



Championing Women in Business in Canada

A toolkit to help employers recruit, retain and promote more women and bring them onto boards

Introduction

It is now well-known that the pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on women in the workforce. They face the crushing pressures of working from home in demanding professional jobs while juggling family obligations that tend to fall on their shoulders more than their male counterparts. They also dominated the sectors that had the pandemic impacted most significantly – retail, food services, health care etc.

In many cases, women are not only taking care of their children, but also elderly parents and relatives as well, and bearing the brunt of domestic responsibilities. Some have had no choice but to scale back in their jobs, reconsider advancement ambitions, or leave the workforce altogether. Others have excelled in the workplace, either in senior roles or as entrepreneurs. But that has come at a tremendous cost to their mental health and personal lives.

Women in business face barriers, including microaggression, burnout, pay inequity, discrimination, as well as a lack of mentors and allies.

All of these issues have broader economic implications, given the pandemic also laid bare a shortage of skilled labour in Canada. Even as some sectors were decimated, others boomed. Many companies are still [struggling to hire](#) the workers they need.

Significantly increasing the number of women in business and in senior leadership roles is vital to address this imbalance. Critical to this effort is tailoring upskilling and reskilling training to the realities of women's needs and lifestyles, confronting discrimination and bias, and setting women up to succeed.

A concerted effort to champion women in Canadian business is not just about gender equality, it's an economic issue. Companies with more women in executive teams are [more likely](#) to outperform on profitability, value creation, customer satisfaction, and employee engagement.



When women reach their full potential in the workplace, the whole economy grows and all Canadians reap the benefits. This playbook toolkit contains practical steps to help employers recruit, retain and promote more women into leadership positions and onto boards.

Acknowledgement

We'd like to thank Compass Rose for their collaboration on this effort.

Issues: State of Women in Business in 2022

- Employment losses by women have **started to rebound** from earlier in the pandemic. However, a **“leaky talent pipeline”** means women remain **significantly underrepresented** higher on the corporate ladder.
- While there has been progress in boosting the number of women in top positions in corporate Canada, they still only make up about **18%** of executive teams. Barriers preventing women from reaching the C-suite and boards include **a limited candidate pool**, a **lack of recognition** of women leaders and a **lack of diversity-driven recruitment**.
- **Racialized women** held 6.4% of board seats held by women, 7.4% of female executive officer roles, and 11.5% of female roles in the pipeline to the executive officer level. One factor affecting the career progression of racialized women is **microaggression** — insults, comments or gestures charged with sexism and racism.
- Women are more likely than men to be **discouraged by detailed job descriptions**. An often-cited statistic is that women **only apply** if they think they meet 100% of the qualifications, while men will apply even if they only meet 60%.
- Women make up **approximately** 45% of all entry-level employees but only 25% of vice-presidents and 15% of CEOs. **Only three women are promoted to manager for every four men**. When it comes to advancing from director to vice-president roles, men advance at triple the rate of women.
- Caregiving realities of the pandemic have had an impact on retention and promotion of women. **Working mothers have consistently put in fewer weekly hours** at the office than fathers. In the first year of the pandemic, **12 times as many** mothers as fathers left jobs to care for toddlers or school-aged children.
- Despite facing stress and burnout, **many women have excelled and persevered in the business world** — taking on extra work, launching new companies, and stepping up to support their teams in advancing diversity, equity and inclusion efforts. However, this work is often **not financially recognized** even though it **drives better outcomes** for all employees.



- Even at the most senior levels, women face **barriers to reaching a level playing field** with men due to male-centric norms around leadership, which are behaviors and roles typically associated with male leaders. While representation of women on the boards of Canadian companies is slowly increasing, they still only hold **21.5% of all board seats** among TSX-listed companies.
- Addressing gender equality will pay dividends in the broader national economy. If steps are taken to level the playing field for women, Canada could add \$150 billion in incremental GDP in 2026 or see a 0.6% increase of annual GDP growth.

Practical steps to help employers recruit, retain, and promote more women and bring them onto boards

There are four main areas to supporting women in the workplace and setting them up to succeed. The following table provides suggestions that companies of all sizes in Canada can adapt to their unique culture and circumstances, as well as resources to help you get started. It doesn't matter where or how you start, the important thing is to start!

