



## **THE BLUEPRINT APPROACH:**

Building Inclusive Workforce  
Systems in High-Demand  
Industries







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## LED BY



Stacey Noronha & Pinky Sabhnani

## AUTHORS

GIOGRAFIK

## DESIGN

## Community Partners

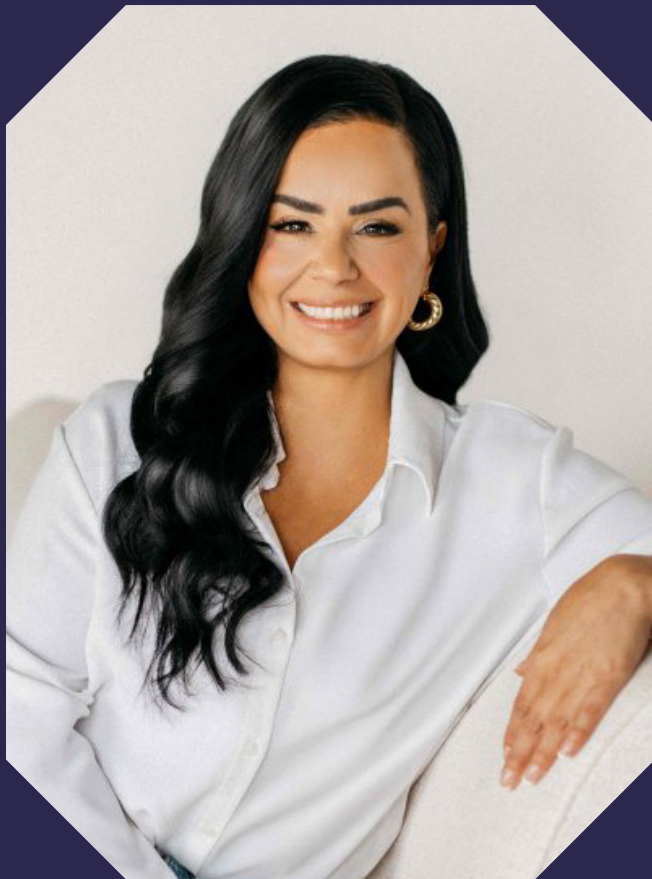
This study and guide were made possible thanks to:

- The women and gender-diverse individuals across multiple male-dominated industries who generously shared their experiences, insights, and challenges with us;
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# Letter from the President

When I founded Build a Dream, I believed deeply that talent is universal — but opportunity is not.

Over the years, I have met thousands of young women who are capable, driven, and ready to lead. Their ambitions are bold. Their potential is undeniable. Yet too often, the systems surrounding them have not been designed for their success.

This report reflects what we heard directly from women across Canada. Progress is real, but barriers persist. From inconsistent mentorship to limited representation, from workplace culture challenges to the strain of caregiving responsibilities, the gaps are structural. They are not individual shortcomings. They are design flaws within our workforce systems.

And design flaws can be redesigned.

The Blueprint mindset recognizes that industries are dynamic systems. They can be reimaged to prioritize equity, retention, and long-term sustainability. The data is clear. When women enter male dominated fields, innovation strengthens, productivity rises, and industries become more resilient. When they leave because systems fail to support them, we all lose.

Workforce sustainability requires more than recruitment campaigns. It demands operational accountability. It requires leaders who are willing to create space intentionally, consistently, and structurally so that women can contribute fully and advance without navigating unnecessary barriers. It calls for collaboration across educators, unions, employers, policymakers, and communities.

Most importantly, it requires leadership.

The Yellow Chair is our symbol of that leadership. It is not simply a seat at the table. It represents the responsibility to ensure that women's voices are embedded in decision making, culture building, and innovation. We envision a Yellow Chair in every boardroom, on every shop floor, and on every front line, not as decoration, but as commitment.

## **This is your invitation.**

Join us in redesigning workforce systems where women can thrive. Champion accountability. Invest in mentorship. Build flexible structures. Measure progress. Partner boldly. Be the organization that closes the gap. Together, we can build industries that reflect the full potential of our workforce.

And together, we can make space for every Yellow Chair.

