

WE FOR SHE:

ADVANCING WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN CREDIT UNIONS



**Global Women's
Leadership Network**

G W L N P I N K P A P E R

Acknowledgements

GWLN would like to acknowledge the individuals who assisted in the production of this GWLN Pink Paper. GWLN surveyed our network around the world and, in addition, conducted semi-structured interviews with 20 GWLN women credit union leaders, executives, CEOs, and board members from across the globe. We would like to thank all survey respondents and interviewees who contributed with a commitment as we work together to advance more women into leadership roles in the credit union space.



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This Pink Paper is written to inform the international credit union movement and aims to offer recommendations to credit unions and women on how to increase access to leadership roles in credit unions and financial cooperatives worldwide.

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The information in this publication is correct at the time of going to press. For further information on the issues raised in this paper, please email cuwomen@woccu.org.



**Global Women's
Leadership Network**

An **Initiative** of **WORLDWIDE FOUNDATION
FOR CREDIT UNIONS**

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MESSAGE FROM THE GLOBAL WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP NETWORK

Women in credit unions around the world tell us they face real obstacles in advancing professionally and contributing to the growth of their institutions. This is evident in the notably limited participation of women in senior management and board of director roles in credit unions worldwide.

The World Council of Credit Unions created the Global Women's Leadership Network (GWLN) in 2009 to respond to this challenge.

In this Pink Paper, we share the many challenges that block our GWLN members from advancing, including disadvantageous social and cultural norms, explicit and implicit gender biases, work/life balance challenges, as well as a lack of respect that harms women's confidence.

And we present the GWLN solution – we are connecting professionals globally, providing mentorship and developing other resources to advance women's leadership in the credit union sector. With the continued commitment from our members, volunteers, sponsors, and industry partners, GWLN embraces ***We for She*** to grow credit unions and improve lives globally.

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We for She
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We for She

WOMEN IN GWLN ARE ADVANCING AS CREDIT UNION LEADERS

The Global Women’s Leadership Network (GWLN) connects, inspires, and empowers women to advance in leadership in the credit union sector. In 2021, GWLN surveyed our membership base to understand the challenges faced by women globally in advancing to leadership positions in the credit union industry, as well as strategies to overcome them. We complemented this by conducting semi-structured *interviews with 20 GWLN women credit union leaders, executives, CEOs, and board members from across the globe.* We dove deeply into women’s experiences with organizational and systemic gender issues, as well as personal struggles with self-esteem and self-confidence. We invited leaders to describe the impacts GWLN has had on their lives and careers and tell us what more they would like from GWLN.


This Pink Paper outlines what credit unions and credit union professionals can do to be part of this global movement. It also shows how GWLN drives impact.


Our GWLN credit union leaders:

- ◆ Invest in women’s careers and their personal development.
- ◆ Recognize that diverse perspectives make good business sense.
- ◆ Champion women into board and executive positions.
- ◆ Mentor and coach women to seize opportunities.
- ◆ Encourage women to re-write social and cultural scripts that define power and privilege.

¹202 individuals responded to the 2021 GWLN survey.

The GWLN members we surveyed¹ are advancing their leadership in credit unions:

 **36% OF THOSE WHO RECEIVED PROMOTIONS SINCE JOINING GWLN CREDIT THE NETWORK FOR ITS SUPPORT**

45% APPLIED SKILLS OR KNOWLEDGE GAINED FROM GWLN TO IMPROVE THEIR INSTITUTION’S DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION INITIATIVES 