	Actions	Implementation resources
RECRUIT	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Expand candidate pools by supporting internal mobility, going beyond your typical recruiting channels, and reviewing your benefits package to ensure it reflects the needs of women. ○ Examine job descriptions to ensure they don't inadvertently discourage women from applying. ○ Provide "train-to-hire" options for women to give them on-the-job experience that will propel them into jobs they currently consider out of their reach. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ <u>Tips</u> for recruiting more women to your company. ○ How <u>mentorship</u> can help businesses fill labour gaps. ○ <u>Learn</u> how to recognize and address implicit bias. ○ Leverage <u>tools</u> for interrupting bias in hiring. ○ <u>Actionable tips</u> for building a diverse candidate pool.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve human resources policies to ensure women have the supports they need to succeed, such as flexible work arrangements, anti-harassment policies, parental leave, and mental health first aid training. ○ Implement bias training to help understand how even implicit bias can play a role in excluding women from hiring and promotion. ○ Track hiring outcomes to ensure diversity, equity and inclusion in your workplace. 	
<p>RETAIN</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Strive for equal pay in your workplace by annually re-grading jobs. ○ Provide training/upskilling resources to ensure professional development for women who want to move up the ladder. ○ Promote mentorship within your team to help fill gaps and develop skill sets. ○ Create hybrid/back to office policies that focus on diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI). ○ Allow flexibility for child care support so mothers don't have to choose between their families and getting ahead at work. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How to craft a hybrid work schedule: templates, tools and tips. ○ Tips for getting allyship right in the workforce. ○ Examples of what being an ally at work really looks like. ○ DEI policy template and DEI playbook ○ Change together guidebook to help companies be more inclusive and productive. ○ Examples of human resource policies that help women to thrive. ○ Fostering a mentally healthy workplace.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create an internal awareness campaign which highlights the barriers women face in the workplace ○ Provide DEI training to build allyship and communicate expectations for employees on what constitutes an inclusive culture. ○ Include DEI/well-being support in the job descriptions for managers so they are aware of their role in creating an inclusive workplace.. ○ Implement human resources policies to eliminate discrimination. ○ Support employee mental health and address burnout which is particularly pervasive among parents. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ How Employers Can Help Women Who Are Returning To Work. ○ Toolkit to implement the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace (free online training).
<p>PROMOTE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Create bias training for performance reviews to ensure equitable promotion to manager positions and address the “broken rung” phenomenon — where women fall off the corporate ladder the higher up they go. ○ Track promotion outcomes to see how women are advancing in your workplace. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Tips for supporting effective career path planning and development. ○ Ways to encourage women to chart their career paths. ○ Strategies for empowering female employees. ○ List of networks for women entrepreneurs across Canada.



	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Hold senior leaders accountable and provide financial incentives for progress on diversity goals○ Recognize and reward women leaders for their achievements, particularly around DEI that drives better outcomes for their organizations.○ Provide networking opportunities for women to connect with senior leaders and other women who can become their champions.○ Provide mentorship opportunities to help connect women with other successful women to build confidence and leadership skills.○ Ensure women have sponsors who can advocate for their accomplishments and potential, connect them to others in their network, and recommend them for bigger roles.○ Improve procurement/supplier diversity to better level the playing field for women competing for business opportunities with male-run companies.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ <u>Leverage</u> organizations like WBE Canada, which bridges public and corporate procurement and Canadian women business enterprises.○ <u>Improve</u> access to mentorships and <u>sponsorships</u>.○ <u>Provide</u> regular, constructive and actionable feedback.
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<p>GET ON BOARDS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Improve board diversity by recruiting and attracting more women to board positions. ○ Address key barriers that even highly qualified women face when it comes to being candidates for board positions. ○ Ensure board skill and experience requirements are aligned to corporate governance realities of the current economic climate. ○ Put in place board readiness training and mentoring programs for women to widen the pipeline. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Playbook for getting women on boards. ○ Guide: Stacking Your Board for Diversity. ○ Strategies to get more women of colour on boards. ○ Tools to help women with career planning and getting board ready. ○ Actions organizations and leaders can take for a more inclusive workplace.
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Additional resources

Recruiting, retaining and promoting women

- Government of Canada: [Women and the workplace – How employers can advance equality and diversity – Report from the Symposium on Women and the Workplace](#)
- McKinsey & Co., in partnership with LeanIn.org: [Women in the Workplace report](#)
- Careers in Construction: [Organizations that help women to get started in the construction trades](#)
- Catalyst: [10 Big Issues Women Face at Work and What Leaders Can Do to Help](#)

Getting more women into executive positions and boards

- Women In Capital Markets: [Resource for board chairs, senior leaders and recruiters to identify and locate qualified women for board positions in finance.](#)
- Harvard Business Review: [Women Rising: The Unseen Barriers](#)
- 30% Club and Catalyst: [Women in Leadership at S&P/TSX Companies](#)
- Institute for Corporate Directors: [Board Diversity Policy template](#)



Building an inclusive workplace

- Mercer: [The Time is Now: Addressing Diversity, Equity, & Inclusion in the Workplace](#)
- Deloitte: [2019 state of inclusion survey — “The bias barrier: Allyships, inclusion and everyday behaviours”](#)
- Catalyst: [Building Inclusion for Indigenous Peoples in Canadian Workplaces](#)
- Osler: [Diversity disclosure practices: Diversity and leadership at Canadian public companies](#)

Addressing well-being of women in the workplace

- Mental Health Commission of Canada: [Catalyst – May 2021 – Supporting women’s mental health in and out of the workplace](#)
- Harvard Business Review: [What’s Really Holding Women Back?](#)
- Workplace Strategies for Mental Health (Canada Life): [Workplace mental health](#)
- Morneau Shepell: [Mental health for people leaders during COVID-19: Leading on the edge](#)