## **Nour Hachem**

President & Founder | Build a Dream



# Executive Summary

The Blueprint synthesizes the experiences of women working across male-dominated industries in Canada, including skilled trades, emergency services, STEM, and entrepreneurial ventures. Drawing from focus groups in British Columbia, Alberta, New Brunswick, and Ontario, supplemented by the Blueprint Project survey, multiple organizational case studies, and industry scans, this report identifies systemic gaps, workplace challenges, and pathways for transformative change.

Key insights reveal that women are entering these fields through increasingly diverse pathways, yet systemic and cultural barriers create a “leaky pipeline” that prevents long-term retention and advancement.

## HIGHLIGHTS INCLUDE:

### • Retention as a systemic challenge:

Women often exit organizations silently when workplaces fail to provide structural supports, creating lost talent.

### • Cultural and informal power barriers:

Advancement depends on informal networks and navigating biases rather than skill alone, creating inequities.

### • Infrastructure gaps:

Ill-fitting PPE, unsafe or inaccessible facilities, and lack of gender-informed workplace design signal exclusion and affect safety and belonging.

### • Pipeline and early exposure:

Visibility, mentorship, and structured programs are essential. Initiatives like Build a Dream’s Dreamer Day and career discovery expos have proven effective at introducing girls and women to high-demand industries.

### • Intersectional considerations:

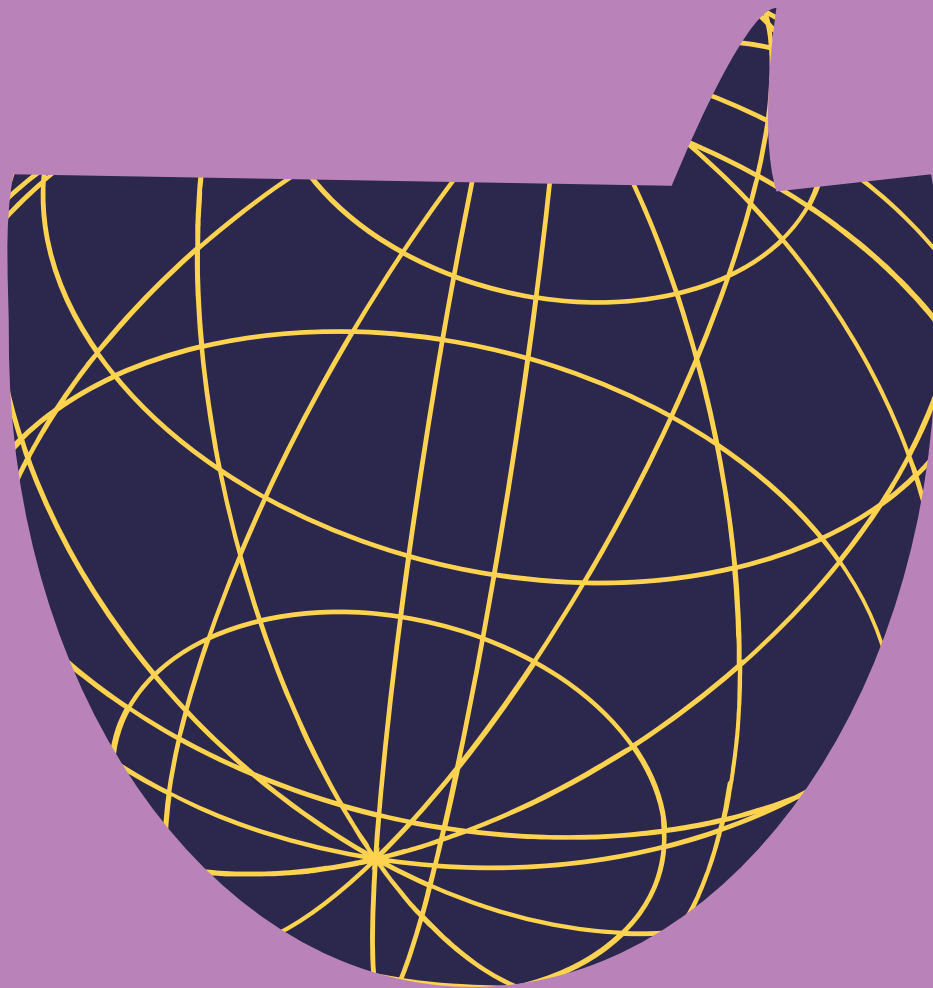
Women of colour, 2SLGBTQIA+ individuals, immigrants, and caregivers face compounded barriers requiring nuanced interventions.

