



Strategic Planning for Increasing Women's Participation in the Computing Industry

WORKBOOK



An NCWIT Industry Resource
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This workbook presents guidelines for strategic planning to reach gender parity in technology companies or departments. It should be helpful for those working independently, but assistance from an independent consultant with appropriate expertise also would be helpful. Contact info@ncwit.org for more information.



INTRODUCTION: A BLUEPRINT FOR SUSTAINED INCREASES IN WOMEN'S PARTICIPATION

Technical companies or departments typically seek gender parity for one or more of the following reasons:

- increasing access to the best talent
- improving innovation, productivity, competitiveness, and the bottom line
- fulfilling an ethical commitment to diversity and equity

What Counts as Parity?

Quantitative and qualitative parity is achieved in technical companies or departments when conditions such as the following exist:

- The percentage of women in technical positions equals the percentage of men in similar positions, or equals the percentage of women in the workforce.
- Men and women are retained in the company or department at similar rates.
- Women represent close to 50% of new hires.
- Men's and women's career trajectories, promotion patterns, and/or salaries for similar work are similar.
- Men's and women's participation in innovation activities, leadership, and other rewarded tasks are similar both in rate and quality.

Why a Strategic Plan?

Most worthwhile efforts require a plan. For example, if you build a new home, you would first draw up a master plan before putting up new walls, plumbing, or electricity. In the same way, accomplishing gender parity in technical organizations requires a strategic plan.

Strategic planning for gender parity helps an organization:

- create a vision for women's participation.
- identify specific and reasonable goals.
- choose relevant interventions and activities coordinated to reinforce each other.
- select metrics for determining whether the goals are met.

What are the Components of a Strategic Plan?

The chart below outlines the key components of and important steps for creating a strategic plan.

Key Components	Important Steps
<u>Vision Statement</u> that describes the organization's desired future state. The vision statement should be explicit, simple, and brief.	Include input from all affected constituent groups in the high-level planning. To the extent possible, include employees and customers as well as company leaders. Be sure to keep them informed of upcoming decisions or stages in planning and provide opportunities for them to give input.
<u>Values Statement</u> that articulates the organization's ethical and guiding principles.	
<u>Goals and Objectives</u> that state the desired outcomes. Goals are more generally stated than objectives. Objectives are directly related to metrics or indicators.	Entrust the core work to a small planning committee with sufficient authority, prestige, and influence to keep the process moving.
<u>Strategies and Tactics</u> are the interventions, activities, and processes by which goals and objectives are accomplished.	Identify and apply research-based best practices.
<u>Implementation Plan</u> outlining who will do what, when, and with which resources.	Prioritize action and implementation steps and set a reasonable timeline.
<u>Evaluation Plan</u> to assess accomplishment of the desired outcomes.	Create measurable milestones that can show continual progress.

Before Beginning: How Do I Act as a Change Agent and Persuade Others to Engage in Strategic Planning?

Making change requires dissatisfaction with the status quo and a clear vision of a better way. People must see the existing problem, perceive how the new vision aligns with company values, and believe that the change is possible, given existing constraints and available resources. Use the following steps to create a shared understanding and to get colleagues and other stakeholders involved with creating and supporting a strategic plan for diversity.

- **Know the facts.** Use relevant reports from trusted sources. The recent NCWIT report, *Women in IT: The Facts*, is a reliable source for national industry conditions for technical women and is available at www.ncwit.org/thefacts. Also know what the current conditions are in your *own* department and company, such as employment trends and gender gaps in advancement, and how these compare to national conditions. Contact info@ncwit.org for more information or for resources to help collect this information.
- **Be sure to enlist top leadership support.** Company leaders play a key role in making change happen. Senior leadership endorsement is necessary for providing the conditions and resources necessary for change.

- **Listen** carefully to your colleagues' concerns and explain how the changes you propose will provide them tangible benefits.
- **Give examples** of successes from departments like yours.
- **Show your passion** for this issue and these reform efforts.

