

WeForShe

FORUM RECAP 2019
2020 ACTION PLAN

CONNECTING FOR CHANGE

WeForShe

is a movement that brings people together to **accelerate change for gender equity** in BC. The world is making progress on gender equality, but we still face a persistent gap in access to opportunities and decision-making power for women, girls and gender diverse people. Women earn less, own fewer assets, and are underrepresented in economic and political decision-making.

Since 2014, **over 6,300 people have attended the annual We For She forum**, and countless more use the Action Plan Priorities to start conversations, launch programs and share their commitments.

And **we've made a lot of progress** (which we share in this booklet)—but we're not there yet! Eighty-seven percent of women we surveyed this year say they have personally experienced inequities based on their gender during their career.

Our intention with We For She is to **inspire people by sharing compelling stories** of those who have broken through barriers to gender equity and who are role models for what is possible.

As The Honourable Janet Austin shared at this year's event, "Setting an example isn't the *best* way, it's the *only* way to create change." **Thank you for being a part of this movement.**

WE FOR SHE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

Jill Earthy, Co-Chair, We For She

Sheila Bouman, High Impact Lab
Alison Coyne, Government of B.C.
Laurel Douglas, Women's Enterprise Centre
Chaunda Honkonen, Women's Enterprise Centre
Jordan Humphries, Pace Group

Lois Nahirney, Co-Chair, We For She

Katherine Lazaruk, Lazaruk Consulting Inc.
Samantha Maw, Greater Vancouver Board of Trade
Nicola Openshaw, Greater Vancouver Board of Trade
Tina Strehlke, Minerva BC
Amelia Wong, Greater Vancouver Board of Trade

ORGANIZING PARTNERS





BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

A Movement In The Making

We For She began in 2014, when 350 business leaders met with government and organizations at the BC Economic Forum to discuss advancing women in leadership, as entrepreneurs, in STEM and in emerging industries, and to **pinpoint the specific issues slowing our progress on gender equity in BC.**

We wanted to know, are the well-documented barriers impacting BC, or **do we have unique problems?** What does gender inequity look and feel like for women? Can we use some of the international best practices? Who is making progress on this? **What works, and what doesn't?** Who is responsible for change?

We resolved to **unite gender equity allies at an annual forum** to take action on our commitments and gauge our progress in BC. Then, we started to notice a pattern: attendees kept talking about the importance of **teaching the next generation to speak up, step up and act up** to be bold in their lives and careers—*'I wish I knew then what I know now!'*

So in 2016, thanks to funding from the Government of BC, we invited girls in grades 10-12 from regions all over BC to join the conversation at **what is now known as the We For She forum**, and one of the largest forums in North America tackling gender equity issues.

It is predicted that the **global economy would grow by an estimated \$28 trillion** if women participated in the economy to the same degree as men (*McKinsey Global Institute, 2015*). Translating this into provincial numbers, this would add \$21 billion to our provincial GDP.

To achieve this, **we need to remove the implicit and institutional biases** that get in women's way. We need to add more women to high-productivity sectors (like tech and the skilled trades), raise women's participation in the labour force, and invest in women entrepreneurs. In short, we need to **encourage women to be bold in their careers.**

That's what We For She is all about!



"I feel empowered to be who I want to be, regardless of society's opinion of whether I should do that or not."

~ Business Leader



ABOUT THIS YEAR'S WE FOR SHE FORUM

On October 1, 2019, we welcomed more than 1,300 business leaders, students and educators for a day full of inspiring presentations, thought-provoking panel discussions, interactive workshops, and energetic breakout sessions.

Over 20 sponsors and partners supported this year's event, participated in our tradeshow and facilitated workshops to help NextGen Leaders build confidence and explore their career options. The **Instant Theatre Company** helped us imagine what we could do if we rewrite gender challenges. **Kirsten Anderson**, Founder of Integrate Play Solutions, had us playing with Lego to show the diverse ways we all look at a situation. **Sheila Bouman**, Principal of High Impact Lab, encouraged us to stand up for change, and Singer-Songwriter **Victoria Anthony** brought down the house with a performance to end the day.