This report provides actionable recommendations for organizations to rewire workforce systems so that workplaces are equitable, safe, and capable of retaining high-performing talent. The findings are clear: while progress has been made, significant work remains to create space — and to ensure women can confidently take up space — while breaking down the systemic barriers that continue to limit advancement and belonging.

*The Blueprint Approach* offers a pathway to sustainable workforce transformation, and The Yellow Chair is our call to action. It symbolizes representation, visibility, and the right to occupy space in rooms, on worksites, and at decision-making tables where women have historically been absent. It is both invitation and accountability — a reminder that inclusion is not about adding a seat, but about redesigning the room.

**The Yellow Chair** challenges every organization to decide: who is missing — and what are you prepared to do to change that?

# Recommendations at a Glance



# Snapshot: the Blueprint Approach

These recommendations are interconnected. Clarifying pathways without addressing culture will not sustain retention. Upgrading infrastructure without supporting care responsibilities will not solve attrition.

Employers who adopt a Blueprint mindset recognize that workforce inclusion is a systems strategy and not a standalone initiative. They treat equity, safety, and advancement as core operational priorities.

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## **Recommendation 1: Clarify and Support Career Pathways**

Establish transparent career roadmaps, structured mentorship, and aligned employer–union supports so women understand exactly how to enter, progress, and advance.

Make sponsorship and promotion criteria visible and consistent to reduce attrition and strengthen long-term workforce sustainability.

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## **Recommendation 2: Redesign Workplace Culture and Networks**

Operationalize inclusion by training leaders, tying equity outcomes to accountability, and formalizing peer and sponsorship networks.

Dismantle informal power structures to ensure advancement is merit-based, transparent, and equitable.

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## **Recommendation 3: Upgrade Infrastructure and Safety**

Audit and retrofit facilities, provide properly fitted PPE, and strengthen safety planning with direct input from women workers.

Signal belonging through inclusive workplace design that prioritizes dignity, ergonomics, and physical security.

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## **Recommendation 4: Strengthen Pipeline and Early Exposure**

Expand hands-on career exposure, pre-apprenticeships, and employer partnerships with schools and community organizations.

Increase visibility of diverse women in leadership and skilled roles to normalize participation and widen the talent pool.

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## **Recommendation 5: Integrate Care Infrastructure and Flexible Work**

Implement predictable scheduling, flexible shift options, and childcare supports to reduce caregiver-related attrition.

Collaborate across sectors to treat care infrastructure as essential to workforce recruitment, retention, and advancement.



# Introduction

Women in high-demand, male-dominated industries continue to confront systemic and cultural barriers that impede full participation, advancement, and retention. While awareness campaigns and recruitment initiatives have increased visibility, organizations still struggle to retain women beyond entry-level positions. Industries such as construction, emergency services, STEM fields, law enforcement, and entrepreneurial ventures report persistent gender imbalances, particularly in supervisory and leadership roles.

The challenges documented in this report are not the result of individual shortcomings or lack of motivation among women. Instead, they reflect structural deficiencies—inequitable infrastructure, inconsistent implementation of equity policies, and informal networks that favour historically dominant groups.

Women in these environments are often required to expend disproportionate emotional labour to navigate bias, microaggressions, and isolation.

The Blueprint Approach emphasizes bidirectional transformation: equipping women with mentorship,

networks, and practical tools to thrive while simultaneously redesigning organizational systems to provide equitable, safe, and transparent pathways for career progression.

Build a Dream's programming provides a proven model for this approach, offering early exposure, structured mentorship, and skills programs that empower women to navigate traditionally male-dominated workplaces.

## WHY NOW?

Labour shortages across skilled trades, STEM, and emergency services are creating urgent demand for talent.

High attrition rates among women exacerbate workforce gaps and undermine diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives.

Organizations that proactively implement inclusive systems will be better positioned to recruit, retain, and advance high-performing talent.

# Glossary

## **PPE**

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Personal protective equipment, including gloves, helmets, footwear, and other safety gear.

## **EDI**

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Equity, diversity, and inclusion.

## **ATTRITION**

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Employee turnover, voluntary or involuntary.