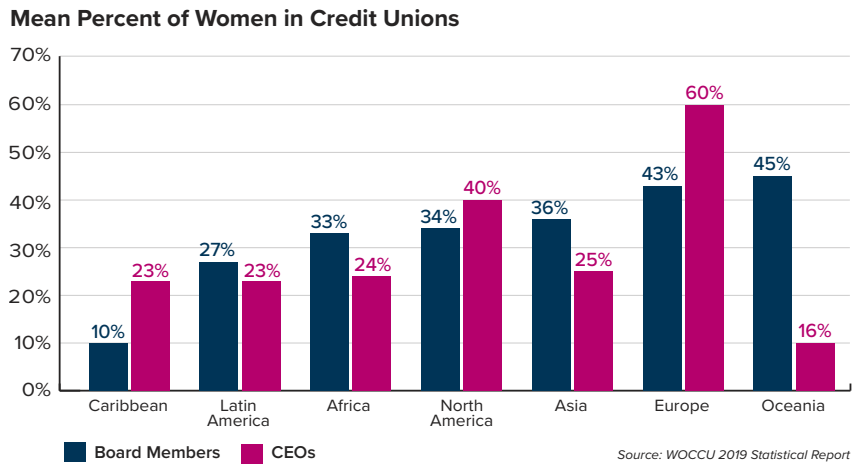
 **53% REPORT THAT GWLN HAS HELPED ADVANCE THEIR CAREERS OVERALL**



I. THE BARRIERS WOMEN FACE

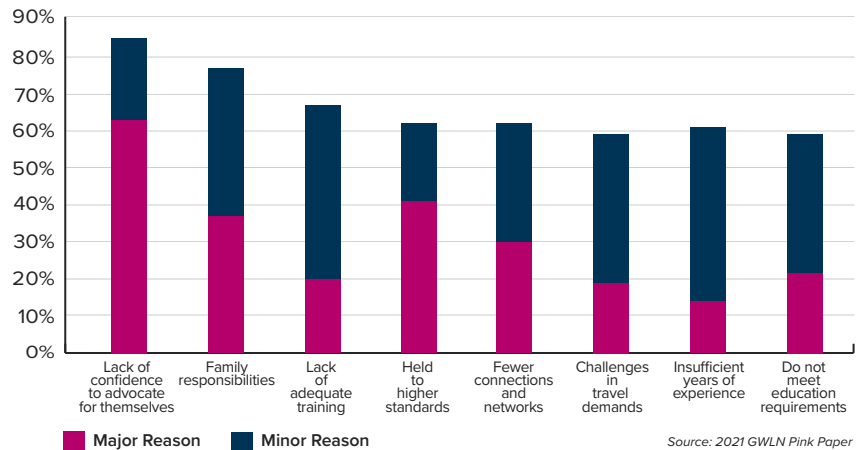
Social and cultural norms and bias hold women back from advocating for leadership positions and resources, including promotions and salary raises. Globally, women occupy far fewer leadership positions than men:

FIGURE 1: WOMEN PROFESSIONALS IN LEADERSHIP POSITIONS IN CREDIT UNIONS



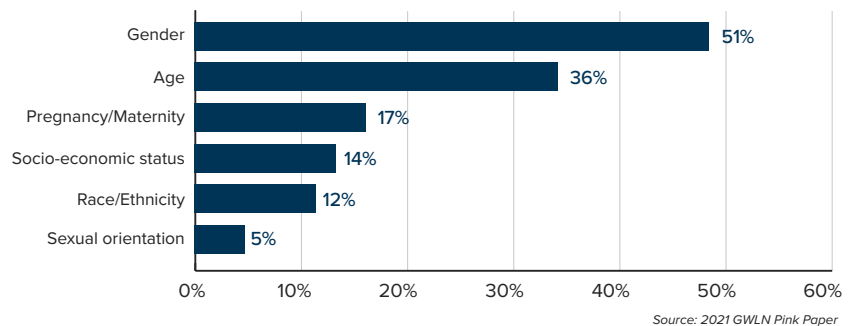
Our GWLN members tell us that social norms are the primary reasons for this discrepancy. They also cited several reasons for what holds them back in accessing leadership positions.

FIGURE 2: WHAT HOLDS WOMEN BACK ACCORDING TO GWLN



GWLN women experienced various types of bias at work.

FIGURE 3: BIAS EXPERIENCED BY GWLN MEMBERS AT WORK



II. SUMMARY OF GWLN SOLUTIONS TO INCREASE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN CREDIT UNIONS

Based on input from our network on the most common issues women face, GWLN recommends the following actions.

FIGURE 4.

KEY ISSUES AND ACTIONS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN THE CREDIT UNION SECTOR

ISSUE	WHAT CREDIT UNIONS CAN DO	WHAT WOMEN CAN DO
<p>1. PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Deepen credit union succession planning emphasizing women's leadership roles Organize Women's Leader Connectedness Sessions Offer growth assignments for women to learn new skills and gain experience and adopt robust mentorship programs 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Advocate for yourself – get in the room Build and grow networks and use them strategically Set up a personal board of advisors comprised of women inside and outside the credit union sector Create a personal strategic plan and review personal growth performance regularly
<p>2. CONFRONT EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT GENDER BIAS</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Actively invest in, promote, and champion women and other diverse leaders Map membership base and set leadership diversity targets that mirror membership 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Examine unconscious assumptions about leadership and gender Advocate for yourself, and advocate for other women
<p>3. SUPPORT WORK/LIFE BALANCE</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer sessions and services that reinforce the importance of well-being and stress reduction Examine/re-examine work policies and expand flexible and remote work options 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Speak up for work/life boundaries Make a personal commitment to examine overachievement
<p>4. INCREASE WOMEN'S CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offer listening groups, support mechanisms such as psychological or spiritual counseling, and other interventions Destigmatize mental health to address employee well-being 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Be willing to examine yourself Develop and implement a confidence development plan, with support from trusted others Explore and request organizational support for individual therapy, spiritual counseling, and other interventions
<p>5. CONFRONT RACIAL INJUSTICE AND HARASSMENT</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Promote diversity at all levels of the organization (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) Build and reinforce an organizational culture that embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion and does not tolerate harassment of any kind 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Listen and learn about racism, white privilege, and sexual/racialized trauma Contribute to organizational culture change by making personal commitment to speak up and act against injustice

III. ABOUT GWLN

Established in 2009 by the World Council of Credit Unions (WOCCU), GWLN has been at the forefront of diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI). GWLN is the only international platform dedicated to promoting gender equity in credit union leadership. GWLN narrows inequality for women by growing the leadership pipeline and engaging with colleagues to address issues that impact women locally, nationally, and globally. By connecting members, mentoring talent, and fostering professional development, GWLN cultivates the leadership and career advancement skills needed to drive the global credit union industry forward.