How Do We Create the Strategic Plan?

Getting Started: Once you have communicated the need and created a shared understanding with others, use the next page to begin your plan. Identify your vision, values, goals, and the planning committee that will plan the initiatives for reaching these goals. Describe the support both in your work unit and in the company for reaching these goals.

Creating and Implementing the Plan: Use the planning templates on pages 8-21 to organize these practices into a coherent reform plan. Identify practices that can support employee retention from initial hiring throughout the career trajectory. See *Women in IT: The Facts* available at www.ncwit.org/thefacts for findings about the current situation for women in IT and a summary of research-based reform practices you may wish to include. Also see NCWIT's Promising Practices available at www.ncwit.org/practices and Programs-in-a-Box Series available at www.ncwit.org/boxes for more detailed information on many of these practices.

Evaluating Your Efforts: Create an overall evaluation plan that tracks progress toward the vision and goals and allows evaluation of specific practices that will furnish information to guide program improvement. Contact info@ncwit.org for assistance in creating an evaluation plan.

CREATE YOUR STRATEGIC PLAN USING THE NCWIT IT INDUSTRY REFORM MODEL

What Research-based Reform Practices Should be Included in Strategic Plans for Increasing Women's Participation in Computing?

NCWIT advocates a multi-pronged, research-based approach to sustained change. Instituting piecemeal practices may be helpful in some cases but is less likely to produce sustained change. To create and maintain excellence through diversity, organizations must improve the everyday experience of all employees, not just women or members from other underrepresented groups. By themselves, programs that target women or underrepresented groups alone are effective only as long as funding or a champion is available, and they are effective only for those people who choose to participate. Some members from underrepresented groups also are hesitant to participate in these programs for fear of being labeled or stigmatized. For systemic reform, effective practices must be mainstreamed into the experiences of all employees.

Drawing from the research on technical women, NCWIT Senior Research Scientist Ashcraft developed the IT Industry Reform Model illustrated in Figure 1 to show the key factors companies need to address in order to increase women's participation in information technology.

Figure 1



In this model, two components are vital for the sustained success of all other efforts: 1) top leadership support and institutional accountability, and 2) supervisory relationships (see *Laying the Foundation*, pp. 9-10 for more information and planning templates). Without these foundational components, reform efforts are less likely to have the desired impact.

Reform initiatives should also include the following components illustrated in the model (see Building the Ecosystem, pp. 11-19 for more information and planning templates):

- **Recruitment/Selection:** Successfully implement a strategic recruiting plan for creating an enduring pipeline of diverse employees with appropriate competencies. Ensure that all employees understand the rationale for and benefits of diverse participation.
- **Professional Development/Mentoring:** Provide mentors, role models, and sponsors to reduce isolation and help underrepresented groups navigate unspoken “codes” and cultural norms.
- **Performance Review and Promotion:** Examine existing tools and processes for unconscious biases and implement policies and practices to ensure equitable advancement.
- **Flexible Work:** Implement policies and practices that provide flexible work schedules and address competing life responsibilities.
- **Reduction of Subtle Biases/Barriers:** Implement policies and practices to reduce subtle instances of unconscious bias and institutional barriers.
- **Evaluation:** Evaluate all of the above reform efforts to identify what works and what does not, to make mid-course improvements, to communicate findings for increased support, and to encourage replication by others. Measure and share the contributions from underrepresented employees to ensure continued support for reform efforts.

Use the charts in the remainder of this workbook to plan your efforts related to each area of reform. You might first brainstorm individually or as a committee on an initial draft and then combine and finesse ideas into a final draft.

Getting Started: Vision, Goals, Planning Committee, and Support

In the space below, begin drafting the initial components of your strategic plan.

Vision Statement:

Craft a succinct statement that describes the desired future state of affairs.

Values Statement:

Choose 2-3 of the most important values in your company and combine them into a succinct statement.