## **PRE-APPRENTICESHIP / BRIDGE PROGRAM**

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Structured training to prepare participants for formal apprenticeship or trade entry.

## **UNION / COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT**

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Worker organizations and negotiated employment standards.

# Methodology

This report synthesizes insights from multiple data sources collected between 2025 and 2026:

## 1. Blueprint Focus Groups

- **Calgary, AB (July 2025):**  
Explored experiences of women in trades and high-demand industries, with emphasis on early-career challenges and mentorship needs.
- **Ottawa, ON (August 2025):**  
Focused on workplace culture, systemic barriers, and the role of unions and employers in supporting retention.
- **Moncton, NB (September 2025):**  
Explored intersectional challenges for women in regional labour markets, emphasizing access, visibility, and support networks.
- **Vancouver, BC (August 2025):**  
Highlighted harassment, isolation, and the importance of peer networks, mentorship, and visibility in male-dominated workplaces.
- **Toronto, ON (August 2025):**  
Investigated career advancement, informal power structures, and the effects of emotional labour on retention.
- **Burnaby, BC (August 2025):**  
Examined structural barriers and opportunities in the construction and natural resource sectors, including apprenticeship bottlenecks.
- **Windsor, ON (September 2025):**  
Focused on second-career entrants, early exposure to high-demand industries, and the need for clear pathways and support systems.

## 2. Blueprint Project Survey (January 2026)

- Engaged 26 participants who had taken part in Build a Dream programming.
- Captured data on participants' connection to gender-equity networks, confidence navigating workplace barriers, prior coping strategies, and identification of critical supports needed for retention and advancement.

## 3. Case Studies

- Examined four organizations across diverse sectors at varying stages of maturity in equity-focused hiring, retention, and advancement practices.

- Assessed leadership accountability, workplace culture, infrastructure, and programmatic interventions to identify promising models and persistent gaps.

## 4. Industry Research Scans

- Conducted structured scans of 89 organizations across healthcare, manufacturing, transportation, construction, and related high-demand sectors.
- Provided insight into operational realities, infrastructure and safety gaps, caregiving barriers, leadership composition, and public-facing equity commitments.

## 5. Analysis Approach

- Applied thematic coding to focus group transcripts and survey responses to identify recurring patterns and systemic issues.
- Conducted cross-comparative analysis across geographies and industries to surface regional distinctions and common trends.
- Integrated findings with secondary labour market data, industry benchmarks, and workforce research to situate participant experiences within broader economic and policy contexts.

## FINDINGS:

# Systemic Gaps in Male-Dominated Workplaces

The focus groups, surveys, and case studies reveal a persistent set of structural, cultural, and systemic gaps that women face across male-dominated industries. While some progress exists, these challenges continue to create friction for women entering, remaining, and advancing in these fields.

### Gap 1: Retention and Career Sustainability

Across all focus groups and surveys, retention emerged as a critical systemic issue. Women frequently exit organizations not because of lack of skill, passion, or ambition, but because workplaces fail to provide transparent advancement pathways, equitable support, and safe environments. Survey responses revealed a polarization in confidence: some women navigate workplace barriers successfully, while others feel unsupported and vulnerable, often leaving silently rather than escalating concerns.

#### Bright Spots

Pre-apprenticeship programs such as Introduction to Millwrighting (with Millwright Regional Council) and Introduction to Electrical (with CUSW) provide structured mentorship, cohort support, and union partnerships, demonstrating measurable improvements in early-career retention. Participants consistently cite mentorship and peer networks as stabilizing forces that increase confidence and reduce attrition.

Participants consistently cited burnout, emotional labour, and isolation as key drivers of attrition. Many expend additional effort to prove competence, maintain safety, and navigate informal power structures. These invisible pressures often go unrecognized by organizations, which may assume that women leaving is due to personal choice rather than systemic shortcomings.

#### Key Takeaways

1

Retention is as critical as recruitment.

2

Emotional labour and isolation are primary drivers of attrition.

3

Structured mentorship and peer networks improve long-term engagement.

“

I loved the work, but I didn't see a path forward—and I didn't feel safe pushing for one.”

Windsor Participant

“

Even when policies exist, if you don't know the right people, your growth stalls.”

Toronto Participant

“

Even when unions exist, they don't always protect you from subtle sabotage or social exclusion.”