We've captured some of the keynote takeaways in this document, and you can **watch videos of the sessions at weforshe.ca/Videos**.

"I'm here to inspire young women that entrepreneurship is a viable career option."

~ Business Leader



FROM TALK TO ACTION

A Crowdsourced Blueprint To Accelerate Change

After our first forum in 2014, we compiled all of the input from our discussions and released “Women as a Catalyst for Growth: A British Columbia Action Plan,” a document that outlines the **specific actions individuals, industry and government in BC can take** to promote gender equity.

Every year, we ask attendees at the We For She forum to re-visit those action items, then we combine their input with research and best practices and set **new priorities for achieving gender equity in BC**. These priorities have been the same since 2014, and are still relevant today—perhaps more than ever!

This is the We For She Action Plan

Priority #1



Promote & Advocate Diversity

Priority #2



Create Positive Mindsets

Priority #3



Champion Women

Priority #4



Activate Men

Priority #5



Measure Progress

"We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit."

~ Will Durant



HOW YOU CAN PUT THIS PLAN INTO ACTION

We all have a role to play to promote gender equity, and you can accelerate change by **taking small actions every day!**

In this booklet, we're re-living some of the highlights of this year's forum, offering suggestions for **what you can do to get involved** and sharing some **fantastic resources** that can help.

We challenge you to **find the recommendations that resonate with you and take that next step**: maybe you host a workshop, or share the link to an article about unconscious bias. You could invite a young colleague to your next important meeting, or apply for the position that takes you out of your comfort zone.

*Let's make a habit of inclusion, so BC can
be a role model for gender equity excellence!*



We For She
Action Plan
Priority #1

Promote & Advocate Diversity

TOP PRIORITY FOR THE SECOND YEAR

Studies show that leadership diversity can lead to innovation, economic growth and social change. It reduces group-think, and fosters an environment where female, racialized and LGBTQ+ people are better able to contribute (*Minerva BC, 2019*).

Ninety-two percent of BC business leaders have witnessed inequities based on gender since entering the workforce, yet only 67% know what to do when they see or experience behavior that is not inclusive.*

As **Dr. Maria Gyongyossy-Issa**, President of the Society for Canadian Women in Science and Technology (SCWIST) pointed out, "it's the little conversations, not the big ones, that are going to change the world."

"Every time you communicate, you have the opportunity to lead."

~ Amara Hunt, Director of Diversity and Inclusion Programs, The Humphrey Group

5 TAKEAWAYS FROM AMARA HUNT

1. **Be strategic.** Be mindful of when and who you challenge.
2. **Be bold.** Avoid minimizing habits that make you appear less confident.
3. **Be respectful.** People believe something, and that's why they do what they do. We need to share thinking to shape thinking.
4. **Be positive.** Highlight the opportunities to move forward.
5. **Use research.** Leaders don't "show up and throw up." Consider your audience, anticipate challenges and prepare.

Watch Amara's session at weforshe.ca/Videos



Amara
Hunt



We For She
Action Plan
Priority #2

Create Positive Mindsets

WE HAVE THE POWER— AND RESPONSIBILITY— TO TRANSFORM OUR MINDSET

Attendees voted, and this is the area where they feel they can make the most progress as individuals. The We For She philosophy is *'you've got to see it to be it!'* So, we welcomed diverse BC women to the stage to share their personal stories of perseverance, determination and overcoming their self-limiting beliefs to be bold in their lives and careers.

- **Mitzi Dean**, Parliamentary Secretary for Gender Equity: “See that you do belong. Be bold, say yes, step into that space.”
- **Amal Alhuwayshil**, Intersectional Feminist, says to ask yourself: what are your limiting beliefs? What are your affirmations?
- **Kiana Alexander**, Chief Operating Officer, The Raven Institute: “When we’re brave enough to be who we are, we’re already changing the world by inviting others to do the same. [...] Belonging feels like you matter.”
- **Asha Diaz**, Singer-Songwriter & Mental Health Advocate: “Be mad, be proud, take up space.”