Goals:

Choose 3-4 goals.

Planning Committee:

Select 8-10 committed employees.

Institutional and Departmental Support:

List key supporters from each department. Make sure to include informal opinion leaders as well as individuals in formal leadership positions.

LAY THE FOUNDATION

Top Leadership Support and Institutional Accountability

Leadership and accountability matter. Ensure that leaders of diversity efforts include high-level executives and senior employees who actually have the authority to make, carry out, and enforce necessary decisions. These leaders need to establish a core team or committee to lead diversity initiatives, and leaders need to be regularly and visibly involved with these committees. They also need to help:

- set clear, measurable goals for diversity.
- require and support ongoing evaluation of these goals.
- hold managers accountable for promoting as well as hiring diverse employees.
- involve members of majority groups (e.g., white males) in leading diversity efforts.
- regularly promote and make visible diversity goals, efforts, and accomplishments.



For more information see *How Can Companies Achieve Organizational Diversity? Establishing Institutional Accountability* available at www.ncwit.org/institutionalaccountability.

Top Leadership Support and Institutional Accountability Objectives	
<i>In Place Now:</i>	
<i>Objectives:</i>	
Actions/Interventions/Initiatives Likely to Be Successful Here:	
Responsible & Participating Persons:	
Timeline/Due Dates:	
Evaluation Plan, Including Milestones & Measures:	
Plan for Reporting on Efforts & Results:	

Supervisory Relationships

Focusing efforts on positive supervisory relationships is crucial for two reasons: 1) research suggests that the supervisory relationship is one of the most significant factors in an employee's decision to leave or stay with a company, and 2) the supervisory relationship exerts significant influence on *all* of the other levels of reform, including employee development/mentoring, performance reviews and promotion, access to flexible schedules, recruiting/selection, and subtle biases that shape team interaction. Supervisors should be:

- informed as to how unconscious bias and institutional barriers shape their responsibilities in four areas: 1) recruitment/selection, 2) employee development, 3) team/project management, 4) performance evaluation and promotion procedures.
- held accountable for hiring and promoting a diverse range of employees.
- held accountable for providing access to mentoring and flexible work schedules.
- held accountable for examining and reducing bias in performance reviews.



For more information, see NCWIT's *Supervising-in-a-Box Series* available at www.ncwit.org/supervising.

Supervisory Relationships Objectives	
<i>In Place Now:</i>	
<i>Objectives:</i>	
Actions/Interventions/Initiatives Likely to Be Successful Here:	
Responsible & Participating Persons:	
Timeline/Due Dates:	
Evaluation Plan, Including Milestones & Measures:	
Plan for Reporting on Efforts & Results:	

BUILD THE ECOSYSTEM

Recruitment/Selection

Implementing strategies for reducing bias and diversifying the candidate pool are important if technical companies are to have many women to retain and advance. Below are some strategies and resources for doing so.

- Examine job announcements/criteria for bias.
- Advertise and recruit in a variety of venues that target diverse audiences.
- Systematically track demographics of candidate pools and successful hires.
- Create/promote alternative pathways to technical careers.
- Educate interviewers and/or search committees about unconscious bias and ways to reduce it.



For more information, see NCWIT Promising Practices Series available at www.ncwit.org/practices, and *Supervising-in-a-Box Series: Recruitment/Selection* available at www.ncwit.org/supervising.

Recruitment/Selection - Hiring the Best Talent Objectives	
<i>In Place Now:</i>	
<i>Objectives:</i>	
Actions/Interventions/Initiatives Likely to Be Successful Here:	
Responsible & Participating Persons:	
Timeline/Due Dates:	
Evaluation Plan, Including Milestones & Measures:	
Plan for Reporting on Efforts & Results:	

Professional Development/Mentoring

Both technical men and women report valuing opportunities for technical professional development above and beyond other work benefits. Technical men, however, report being able to find informal professional development opportunities at a higher rate than do women (82% versus 62%, respectively).¹ This is likely due, in part, to isolation, a lack of role models or available mentors, unconscious biases, and other subtle dynamics that make it more difficult for women to access these informal opportunities. This gap also could result from the fact that competing life responsibilities still fall more heavily on women who may have less time to access these opportunities outside of work. As a result, providing formal opportunities is particularly important for retaining and advancing underrepresented employees. The following strategies and resources are important for successful mentoring.