Toronto Participant



## Gap 2: Cultural and Informal Power Structures

Women report navigating entrenched “boys’ club” dynamics, persistent microaggressions, and inconsistent enforcement of equity policies. Advancement often depends more on informal networks, political navigation, and self-advocacy than merit alone, reinforcing inequities and leaving highly capable women at a disadvantage. Even in organizations with formal diversity commitments, informal power structures continue to favour those already positioned within dominant circles.

And yet, women are taking up space in these environments, stepping into rooms, onto worksites, and into leadership conversations where they were not always expected or welcomed. The Yellow Chair represents this shift. It symbolizes visibility in spaces historically reserved for others and the refusal to shrink in systems not originally designed for them. It is both a marker of progress and a challenge: taking up space should be the norm, not the exception.

“ The only way up is often out. You leave one employer to get promoted at another.”

Toronto Participant

Building inclusive cultures requires both visible allyship and operational accountability to ensure policies are applied consistently. It also requires employers to intentionally create space, not just by opening doors, but by reshaping environments so women can participate fully, lead confidently, and influence decision-making without navigating informal barriers.

Creating space means examining who speaks in meetings, who receives stretch opportunities, who is sponsored for advancement, and who feels safe to challenge the status quo. Inclusion is a deliberate act of redesigning culture so belonging and advancement feel embedded.

### Key Takeaways

1

Formal policies must be operationalized into everyday culture.

2

Peer and mentorship networks buffer isolation and provide guidance.

3

Transparent, merit-based advancement reduces reliance on informal politics.

### Gap 3: Infrastructure and Safety

Ill-fitting PPE, inadequate washrooms and change rooms, poor lighting, and unsafe worksites remain daily stressors and safety risks. Small and medium-sized workplaces are particularly affected, often lacking resources or awareness to implement gender-inclusive infrastructure.

#### Bright Spots

Employers partnering with Build a Dream often provide inclusive PPE, mentorship on site, and safety protocols that account for gender-specific needs. Incorporating proper tools and facilities into training programs ensures participants experience workplaces designed for equity from the start.

Without accessible facilities and proper equipment, women may feel marginalized, which, in turn, impacts confidence, morale, and retention.

#### Key Takeaways

1

Infrastructure signals inclusion; deficits harm belonging.

2

Safety and ergonomics are essential for retention.

3

Small investments in facilities and equipment yield significant returns.

“

I had to borrow gloves from a male coworker—they were too big and slipped constantly.”

Vancouver Participant

“

The only washroom was a locked office bathroom. It made me feel like I didn't belong here.”

Windsor Participant



## Gap 4: Pipeline and Early Exposure

Awareness of career pathways remains low, particularly for young women, newcomers, and those from underserved communities. Most participants reported entering male-dominated fields through personal networks or by serendipity, rather than through structured opportunities. Without early exposure, hands-on experiences, and visible role models, industries risk a persistently narrow and homogeneous talent pool.

Programs such as Dreamer Day and Career Discovery Expos create early, hands-on experiences and connect participants with role models, addressing barriers in awareness and confidence. Early exposure broadens the talent pipeline, ensuring that women see themselves as viable candidates for high-demand roles.

### Key Takeaways

1

Recruitment without early exposure is insufficient.

2

Mentorship and visibility drive long-term engagement.

3

Inclusive programming mitigates systemic bias in guidance systems.



Seeing another woman in the role made me realize I could do this too."

Vancouver Participant



My guidance counselor didn't even tell me trades were an option—they assumed it wasn't for girls."

Windsor Participant



## Gap 5: Care Infrastructure and Work-Life Sustainability

Women with caregiving responsibilities face systemic barriers such as inflexible schedules, limited childcare access, and insufficient organizational policies. Without structural support, employees may reduce hours, leave training programs, or exit the workforce entirely. These pressures are intensified by irregular shifts, extended travel requirements, and apprenticeship models that were not designed with caregiving realities in mind.

Care infrastructure is workforce infrastructure. Employers must move beyond accommodation and intentionally create space within workforce systems for caregiving realities. This means redesigning scheduling practices, embedding flexibility into operational models, and advocating for childcare solutions that reflect the demands of skilled trades and industrial work.