In a time when institutionalized gender and racial discrimination is at the forefront of global dialogue, GWLN is committed to narrowing inequality gaps by providing women with opportunities and resources to make measurable differences in their own lives, in the lives of credit union members, and in their communities through their leadership.

Credit union leaders empower women to speak, act, and ensure they do not leave power on the table. They cite GWLN as a key resource for information, networking, and emotional support in this journey.

GWLN cultivates the leadership and career advancement skills needed to drive the global credit union industry forward.

BY THE NUMBERS SINCE 2009, GWLN HAS:

ENGAGED MORE THAN **4,500 PEOPLE** FROM **86 COUNTRIES**, INCLUDING CREDIT UNION LEADERS, PROFESSIONALS, VOLUNTEERS, AND INDUSTRY PARTNERS.



INTRODUCED **HEFORSHE** TO GWLN IN 2017, WITH MEMBERS WHO ARE MEN PRESENTLY COMPRISING **10% OF GWLN MEMBERSHIP.**



AWARDED MORE THAN 70 SCHOLARSHIPS TO WOMEN IN CREDIT UNIONS/FINANCIAL COOPERATIVES, REPRESENTING **25 COUNTRIES**

ESTABLISHED **150 ACTIVE LOCAL SISTER SOCIETIES** ON SIX CONTINENTS.



BENEFITS OF GWLN:

◆ Pursue networking opportunities:

- Engage with hundreds of GWLN members (women, men, and nonbinary) across six continents.
- Connect to a diverse community of thought leaders through networking events (in-person and virtual) at the local, national, and international levels in the credit union industry.

◆ Utilize tools and resources:

- Learn from leaders within and outside the credit union sector through webinars, leadership workshops and Sister Society meetings, including presenters from the law enforcement, health services, sports, politics, and technology sectors.
- Access GWLN's specific documents and Sister Society meeting materials on our internal resources page.²
- Find inspiration on GWLN's external resources page³ with tips, reports, and articles that inspired us to become better leaders and motivated us to reach new heights — in both business and life.

◆ Apply for scholarships, made possible through memberships and generous sponsor support:

- GWLN awards between four to six scholarships annually for professional development, networking, and diversifying skill sets.
- GWLN offers scholarship winners a complimentary one-year GWLN membership and complimentary registration and an all-expense paid trip to the annual World Credit Union Conference (WCUC).

◆ Attend credit union industry events:

- Participate in the GWLN Breakfast meeting at CUNA's Governmental Affairs Conference.
- Join the GWLN Forum and attend sessions at WCUC.
- Attend the Executive Readiness Summit, a unique learning event dedicated to credit union women focused on learning, networking, and cultivating the leadership potential of up-and-coming talent and expediting top performers' readiness for advancement.

**CONNECT.
INSPIRE.
EMPOWER.**

SISTER SOCIETIES: LOCAL IMPACT. GLOBAL REACH.

Sister Societies are local GWLN “chapters” established worldwide to further our global mission by making a local impact. The mechanism through which our members meet, Sister Societies empower women’s advancement to leadership by:

- ◆ Growing GWLN’s membership in the US and internationally.
- ◆ Elevating voices in credit unions to narrow inequality gaps.
- ◆ Supporting local community efforts and organizations.
- ◆ Raising awareness about Worldwide Foundation’s and World Council’s work.
- ◆ Supporting DEI journeys within the credit union industry.
- ◆ Inspiring the next generation of young leaders.

Sister Societies serve as platforms to discuss issues, exchange ideas, seek solutions, engage with local community organizations, share lessons learned with GWLN members and Sister Societies worldwide, and work toward narrowing inequality gaps. Sister Societies discuss topics such as building diverse teams, supporting DEI, promoting financial wellness, fostering leadership skills, eliminating racial disparities, crafting personal mission statements, diversifying board representation, and others.

Each Sister Society is encouraged to focus on personal and professional development, credit union development, and community development. To demonstrate the credit union difference in the local marketplace, Sister Societies frequently raise support for community nonprofit organizations in their local areas dedicated to empowering women and families.

²GWLN active members can access the members-only internal resources page here:
https://cuwomen.org/gwln_empower/resources/resources_internal

³A collection of resources including reports, articles, etc. are available on the GWLN external resources page here:
https://cuwomen.org/gwln_empower/resources/resources_external

IV. GWLN'S RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADVANCE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP IN CREDIT UNIONS

GWLN listened to our members, both interviewees and survey respondents. We heard the following key issues women face in advancing to leadership in credit unions.

ISSUE #1: PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

WHAT CREDIT UNIONS CAN DO TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

#1: Deepen credit union succession planning emphasizing women's leadership roles

GWLN members told us that credit unions should undertake more rigorous succession planning that prepares for leadership transitions at various levels of the organization. Credit unions should look deeper, beyond top executives, to examine women supervisors, managers, and associates who can be cultivated for leadership roles. GWLN members also told us that involving executives in succession planning strengthens the opportunity to put women on senior leaders' radar.



“[We] have senior level executives do the succession planning [so] it gives them visibility. These talent reviews are a time when you speak up on a person's behalf.”