3 FACTORS THAT CAN IMPACT MINDSET

- **Unconscious Bias** refers to the assumptions and conclusions we jump to without thinking. If you have a brain, you’re biased, so you can’t eliminate it—but you can interrupt it.
- **Impostor Syndrome** makes successful people feel that their achievements are due to luck, and everyone is going to figure out they’re a fraud.
- **Belonging Uncertainty** is a feeling that many women encounter when they enter fields where they’re under-represented, like STEM and the trades. Lacking a social connection with the group, they experience more self-doubt and a greater pressure to prove that they deserve to be there.

Find resources to transform your mindset at weforshe.ca

3 TAKEAWAYS FROM HUMAIRA AHMED

1. **There is power in perseverance.** Humaira shared her powerful story of narrowly escaping two arranged marriages and using her strength later as the female founder of a tech startup, Locelle. When faced with failure, she says you should do the only thing you can do and push forward.
2. **Commit to yourself.** Women are taught to nurture, show empathy and think of others before themselves. Humaira says women need to show up for ourselves.
3. **Challenge the status quo.** Humaira spoke of the added stress of operating in a male-dominated field, thinking: “If I fail, I’ll just validate that I’m not supposed to be here.” Change doesn’t happen from things that are easy. Write down your goal, share it with someone and use your voice to speak up.

Watch Humaira’s keynote at weforshe.ca/Videos



Humaira
Ahmed



We For She
Action Plan
Priority #3

Champion Women

ROLE MODELS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

The World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Report 2020 suggests that the "Role Model Effect" may contribute to higher numbers of women in leadership and changing social norms, which could close the gender gap. Developing and nurturing relationships is critical. Overall, women tend to have fewer connections than men, and less access to networks (*Harvard Business Review*, 2019).

Good news: 81% of BC business leaders can name someone who has actively championed their career.*

Rajveer Hundal, Partner, PwC Canada, shared her personal impact of having a champion. Despite having a strong work ethic and taking every opportunity to hone her skills, she was faced with challenges as a female and a visible minority. On the road to becoming the first female Indo-Canadian partner in BC, Rajveer found that mentors and advocates were key to her journey. One female partner, in particular, actively championed Rajveer's career.

"For some opportunities that weren't in my control, my champion brought me to the table. She has been key to my journey and where I am today."

~ Rajveer Hundal, Partner, PwC Canada



Tessa
Virtue

5 TAKEAWAYS FROM TESSA VIRTUE

- 1. Adapt and conquer.** In her training, Tessa learned to practice failure and use it to anticipate what could go wrong so she could better herself.
- 2. The hard work is where you find the joy.** The process of working toward your goal is the fulfilling part, and ambition is a commitment to the process.
- 3. Women don't need to compete with each other.** Reach out and ask for help, to benefit from the insights and experiences of your mentors.
- 4. Find time to connect with yourself, and commit to your values.** Tessa uses personal and professional mission statements to help her make choices in her career that align with her values.
- 5. Don't be afraid to put yourself out there.** It's important to celebrate our unique assets. Maybe your job doesn't exist yet, because you'll create it.

View Tessa's interview at weforshe.ca/Videos



We For She
Action Plan
Priority #4

Activate Men

FIND A COMMON SPACE FOR DIALOGUE

Engaging men as allies and partners is critical. According to our 2019 survey, 96% of leaders in BC believe men play an important role in helping achieve gender equity in the workplace. But how, exactly, can we do that?

When we focus on the equity part of the movement (i.e. being fair and impartial) we find that common space for dialogue because equity benefits people of all genders, backgrounds and orientations. We found that 60% of respondents—males and females equally—believe they have personally been affected by the caretaker penalty.*

At the Inclusive Leadership Forum hosted by Minerva BC in June 2019, **Dr. Michael Kaufman** pointed out that gender norms hurt men too. As an expert on engaging men as partners in gender equality, he feels that a “genuine belief” that all people deserve fair treatment must be behind any change (*Minerva BC, 2019*).

“Build a culture of shared responsibility for home, family and work that is flexible enough for both men and women to be successful.”