### Bright Spots

Pilot programs offering flexible scheduling, childcare subsidies, and peer support networks demonstrate measurable improvements in retention. Build a Dream's partnership-driven approach illustrates how employers, unions, and training institutions can work together to redesign workforce systems so that care responsibilities do not force capable workers out of high-demand careers.

Creating space in this context requires structural shifts: predictable scheduling where possible, transparent leave policies, integrated childcare supports, and collaborative solutions across employers, unions, and training providers. Employer-led initiatives alone are insufficient; sustainable change demands cross-sector coordination and policy-level engagement in order to ensure that caregiving is not treated as a personal constraint, but as a workforce reality.

### Key Takeaways

1

Flexible scheduling and childcare support are essential.

2

Care access impacts both recruitment and retention.

3

Collaboration with community and policymakers is critical.

“

I love my job, but sometimes it feels impossible to balance work and home—especially with unpredictable shifts.”

Toronto Participant

“

Without childcare support, some of my classmates had to quit apprenticeships.”

Windsor Participant

# Data, Measurement & Accountability Infrastructure

Across industry scans, a critical systemic gap emerged: the absence of consistent, transparent, and standardized measurement frameworks to assess gender equity in practice.

At first glance, employer responses suggest progress. When asked about women's representation in the workplace:

- **33%** of respondents stated women make up a small percentage of their team, both on the ground and in leadership.
- Approximately **31%** reported women make up the majority of their workforce.
- Nearly **23%** indicated women represent between **50% and 75%** of employees.
- Only **6%** reported that there are almost no women in their organization or leadership.

These responses suggest significant variability across sectors. In some organizations, women appear well represented. In others, they remain a small minority. However, representation percentages alone provide an incomplete picture.

## Policy Presence vs. Measurable Impact

When examining formal policy commitments:

- **14%** reported having a zero-tolerance policy in place.
- **12%** indicated inclusive hiring and onboarding policies.

While these policies are important signals, they do not reveal whether they are consistently enforced, monitored, or evaluated.

More concerning is how organizations measure impact. When asked how they measure the effectiveness of diversity and inclusion initiatives:

- **19%** reported using regular employee satisfaction surveys.
- Only **16%** indicated participation in DEI-focused events.
- Over **40%** reported they did not know the primary barriers associated with DEI within their organization.
- **18%** selected "none of the above."

This data reveals an inconsistency in measurement approaches and in some cases, a lack of awareness regarding systemic barriers.

## The Measurement Maturity Gap

The findings point to what can be described as a measurement maturity gap.

Many organizations appear to operate with:

- Broad policy language
- Generalized diversity commitments
- Self-reported representation estimates
- Limited disaggregated workforce tracking
- Minimal structured impact evaluation

Without standardized metrics, such as gender-disaggregated retention rates, promotion timelines, leadership pipeline tracking, mentorship participation, exit analysis, and climate indicators, organizations are left relying on perception rather than performance data.



## Perception vs. Lived Experience

The disconnect between employer self-assessment and women's lived experience is significant.

While employer responses reflect optimism about representation and policy presence, women in focus groups described:

- Inconsistent enforcement of equity policies
- Informal advancement pathways
- Unequal access to sponsorship and stretch assignments
- Workplace cultures that do not always align with formal commitments

This divergence does not necessarily indicate bad faith. Rather, it reveals the consequences of limited, inconsistent measurement systems. When equity is not systematically tracked, progress can appear stronger than it feels.

### Key Takeaways

1

Representation estimates vary widely and are not consistently validated.

2

Policy presence does not equate to measurable impact.

3

A lack of standardized DEI metrics limits accountability and obscures systemic barriers.



# The Blueprint Approach

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## Recommendations for Transformation

To achieve lasting change, organizations must move beyond incremental improvements and adopt a **dual approach**: internal action to address factors within their immediate control, and external collaboration to tackle broader systemic constraints.

Each recommendation is designed to provide both strategic direction and practical steps, emphasizing the integration of mentorship, policy, infrastructure, and culture to create truly inclusive workforce systems.

### Recommendation 1: Clarify and Support Career Pathways

Women entering male-dominated industries frequently encounter opaque career structures, unclear promotion criteria, and limited visibility of advancement opportunities. These gaps contribute to attrition, disengagement, and a loss of talent in sectors where retention

is already a challenge. By clarifying career pathways and embedding structured mentorship, organizations can ensure that employees not only see the trajectory of their careers, but that they also have the guidance and support to navigate it successfully.