#2: Organize Women's Leader Connectedness Sessions

GWLN members also recommend that credit unions strengthen women's connections to senior leaders who can specifically help them identify what is needed to advance in their careers. For example, one credit union offers “leader connectedness sessions” to build networking opportunities between senior executives and managerial staff that enable women to understand pathways to leadership. Another credit union offers one-on-one sessions specifically focused on bringing senior leaders together with women managers to plot their careers and identify ways to gain additional training and experience. In several cases, GWLN members noted the need for greater involvement by leaders who are men.



“Offer time for women to connect with senior executives and/or board members and explore women's pathways to leadership. This can take place in small groups or 1:1. In either case, connections to senior executives can help advance women's leadership in credit unions.”

#3: Offer growth assignments for women to learn new skills and gain experience and adopt robust mentorship programs

GWLN members suggested that credit unions can foster a culture of professional development by offering growth assignments to women to gain skills and experience. GWLN members recommend that growth assignments should be recognized in an employee's work plan and annual review, with performance-based rewards dedicated to those who choose to take on these assignments. Credit unions must make time for these assignments, rather than adding them on top of employees' existing work.

Some credit unions may be hesitant to offer growth assignments because they require work to be assigned elsewhere. However, the benefits are clearly multiplied: as senior leaders hand off assignments to managers, those executives can prioritize other tasks while at the same time growing future women leaders. Bold, innovative organizations are willing to take these risks, recognizing the benefits.

GWLN members suggest that credit unions establish more robust in-house mentorship programs to complement activities through GWLN. Credit unions should ensure mentorship programs include intentional, structured commitments rather than serve as casual get-togethers that lack formalized plans or fail to measure progress. Some practical steps are included in the following box.



“Even if something is outside a woman’s area of expertise, putting a woman in charge so she can grow and then support her [will] get her involved and exposed across different areas of expertise.”

“Grow talent by offering assignments that enable women to build new skills, gain experience, and acquire visibility in the credit union.”

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO TO PROMOTE WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP

#1: Advocate for yourself – get in the room

If women are not in the room to advocate for themselves or for other women, they may miss key opportunities for advancement. Some women even described how they needed men to advocate for them or nominate them, otherwise they would not have received the same chances to access leadership, including executive and board positions. Women's advancement in leadership tends to depend upon men to a greater extent than men's advancement depends upon women. Some feel it is riskier to put women candidates forward for leadership positions, especially if they have fewer years of experience or have stepped away from their careers for other life events, such as education or family caregiving.



“You can’t progress if you don’t get a swing for that job when it becomes available.”

“It’s easy for you to go to bat for me when I’m standing next to you. But when I am not there, do you still push me forward?”

MENTORSHIP PROGRAMS

In robust mentorship programs, mentors and mentees should:

- agree learning goals;
- establish regular cadence of meetings;
- identify gaps and opportunities for development;
- allow ample time for relationships to deepen;
- set up metrics to measure growth; and
- decide whether to renew and re-establish new goals or bring the mentorship to a conclusion.

#2: Build and grow networks and use them strategically

GWLN members advocate for women in the credit union sector to join GWLN, build strong networks, and tap into these networks strategically to advance in leadership. Many respondents identified GWLN and Sister Societies as key resources for making contacts, establishing relationships, advancing knowledge, and learning about career opportunities. However, they tended to view these networks as opportunities to hear from other leaders, rather than strategically tapping these networks to ask for support finding jobs or advocating on their behalf when specific opportunities arise. GWLN members specifically suggest that women challenge themselves to “work their nets” for strategic purposes to help them identify, compete for, and succeed in leadership positions.



“We’re creating love and belonging, but we’re not necessarily networking for strategic influence.”

#3: Set up a personal board of advisors comprised of women inside and outside the credit union sector

GWLN members recommend that women think of themselves as a brand, setting up a personal board of advisors to receive feedback and support in navigating key issues. A board of advisors should not be comprised of friends, but individuals from a broad range of sectors who possess the knowledge, skills, and experience to fill gaps, challenge and offer critical feedback, and hold women accountable for their progress.



To find people willing to serve as advisors, one leader described her process: “when I find a good speaker in a particular meeting, I make sure that I get her business card so that we keep talking and I keep learning. Learning doesn’t end until you die.” A personal board should evolve over the course of a woman’s leadership journey.

Another leader advised, “a personal board of directors has to be customized to what that person needs at the time.”





#4: Create a personal strategic plan and review personal growth performance regularly

GWLN members recommend that women create a personal strategic plan to identify leadership positions they want to grow into, then map specific steps to reach them. Not only does this benefit women in advancing in leadership, but also it hones strategic planning skills that are essential for executive work. Women tend to hold back from developing and prioritizing their own individual plans, often due to social and cultural expectations that women must first manage their family's activities. GWLN members recommend that women articulate their goals and map the gaps between present and future, then identify intermediate steps to reach them, including growth assignments, training courses, conferences, mentorship, and other networking opportunities that build and expand one's skill set and experience.

Plans are only as effective as their implementation, so GWLN members suggest that women need to monitor and measure their progress on a regular basis. Women should convene their personal board of advisors to review performance on at least an annual basis, then solicit feedback and support as needs evolve. The review process need not be formal or time-consuming.

PERSONAL STRATEGIC PLAN

A personal strategic plan enables women to identify their leadership goals and map specific activities and support needed to get there.



