – further widening the gender gap in tech.[51] To overcome these stereotypes, attendees at a co-design workshop hosted by ICTC expressed that ecosystem players could help combat gender stereotypes by celebrating the successes of women leaders in the technology sector. By celebrating and showcasing successful women in tech, young women will be able to look up to successful women, and hopefully, see themselves as capable of holding similar positions. In addition to this, the technology ecosystem can provide resources, such as training, to organizations and individuals so that they themselves can enact change.

1 STRATEGY 1: CELEBRATE THE SUCCESSES OF WOMEN IN TECH LEADERSHIP.

Gender stereotypes can either be perpetuated or combatted through corporate media and events. By telling positive stories about women in tech, ecosystem players can showcase tech as an industry where people of all genders can find success. This can be done through awareness campaigns and industry-wide initiatives that celebrate the successes of women in tech.

KEY ACTIONS MAY INCLUDE:

- Hosting events, such as webinars, panel discussions, and speaking engagements that provide women in tech a platform to share their innovative ideas and thought leadership.

- Hosting social media campaigns that elevate women in tech.

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50   Allison Clark, Justin Ratcliffe, Mansharn Sangha (Toor), "Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential," Information and Communications Technology Council (ICTC), June 2023, https://ictc-ctic.ca/reports/empowering-women-in-the-digital-economy.

51   Ekaterina Netchaeva, "Women are still less likely to aspire to leadership in business, despite decades of gender initiatives – we need to find out why," The Conversation, 2022, https://theconversation.com/women-are-still-lesslikely-to-aspire-to-leadership-in-business-despite-decades-of-gender-initiatives-we-need-to-find-out-why-185796.

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2 STRATEGY 2: PREPARE AND EQUIP CHANGE MAKERS WITH RESOURCES.

Ecosystem players such as industry associations, sectoral councils, and other support organizations can play a crucial role in advancing EDI within the tech industry by developing programs and services that prepare change makers to champion inclusive practices. When partnering with experts, thought leaders, and academia, ecosystem-level organizations can design comprehensive training programs, courses, workshops, and educational resources aimed at equipping industry leaders with the knowledge, skills, and tools necessary to drive meaningful change.

KEY ACTIONS MAY INCLUDE:

- Developing courses and programs to prepare, coach and empower industry leaders.

- Collaborating with academic institutions and research organizations to conduct studies on gender diversity, leadership effectiveness, and organizational culture in the tech sector.

- Producing resources and tools for leaders that distill key research findings and policy insights related to gender equity.

- Hosting informational webinars and events that provide change makers with resources and tools to address gender stereotypes and boost diversity.

- Establishing mentorship programs that pair industry leaders with aspiring women leaders.

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CALL TO ACTION 2:
Close the gender gap among founders.

While the gender gap among founders is a complex issue, the technology ecosystem has a role to play in ensuring women have access to the resources, relationships, and capital needed to start technology companies. Technology incubators, accelerators, and investors can support aspiring women entrepreneurs by facilitating introductions, building relationships, and supporting networking.

1 STRATEGY 1: SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMMING FOR WOMEN

Ecosystem-level organizations, such as incubators and accelerators, can provide tailored programs to support women at different stages of their entrepreneurial journey, which is essential. To ensure the effectiveness and relevance of these initiatives, they should be co-created, designed, and delivered in partnership with women and people in marginalized communities, grounded in their lived experiences.

KEY ACTIONS PERTAINING TO SUPPORTIVE PROGRAMMING INCLUDE:

- Consulting with women to identify gaps in current entrepreneurial supports.

- Co-develop mentorship programs and services that help women develop and strengthen their pitches, business plans, and budgets, and prepare for questions from funders.

- Establish supplier-diversity programs and include a list of diverse suppliers for business leaders to access.

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2 STRATEGY 2: INVEST IN WOMEN FOUNDERS

Ensuring women have access to growth capital is a necessary part of closing the founder gap. Investors such as venture capital firms can help by ensuring women-founded companies are included among their portfolio companies. Another way to make capital available to women is by creating specific funds for women-founded companies or companies with diverse founders. For example, the Business Development Bank of Canada's Women in Technology Venture Fund was developed recently to allocate funding exclusively to women-led technology startups.[52]

Investors can also help increase the representation of women in leadership by recruiting women board members who have the expertise needed to support company growth. Importantly, diversity among founders and board members can help to ensure companies are rich in intellectual diversity, which can support problem solving, innovation, and overall business development.

SPECIFIC ACTIONS THAT INVESTORS CAN TAKE INCLUDE:

- Setting targets for evaluating the number of companies founded by diverse identifies or the businesses they fund that have diverse boards and executive teams.

- Strengthening and growing relationships with women founders and women-led organizations.

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52 Josh Scott, "With New Thrive Platform, BDC Commits Half a Billion Dollars to Invest in Canadian Women-Led Startups and Funds," BetaKit, September 21,2022, https://betakit.com/with-new-thrive-platform-bdc-commits-half-a-billion-dollars-to-invest-in-canadian-women-led-startups-and-funds/#:~:text=Through%20its%20WIT%20Venture%20Fund%2C%20BDC%20allocated%20%24180,Bridgit%2C%20HiMama%2C%20Manifest%20Climate%2C%20Odaia%2C%20TealBook%2C%20and%20Waabi.

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Conclusion

This gender equity toolkit serves as a comprehensive blueprint for stakeholders, organizations, and the broader ecosystem to promote the advancement of women to leadership roles within the digital economy. Rooted in primary research findings and informed by the barriers outlined in the ICTC's Empowering Women in the Digital Economy: Addressing Tech's Untapped Potential report, this toolkit offers a detailed roadmap of action items and strategies crucial for advancing women in Canada's digital economy.

Given the complexity of organizational change, ICTC has provided considerations for people, processes, and data and technology to accompany each strategy. Additionally, a RACI matrix has been developed to identify the stakeholder groups, such as C-suite/senior leaders, people managers, human resources, and employees, who should be responsible, accountable, consulted, and informed in the implementation of each call to action. Together, this provides a robust framework for organizations in the digital economy to support and advance women and other people of diverse identities in the digital economy.

By adopting and implementing the actionable steps outlined in the toolkit, key stakeholders can collectively work toward fostering an inclusive and supportive ecosystem where women can thrive. By taking a nimble, open-minded, yet dedicated approach, the calls to action outlined in this toolkit offer a pathway toward a more equitable, diverse, and inclusive digital economy.