- Make mentoring programs easily available for all employees.
- Provide access to a diverse range of mentors — mentors who are both similar and different from the employee.
- Ensure that mentoring is a valued activity (e.g., reflected on mentors' performance evaluations).
- Create company-wide opportunities for all technical employees to participate in technical professional development on company time.
- Create specific opportunities for *leadership and management* development.
- Implement learning communities such as patenting or innovation communities.
- Educate supervisors about the importance of encouraging employees to take part in mentoring programs and rewarding mentoring as a professional activity.



For more information, see NCWIT's Promising Practices available at www.ncwit.org/practices and *Mentoring-in-a-Box: Technical Women at Work* available at www.ncwit.org/imentor.

Professional Development & Mentoring Objectives	
<i>In Place Now:</i>	
<i>Objectives:</i>	
Actions/Interventions/Initiatives Likely to Be Successful Here:	
Responsible & Participating Persons:	
Timeline/Due Dates:	
Evaluation Plan, Including Milestones & Measures:	
Plan for Reporting on Efforts & Results:	

Performance Review and Promotion Processes

Gender bias permeates the promotion and performance review process. Almost half (46%) of technical women report that gender bias influences performance evaluations. Research on recommendation letters and performance evaluations confirms this perception of gender bias. Unconscious biases also pervade wider talent management systems and promotion processes. The following are important steps for reducing these unconscious biases.

- Examine your company's tools and criteria for performance evaluation for bias.
- Examine and update your company's promotion criteria. Ensure that measurable steps for promotion are clearly articulated.
- Make promotion coaching a part of company mentoring programs and supervisory training.
- Value mentoring, employee development, and/or diversity work as a performance evaluation or promotion criteria.
- Examine task assignment processes for bias. Educate supervisors and others about how bias shapes who gets assigned to what tasks and what teams.
- Create company awareness about the importance of and ways to value diverse communication styles.



For more information, see NCWIT Promising Practices available at www.ncwit.org/practices, and *Supervising-in-a-Box Series: Team/Project Management* and *Supervising-in-a-Box Series: Performance Evaluation/Talent Management* available at www.ncwit.org/supervising.

Performance Review and Promotion Processes Objectives	
<i>In Place Now:</i>	
<i>Objectives:</i>	
Actions/Interventions/Initiatives Likely to Be Successful Here:	
Responsible & Participating Persons:	
Timeline/Due Dates:	
Evaluation Plan, Including Milestones & Measures:	
Plan for Reporting on Efforts & Results:	

Flexible Work

Interestingly, both men and women believe that being family-oriented is not a characteristic associated with success in technology. For example, in *Climbing the Technical Ladder*, a recent study of technical workers, only 7.3% of mid-level technical women and men agreed that successful technologists are family-oriented. At the same time, however, more than 60% of these same men and women described **themselves** as family-oriented. Flexible scheduling then is a crucial practice for retaining all talent, but particularly for women who are more than twice as likely as men to have a partner who also works full time.

- Do more than simply **offer** flexible scheduling. Ensure that taking advantage of these schedules is valued for both women and men and is not subtly stigmatizing.
- Look for ways that flexible schedules are subtly or explicitly penalized in promotion decisions and provide ways to remedy this problem.
- Examine resource allocation policies to see if they unfairly penalize flex-time workers or teams with flex-time workers.
- Create on- and off-ramp opportunities that make it easier for employees to take time off and return to work.
- Model flexible practices at the executive and supervisory levels. This helps make these practices culturally acceptable.