“We don't set ourselves as a priority with a plan, as women.”

“At the end of year, I gather with a friend, and we say in three minutes what our accomplishments are, then three minutes what we didn't do. Then we take three minutes to describe our goals for next year. If you take too long, [you will] worry about it.”

ISSUE #2: CONFRONT EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT GENDER BIAS

GWLN members described numerous ways in which gender discrimination still exists in credit unions. For example, 41% of those surveyed cited “women are held to higher standards than men when considered for a promotion or nomination” as a major reason holding them back from advancing in their credit union. Many interviewees shared their perception that women in leadership positions still require greater effort to establish and maintain their credibility due to normative social and cultural expectations about men’s leadership.

Establishing trustworthiness, skill, and authority appears to be a tougher challenge for women. Their entrance into the ranks of board members and executives may still be relatively uncommon compared to men. “The challenge of getting the respect at the table is the hardest thing to overcome” said one leader. Women across the globe report battling entrenched social and cultural scripts – both explicit and implicit – that both assume men’s leadership and associate women with certain qualities. As one CEO put it, “sometimes people feel they can get away with a little more because women are more compassionate and empathetic.” GWLN members reported encountering challenges to their credibility, from people second-guessing their decisions to expressing uncertainty of their authority.



“Today, we have to work even harder because it’s still about acceptance.”

WHAT CREDIT UNIONS CAN DO TO CONFRONT EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT BIAS

#1: Actively invest in, promote, and champion women and other diverse leaders

GWLN members say that credit unions must invest in, promote, and celebrate women and other diverse groups to erode centuries-old social scripts about leadership. They must take an intersectional approach, which means having leadership that is diverse in terms of gender, race, class, education level, ability, and other social categories. Credit unions can foster diverse leadership by intentionally setting human resource strategies that specifically prioritize diversity and women’s advancement. They can also feature the achievements of women and other diverse leaders in onboarding trainings, annual meetings, and outreach events. Credit unions can also introduce GWLN as a primary resource on women’s leadership to new staff.

#2: Map membership base and set leadership diversity targets that mirror membership

GWLN members recommend that the leadership of credit unions needs to mirror the diversity of their membership. This requires setting targets for diversity on boards and within executive leadership that mirrors credit unions’ membership. To understand their members’ demographic profiles, credit unions can conduct annual surveys and analyze utilization of member services and social media. GWLN members suggest that credit unions set targets for parallel diversity in leadership, which will help them plan and operate in ways that more accurately reflect their members and their needs.



“You can’t lead any differently just because you’re female.”

SHOWCASE WOMEN LEADERS

In one credit union, men created an e-book to tell the stories of women who inspire them.

GWLN AND ONBOARDING

Credit unions can introduce GWLN in their onboarding materials for all new employees. This provides them with information on how to engage and access services while demonstrating the organization’s interest in women’s leadership.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO TO CONFRONT EXPLICIT AND IMPLICIT BIAS

#1: Examine unconscious assumptions about leadership and gender

GWLN members told us that through examining our own unconscious biases about gender and leadership, we can begin to rewrite old social and cultural scripts. Assumptions about leadership and gender are formed early in childhood, when young people receive messages about their expectations, capabilities, and roles. GWLN members advocate that as women grow, we seize opportunities to challenge ingrained ideas about leadership and gender, including the false belief that men are more “natural” leaders than women.



“[We] as a society disproportionately separate men and boys and do not always amplify and lift up women and girls.”

#2: Advocate for yourself, and advocate for other women

GWLN members report that having an advocate is vital to women’s advancement and success in leadership. However, respondents encouraged women to first examine how their own self-confidence and self-esteem may get in the way of advocating for themselves (see below). GWLN members suggest that women need to advocate for themselves first, then advocate for others. Advocates are essential to changing broader social and cultural perceptions about leadership and gender. When people advocate on behalf of women leaders, it reduces the power of old scripts that undermine women’s leadership. GWLN members suggest that each of us has the power to do this by making a personal commitment to become an advocate for women’s leadership.

Numerous GWLN members cited the importance of men’s advocacy on behalf of women. GWLN members state that men who advocate on behalf of women wear away old assumptions about leadership and gender and reinforce women’s acceptance as leaders.



“I think engaging men is the new frontier in advancing this agenda because they hold the power.” Many cited the importance of having men leaders who advocated for them in their careers. As one woman shared, “For me, I had a champion and an advocate, somebody who cared about my well-being. He was a white male.”

“I had a couple of really great bosses who were gender blind, and I think that helped. One was one of those guys who just wanted to lift me up.”

SPEAK UP FOR WOMEN CHALLENGE

Setting a goal for women’s advocacy can create intention and increase success. How many people can you advocate for in the next twelve months, including yourself?

ISSUE #3: SUPPORT WORK/LIFE BALANCE

The overwhelming majority of GWLN members described the challenge of trying to balance work and life commitments. They report cultural and gender norms that require women to shoulder the burden of caring for families. From taking time off to incurring significant additional costs, GWLN members report they struggle to “have it all.” ***Nearly all interviewees cited challenges with balancing family caregiving responsibilities, participating in community organizations, volunteering, and/or pursuing education.***

Even with strong support, GWLN members reported significant challenges in the workplace because of their roles as caregivers. This includes sometimes stepping away from their jobs and being subsequently set back in their career advancement. This reflects entrenched beliefs about women’s roles that pose emotional burdens and, in some cases, significant financial cost, including for one leader who reported spending half her salary to pay for child care. Women also described how gender stereotypes about family caregiving include normative beliefs that men cannot care for children.