**Mentorship and visibility are particularly powerful in bridging the “middle gap” identified in the Blueprint Project survey**, where participants are motivated but lack consistent access to networks and leadership guidance.

### Action Items



1. Publish clear, accessible career roadmaps outlining advancement steps, required training, and promotion criteria.
2. Establish structured mentorship programs with designated coordinators or case managers.
3. Align union and employer supports with career guidance; for example,

Build a Dream's partnerships with labour unions like the Millwright Regional Council and the Canadian Union for Skilled Workers (CUSW) ensure that apprentices have structured, supported entry into electrical and millwrighting careers.

4. Ensure that employees understand how to access sponsorship, not just mentorship.

## Recommendation 2: Redesign Workplace Culture and Networks

Redesigning workplace culture requires intentional action: including training leaders, promoting visible allyship, and creating robust peer networks. Women consistently report isolation, bias, and the need to constantly prove competence

in male-dominated workplaces. Strengthening culture also builds psychological safety, allowing women to contribute fully, voice concerns, and remain in the workforce long-term.

Programs like women-only cohorts and professional networks create the social infrastructure necessary to counter isolation, build confidence, and foster career resilience.

### Action Items



1. Train leaders in inclusive supervision, bias interruption, and accountability.
2. Tie equity outcomes to leadership performance evaluations.
3. Fund and support peer networks and women-led professional groups to counter isolation.
4. Publicly recognize equity champions and inclusive leadership behaviors to signal organizational commitment.

## Recommendation 3: Upgrade Infrastructure and Safety

Physical and environmental factors such as ill-fitting PPE, inaccessible washrooms, and unsafe worksites remain fundamental barriers to inclusion.

compromise safety, and risk losing skilled employees. Addressing these infrastructure gaps is a precondition for equitable participation and retention.

culturally inclusive. Approaches that emphasize hands-on learning environments with appropriate tools and equipment, demonstrate that infrastructure improvements can support equity while enhancing overall operational efficiency.

When workplaces are not designed to accommodate women, organizations inadvertently signal exclusion,

Incorporating women's input in facility audits and safety planning ensures that solutions are both practical and

### Action Items



1. Audit and retrofit facilities to ensure access to gender-appropriate washrooms and change rooms.
2. Partner with suppliers to provide properly fitted PPE in a range of sizes.
3. Improve site safety measures (lighting, parking, emergency access) with input from women workers.

## Recommendation 4: Strengthen Pipeline and Early Exposure

Persistent underrepresentation of women in male-dominated industries begins long before hiring decisions. Without early exposure to careers, role models, and hands-on experience, many girls and underrepresented youth never envision themselves in these roles.

Organizations must proactively expand awareness campaigns, experiential programs, and outreach to ensure diverse talent has a clear pathway to entry. Build a Dream's Dreamer Day and Career Discovery Expos exemplify this strategy; offering students immersive, inspiring, and

practical experiences that connect education to real-world career possibilities. Early engagement not only builds interest, but it also lays the foundation for a sustainable, diverse workforce.

### Action Items



1. Partner with schools, training providers, and community organizations to expand hands-on exposure.
2. Support pre-apprenticeship programs, career discovery events, and experiential learning.
3. Showcase diverse women across roles and leadership levels.
4. Offer paid co-ops, internships, and entry pathways that reduce financial barriers.

## Recommendation 5: Integrate Care Infrastructure and Flexible Work

Caregiving responsibilities remain a systemic barrier that disproportionately affects women in male-dominated industries, particularly where extended shifts, irregular schedules, and travel are common.

Ad hoc solutions are insufficient. Retention and advancement require integrated policies that recognize care infrastructure as essential workforce support. Flexible work arrangements, childcare partnerships, and advocacy for broader

systemic solutions can dramatically improve participation, morale, and equity. By embedding these supports, organizations not only retain talent, but also position themselves as leaders in modern workforce design.

### Action Items



1. Implement predictable scheduling and flexible shift accommodations where operationally possible.
2. Explore childcare partnerships or subsidies.
3. Normalize parental leave uptake across genders.
4. Collaborate with industry and policymakers to address regional care gaps.