For more information, see NCWIT Promising Practices available at www.ncwit.org/practices, *Supervising-in-a-Box Series: Team/Project Management* available at www.ncwit.org/supervising.

Flexible Work Objectives	
<i>In Place Now:</i>	
<i>Objectives:</i>	
Actions/Interventions/Initiatives Likely to Be Successful Here:	
Responsible & Participating Persons:	
Timeline/Due Dates:	
Evaluation Plan, Including Milestones & Measures:	
Plan for Reporting on Efforts & Results:	

Reduction of Subtle Biases/Barriers

Subtle, everyday instances of bias are extremely important because they are much more difficult to detect and often build upon each other, creating environments that push underrepresented employees out the door. These instances include:

- **Microinequities** — subtle, cumulative messages that devalue, discourage, and impair performance in the workplace. These messages include looks, gestures, or tone of voice, and often accumulate in ways that lead employees to underperform, withdraw from co-workers, and ultimately leave the workplace.
- **Tokenism** — members from diverse groups are often expected by others to “speak for” or “represent” the group as a whole. Diverse members are expected to be able to “relate to” customers or clients who are also members of the same or similar identity group/s.
- **Stereotype Threat** — the fear or anxiety that our actions will confirm negative stereotypes about our “group” or about ourselves as members of a group. These fears and anxieties reduce feelings of competence and trust, and can negatively affect performance, confidence, and risk-taking behavior.
- **“Gender- or Color-Blindness”** — comments such as “I don’t see color or gender; you do your work well on my team and you’ll succeed!” While these are often well-intentioned, they ignore the different life circumstances faced by women and other underrepresented groups.
- **The “Glass Cliff” Phenomenon** — members from underrepresented groups are promoted too early or put in charge of tasks they do not yet have the expertise or authority to carry out. While this is sometimes done to try to meet diversity requirements, meeting these requirements in this way may set these employees up to fail.



These and other subtle dynamics play out differently in every company and environment. For resources to identify and address subtle biases within your company, see the *Supervising-in-a-Box Series* available at www.ncwit.org/supervising.

Reduction of Subtle Biases/Barriers Objectives	
<i>In Place Now:</i>	
<i>Objectives:</i>	
Actions/Interventions/Initiatives Likely to Be Successful Here:	
Responsible & Participating Persons:	
Timeline/Due Dates:	
Evaluation Plan, Including Milestones & Measures	
Plan for Reporting on Efforts & Results:	

CONSTANT IMPROVEMENT PLAN: EVALUATION

Two kinds of evaluation can support a department's or company's reform efforts. Tracking employee recruitment and retention outcomes can help you to understand whether your combination of efforts is working and how to tweak them to improve progress toward goals. See the NCWIT *Supervising-in-a-Box Series: Recruitment/Selection* for sample tracking tools. Evaluation of specific initiatives also can help you to identify whether these are working. NCWIT can work with you to develop evaluation plans for understanding what is working for each component of the IT Industry Reform Model. Contact us at info@ncwit.org.

What is Being Evaluated Now:	
Efforts Needing Evaluation:	
Responsible & Participating Persons:	
Timeline/Due Dates:	
Plan for Reporting on Efforts & Results:	

BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER: STRATEGIC RETENTION PLAN AT A GLANCE

Use this chart to help give a quick overview of your reform efforts in each area. This snapshot look can help you keep track of these efforts and succinctly communicate them to others. Each column summarizes the objectives, interventions, responsible people, timeline, and evaluation for one of the key factors or areas important for reform (e.g., supervisory relationships, performance evaluation processes).

Vision:	
Goals:	
Committee:	
Institutional Support:	

	Contact/Lead	Action/Initiatives	Timeline	Evaluation
Top Leadership Support				
Supervisory Relations				
Recruitment/ Selection				
Professional Development & Mentoring				
Performance Evaluation & Promotion				
Flexible Work				
Reduction of Subtle Biases & Barriers				

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