As one leader noted: “There is an unspoken stigma out there about how can a female really lead when she is a mother managing a family.”

WHAT CREDIT UNIONS CAN DO TO SUPPORT WORK/LIFE BALANCE

#1: Offer sessions and services that reinforce the importance of well-being and stress reduction

GWLN members say that enabling work/life balance is key to enabling women to accede to leadership. They strongly advocate for credit unions to prioritize the work/life balance of their employees, especially women, whose advancement in leadership must not come at the cost of their well-being.

One leader set up listening committees for women to share their experiences and, in so doing, sent a message about the importance of the well-being of employees, their families, and the broader community. In addition to listening sessions, GWLN members suggest credit unions could offer psychological and spiritual counseling, yoga and mindfulness training, and more flexible options for taking time off. GWLN members say that credit unions that prioritize work/life balance live up to the cooperative principle of people helping people and do a better job supporting women in advancing to leadership.



In response to the Covid-19 pandemic, the head of one credit union observed, “Lots of women are stressed. Some of our staff members’ husbands lost their jobs [...] what can I do as their CEO to help them?”

LISTENING COMMITTEES

In response to staff stress due to Covid-19, one credit union leader set up “listening committees” for employees to share their experiences. This enabled employees to feel heard and valued and created a better relationship between management and staff.

#2: Examine/re-examine work policies and expand flexible and remote work options

GWLN members strongly stated that credit unions need to examine or re-examine work policies and invest in flexible and remote work arrangements so that women do not have to sacrifice their commitments to being actively engaged family members while also being top-notch performers in the workplace. One leader described being sent on work travel, and their credit union paid for their child and a caregiver to accompany them.

Many credit unions have allowed their staff to work remotely during the Covid-19 pandemic, and it remains to be seen whether that flexibility will continue. GWLN members recommend that making it easier for women to juggle competing priorities will allow them to pursue leadership opportunities.



One CEO described how her husband asked for time off for child care responsibilities. When his employer asked, “Could your wife not do that?” he told them “She’s off running an organization!”

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO TO IMPROVE WORK/LIFE BALANCE

#1 Speak up for work/life boundaries

GWLN members suggest that women speak up about what they can and cannot do, rather than taking on greater responsibilities at significant costs to their well-being. They suggest that if more women set and maintained boundaries, it could have the effect of shifting the credit union’s overall culture and **create ripple effects that benefit everyone**. Equally, GWLN members suggest that women actively support others who set and maintain boundaries, taking a collective approach that makes it possible for women to advance in leadership without compromising their well-being.

#2 Make a personal commitment to examine overachievement

GWLN members recommend women also examine any of their own tendencies toward overachievement. Are there fears of being seen as under-performing that get in the way of balancing work and life? Asking the question can be a good starting place for exploring tendencies toward overachievement with wider circles of trusted friends, professionals, and networks like GWLN.



ISSUE #4: : INCREASE WOMEN'S CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

Across the globe, members described how women hold themselves back. From not stepping forward to share ideas in meetings to stifling their desire for career advancement, a remarkable percentage of GWLN members described how a lack of self-confidence and self-esteem impacts women's advancement to leadership.

A related theme is self-esteem. GWLN members report receiving conflicting messages about how their self-worth is linked to achieving career milestones. This contradicts a belief in being inherently good enough.

GWLN members describe how Covid-19 has exacerbated existing challenges to mental health. As drastic numbers of women have dropped out of the workplace for family caregiving and other responsibilities. Women across the globe are stepping back amidst competing stressors and priorities, oftentimes at a serious disadvantage to their careers, which also impacts women's confidence and self-esteem. GWLN members say the time is critical to confront this confidence crisis. They challenge both credit unions and themselves to erode deeply engrained messages about women's self-worth through perfection and achievement and alleviate the confidence crisis holding many women back from advancing in leadership.



“Women need the courage to step up. There are so many competent, capable women in our industry, but the travesty is we don't see them taking on those senior leadership roles in our industry.”

“...women are trying their hardest to balance executive, teacher, homemaker, and other roles, then on top of that remaining equal with their colleagues who are men. Mental health is an unspoken challenge because it appears to reflect weakness.”

“...women sabotage our efforts to grow by not raising our hands, by accepting the rhetoric that we are too emotional, and by exhibiting very little confidence in our capabilities.”

“Don't let what you think you don't know stand in the way because your male counterparts are not doing that.”