# Bright Spots and Future Opportunities

While the research clearly identifies persistent gaps in retention, infrastructure, and culture, the focus groups, surveys, and case studies also highlight promising areas of progress—examples of what works and where replication or scaling could create systemic impact.

## Areas of Progress

### **Union Partnerships and Employer-Led Mentorship Programs:**

Participants consistently noted that structured mentorship programs, particularly those facilitated in partnership with unions or industry associations, provide crucial guidance, advocacy, and on-the-job support.

Programs like Build a Dream's Introduction to Electrical and Introduction to Millwrighting offer cohorts where participants can access mentorship, navigate workplace systems, and connect with supportive peers, significantly improving retention and confidence.

### **Women-Only Cohorts and Peer Networks:**

Creating safe spaces for women to share experiences, strategies, and resources fosters resilience and reduces isolation. Peer networks, both formal and informal, allow participants to learn from one another, gain insights on navigating challenging workplace dynamics, and develop leadership skills in a supportive environment.

These cohorts help bridge the "middle gap" identified in the Blueprint Project survey, where participants feel only moderately connected to equity networks.

### **Skill-Based Apprenticeships and Experiential Programs:**

Hands-on opportunities like Build a Dream's Dreamer Day and other Career Discovery Expos were cited by participants as pivotal in shaping career decisions.

Early exposure to trades and male-dominated sectors allows participants to envision themselves in these roles, learn practical skills, and connect with mentors and employers, creating tangible entry points and reducing attrition caused by uncertainty or lack of preparedness.

### **Leadership Diversification:**

Organizations that have intentionally diversified their leadership teams report positive cultural shifts, including increased trust, improved collaboration, and a stronger perception of fairness.

Participants noted that seeing women in decision-making roles validates pathways for advancement and reinforces organizational commitment to equity.

## Opportunities for Systemic Transformation:

Looking forward, participants and research findings emphasize that meaningful change requires a Blueprint mindset: approaching workforce systems as dynamic, interconnected structures that can be reimagined to prioritize equity, retention, and sustainability. Key opportunities include:

### **Building Integrated Networks:**

Linking schools, employers, unions, mentorship programs, advocacy organizations, and policymakers can create cohesive pathways for women entering and advancing in male-dominated industries.

These networks not only support career navigation, but also allow for shared resources, systemic problem-solving, and alignment of recruitment and retention strategies.

### **Data-Driven Progress and Accountability:**

Establishing metrics and reporting structures to track gender representation, retention, mentorship participation, and workplace climate creates transparency and accountability. Participants emphasized the importance of evidence-based interventions that allow organizations to identify gaps, measure impact, and course-correct when initiatives fall short.

### **Visibility and Representation Campaigns:**

Expanding campaigns that showcase women in a range of male-dominated roles—from trades and STEM to public safety and entrepreneurship—helps normalize their presence and combats stereotypes. Representation matters both in attracting new talent and in creating a culture where women feel they belong. Build a Dream's efforts in storytelling, social media, and school outreach exemplify this approach.

The Blueprint Approach positions equity and inclusion as central pillars of workforce sustainability, transforming male-dominated industries into spaces where women can thrive.

## CALL TO ACTION:

# Take Up Space, Transform the System

The Blueprint is not just a set of findings—it's a movement.

It challenges organizations, leaders, and individuals to reimagine workplaces; to transform them into places where women thrive rather than places where they simply fit in.

Every recommendation, every bright spot, and every example of progress points to a simple truth: change happens when we intentionally create space for women to take up space—on the shop floor, in boardrooms, in labs, and on front lines.

The Yellow Chair symbolizes this commitment. It is a reminder that women belong in every decision-making seat, at every leadership table, and in every workplace conversation. It calls on organizations to design systems that actively include, support, and celebrate women, turning symbolic gestures into structural realities.

### Your action matters:

- Place a Yellow Chair in your workplace to spark dialogue and visibility.
- Champion mentorship, inclusive policies, and safe, equitable spaces for women.
- Partner across sectors—schools, unions, employers, and community—to expand opportunity and accountability.

Together, we can move from incremental fixes to systemic transformation. In doing so, we can ensure that male-dominated industries are no longer barriers, but platforms for women to lead, innovate, and inspire.

Join the movement.

Be the difference.

Make room for the Yellow Chair.