WHAT CREDIT UNIONS CAN DO TO INCREASE WOMEN'S CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

#1 Offer listening groups, support mechanisms such as psychological or spiritual counseling, and other interventions

GWLN members suggest that credit unions can offer services and support to help women improve their self-confidence and self-esteem and advance as leaders. Creating mental health awareness and listening groups enabled one credit union to support women “to talk about everything and understand what they feel and how they can help each other.” One GWLN Sister Society organized a martial arts workshop to build women’s confidence. One woman shared how working with a spiritual counselor helped identify a new life direction that brought purpose and meaning through a new form of leadership. ***When credit unions provide services and support women in addressing their self-confidence and self-esteem, they empower women to become stronger advocates for themselves and other women as leaders.***

#2 Destigmatize mental health to address employee well-being

GWLN members suggest that credit unions can contribute destigmatizing mental health simply by recognizing and talking about challenges. They say that when a credit union addresses mental health, it creates space for employees to bring their whole selves forward. This includes women striving for leadership positions. One leader, observing the need to address mental health, simply advised that “we can be more proactive about checking in with one another.” GWLN members cite the Covid-19 pandemic as having spotlighted the need for mental health support.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO TO INCREASE CONFIDENCE AND SELF-ESTEEM

#1 Be willing to examine yourself

GWLN members say that alongside addressing systemic barriers to leadership, women also need to take personal accountability for examining and strengthening their own self-confidence and self-esteem. This offers women an alternative to feeling disempowered by systemic barriers that may be largely out of their control. Taking the brave step to explore challenges to self-confidence and self-esteem through therapy, spiritual counseling, or talking with trusted friends can help women begin to address the ways we hold ourselves back.



“We have the power within us to rise up. How do we seek that power? How are we then accountable to ourselves for our own life journey?”

“When you start to question yourself, you’ve got to be willing to do a lot of reflection (journaling, therapy, meditation, etc.) that is not comfortable or easy. Put the mirror before you to acknowledge what is you and what is not you.”

RESOURCES FOR EMOTIONAL WELL-BEING

Credit union leaders cited the following resources to support women’s confidence and self-esteem:

- 1:1 psychological counseling
- group therapy
- spiritual counseling
- mindfulness meditation & yoga
- martial arts

#2 Develop and implement a confidence development plan, with support from trusted others

GWLN members suggest that, just like a personal career plan, women can implement a confidence development plan that helps them tackle new challenges and risks that provide them with growth experiences.

Others recommend identifying personal activities outside of work that are challenging and can directly translate to bringing confidence back into boardrooms. Activities can be wide-ranging but should challenge women with an eye toward intentionally bringing this growth, confidence, and self-esteem back into the workplace.



One leader suggests, when attending conferences and meetings, “Get up there and say something early, get a little more moxy. Once you’ve found your voice, you can keep your voice.”

#3 Explore and request organizational support for individual therapy, spiritual counseling, and other interventions

Although not widely or equitably available, individual services such as therapy, spiritual counseling, and other interventions can be tremendously beneficial to helping women improve their confidence and self-esteem. GWLN members shared that they uncovered patterns of self-doubt and behaviors that held them back from seeking leadership opportunities. Some said that having a trusted, trained, professional companion for this work was essential to stay focused and accountable to the oftentimes difficult self-exploration.



“I SILENCE my self-doubts.”

ISSUE #5: CONFRONT RACIAL INJUSTICE AND HARASSMENT

GWLN members shared stories of racial bias and sexual harassment, as well as receiving comments on their personal appearance. Sometimes these events were experienced early in women’s careers, yet the emotional scars have endured. Sadly, stories like these are not just relics of the past. One executive shared about confronting inappropriate sexual comments made recently. GWLN members say that a large part of the problem is executive leadership teams and boards that are not diverse, because they permit implicit bias and unconscious stereotyping within credit unions. Women of color continue to experience frequent microaggressions and unconscious bias.



“They’re sometimes subtle, but just as powerful to the person receiving them.”

“I’ve been subject to sexual harassment by male leaders who questioned whether I earned my promotions. It can really shake your belief system in yourself. Did I really earn this, or were [they] expecting something? This was one of the hardest points of my career.”

PERSONAL CONFIDENCE PLAN

In combination with other interventions, encourage women to make a plan to identify specific activities that challenge their confidence. Activities can vary but should push an edge without creating distress.

WHAT CREDIT UNIONS CAN DO TO CONFRONT RACIAL INJUSTICE AND HARASSMENT

#1 Promote diversity at all levels of the organization (gender, race, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.)

GWLN members state that having people of diverse backgrounds in decision-making positions sends a message that an organization is living up to the credit union cooperative principles. Actionable, measurable, and transparent diversity, equity and inclusion policies and practices send a message that attracting, retaining, and advancing women and people from other diverse groups is a priority. Valuing people of diverse backgrounds (race, gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation, etc.) by promoting them to leadership positions allows credit unions to uphold the dignity of all people while contributing to advancing women's leadership.

#2 Build and reinforce an organizational culture that embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion and does not tolerate harassment of any kind

GWLN members observe that most credit unions promote DEI but must do more to build cultures of inclusivity in which harassment based on race, gender, or any other social category is unacceptable. GWLN members say that encouraging participation in employee resource groups/business resource groups can create opportunities for people who have common backgrounds to network and support each other. They suggest that credit unions set up organization-wide platforms for these employee groups to highlight challenges and advocate where continued action is needed. Credit unions can also strongly encourage employees from dominant groups to further their own education about issues of racial and sexual harassment, so the burden of education does not fall on people of color and women. For example, one credit union industry organization sponsored a cross-cultural exchange that paired executive women who are White with Black women who were at earlier stages in their careers. It created space for meaningful exchanges that broadened participants' understanding of others' experiences and paved the way for Black women to advance in leadership.

WHAT WOMEN CAN DO TO CONFRONT RACIAL INJUSTICE AND HARASSMENT

#1 Listen and learn about racism, white privilege, and sexual/racialized trauma

GWLN members express a need to understand how racism impacts access to leadership for all women based on intersectional discrimination and privilege. In an era when attention has begun to be paid to racism, white privilege, and the impacts of racialized and sexual trauma, there are no shortage of opportunities for personal learning, such as workshops, books, podcasts, and other resources. GWLN members say that much more is needed as part of promoting leadership of women and other groups in credit unions.

#2 Contribute to organizational culture change by making personal commitment to speak up and act against injustice

GWLN members advocate for making a personal commitment to speak up and act against injustice, even when it occurs against people with different identities as us. Destabilizing dominance benefits women and people of diverse backgrounds who seek to advance in leadership. Some GWLN members report their leadership journeys were motivated in part by their making a personal commitment to act against injustice.

EMPLOYEE RESOURCE GROUPS

Credit unions that invest in employee resource groups offer support and space for women and diverse groups to highlight challenges and successes.

JUSTICE CHALLENGE

It can be daunting to speak up against injustice. If we each make a personal commitment to speak up, we will make an impact. How many times can you speak up for justice in the next twelve months, for yourself as well as others?

AN INDUSTRY PARTNER APPROACH TO DIVERSITY

One of GWLN's largest supporters and major industry partners, PSCU, shares their approach to encompassing DEI as part of cultivating a healthy workplace community.

PSCU: CULTIVATING A WORKPLACE COMMUNITY WHERE DIFFERENCES ARE TREASURED

PSCU is a payments technology credit union service organization (CUSO) built, owned, and governed by credit unions. We welcome diversity of culture, background, perspective, beliefs, personality, and thought so we can achieve the greatest outcome. What began as efforts to achieve gender balance in leadership positions has evolved to a comprehensive DEI strategy that is a proven path to higher performance and positive business outcomes.

To level the playing field, organizations must be intentional and remove factors that may negatively impact underrepresented groups and deliberately seek a diverse talent pool. We have seen progress through deploying the following tactics:

- ◆ Implementation of cross-functional team executing PSCU's DEI Strategy and operationalizing the roadmap
- ◆ Initiation of new hire process with only Certified Diversity and Inclusion Recruiters
- ◆ Implementation of technology to increase diversity pool, finding candidates from under-represented groups
- ◆ Modification of the employment application to remove the question asking for the applicant's current salary
- ◆ Use of a hire-in-scale for pay equity, which provides a minimum starting pay based on years of experience
- ◆ Hiding and anonymizing candidate information associated with different forms of bias before executing a search
- ◆ Use of gender neutral and inclusive language in job postings and candidate communications
- ◆ Addressing benefits to include adoption, domestic partner coverage for same and opposite sex, same-sex spousal benefits, coverage for gender identity treatments, and more
- ◆ Using Employee Engagement Survey and DEI Index to measure progress
- ◆ Providing professional development DEI Certification opportunity for all staff annual performance reviews to document how PSCU employees are living our corporate values, providing for self-reflection and alignment with DEI goals

COLLABORATING WITH INDUSTRY PARTNERS

Our journey includes the establishment of five Business Resource Groups (BRG) centered on Women's Leadership, African Americans, Latino/LatinX, LGBTQ+, and Emerging Leaders. Each helps our organization identify areas of structural bias to confront while providing career development and networking opportunities for employees. Each BRG collaborates with likeminded industry organizations, including GWLN and Sister Societies, World Council of Credit Unions Young Professionals Program, African American Credit Union Coalition, Network of Latino Credit Union and Professionals, and CU Pride, each championing and strengthening diversity, equity, and inclusion in our industry. As founding member of the DEI Collective, we have aligned with national credit union system organizations, service providers, and credit unions committed to the movement's cooperative principles, because is it the right thing to do and it is good for business. We've seen time and time again the power of collaboration. After all, we are all on this journey together.

ABOUT PSCU

PSCU, the nation's premier payments CUSO, supports the success of 1,500 credit unions representing more than 5.4 billion transactions annually. Committed to service excellence and focused on innovation, PSCU's payment processing, risk management, data and analytics, loyalty programs, digital banking, marketing, strategic consulting, and mobile platforms help deliver possibilities and seamless member experiences. Comprehensive, 24/7/365 member support is provided by contact centers located throughout the United States. The origin of PSCU's model is collaboration and scale, and the company has leveraged its influence on behalf of credit unions and their members for more than 40 years. Today, PSCU provides an end-to-end, competitive advantage that enables credit unions to securely grow and meet evolving consumer demands. For more information, visit [PSCU.com](https://www.pscu.com).



Global Women's Leadership Network

An **Initiative** of **WORLDWIDE FOUNDATION FOR CREDIT UNIONS**

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The purpose of the Worldwide Foundation is to transform a billion lives worldwide through credit unions.

As the official engagement and fundraising arm of the World Council of Credit Unions, we invite you to join us on this global journey.



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