~ Business Leader

RESOURCES TO INFLUENCE CHANGE THROUGH POSITIVITY at weforshe.ca

As our social norms change, we're bound to encounter complex situations because we're exploring uncharted territory. But most conflicts don't come out of intentionally bad behavior—they can be bad habits, or unconscious thoughts that we have the opportunity to interrupt. These resources can help:

- **Don't Burn Hapless Men, Turn Them,** Forbes
- **What (If Anything) to Do or Say to Interrupt Bias,** National Center for Women & Information Technology
- **Infographic: Actions Men Can Take to Create an Inclusive Workplace,** Catalyst



Jill Earthy and
Lois Nahirney



**We For She
Action Plan
Priority #5**

Measure Progress

WE'RE MOVING THE DIAL ON GENDER EQUITY

People and organizations in BC are waking up and taking action, and we're starting to see an impact.

- 81% of BC business leaders believe diverse backgrounds and different perspectives are welcomed and encouraged at their company (*We For She Survey, 2019*).
- Over 49% of public sector board members in BC are women, an 8% increase from 2017 (*Face of Leadership™ Scorecard, 2019*).
- 84% of women entrepreneurs have goals to grow their business in the next 5 years (*BC Chamber of Commerce and Forum for Women Entrepreneurs, 2019*).
- 64% of women aspire to be a senior leader and more than 50% want to be on the board of a company or organization (*KPMG, 2015*).
- The BC government reached 49% gender balance on provincially-appointed boards in 2019 (*BC Government, 2019*).
- The BC Construction Association and the Builders Code project have a province-wide goal to increase the number of skilled trades women from 4.7% to 10% by 2030.

BC INITIATIVES STARTED SINCE 2014

We're excited to share some of the initiatives that sponsors and partners of We For She have implemented since 2014, and we encourage you to use these tested models to create change in our own systems and networks. Learn more about these programs at weforshe.ca.

- BC Tech – What Works Series
- Catalyst for Growth Regional Dialogues and Fund by Women's Enterprise Centre
- "Enhancing the Mosaic of Women Entrepreneurs" (EMWE) project launched by Women's Enterprise Centre
- Face of Leadership™ BC Score Card
- HR Tech Group
- Inclusive Leadership Training Program Pilot by Minerva BC, advanced through the HR Tech Group
- Minerva BC Tech Scorecard
- We For She NextGen™ Leaders Program
- Women in Tech Regatta – in Vancouver since 2017
- Women in Tech World – See their Gender Equity Roadmap
- Women's Leadership Council Wendy McDonald Awards
- YVR Airport Authority Women's Development Circles

NOW IT'S YOUR TURN

We all have a role to play to keep the momentum going! From simple actions to long-term goals, **you can make a difference by using these strategies to live out the We For She Action Plan Priorities** and sharing them with your network. Visit weforshe.ca for resources and samples of organizations in BC that are making progress.



1. PROMOTE AND ADVOCATE DIVERSITY

- Speak up! Step up! Act up!
- Invest in women's leadership and entrepreneurial skill development.
- De-bias organizational policies and HR practices, and create safe environments.
- Be flexible for families.
- Incorporate diversity into schools and encourage girls in STEM.
- Have tough conversations respectfully.



Asha Diaz



2. CREATE POSITIVE MINDSETS

- Invest in your own leadership development.
- Learn about impostor syndrome and how to overcome it.
- Address stereotypes.
- Recognize unconscious bias.
- Share stories and images of women leaders.
- Be confident in your abilities, take risks and overcome challenges.



Amal Alhuwayshil



3. CHAMPION WOMEN

- Take charge and learn to negotiate.
- Offer to mentor someone; be a champion and role model for women.
- Develop champions and advisors.
- Invest in women-owned businesses.
- Build a network and reach out for help.



Mitzi Dean



4. ACTIVATE MEN

- Talk to men who show up at events like We For She. Listen to their perspectives and ask them about the changes they would like to see.
- Know the facts—share the economic and societal benefits of gender equity.
- Share responsibilities at home and work.
- Lead by example—make inclusion part of our leadership approach.
- Offer concrete actions.



Kiana Alexander



5. MEASURE PROGRESS

- Assess your current D&I policies and create a benchmark.
- Figure out what you need to measure, and measure it.
- Share progress, including failures.
- Share goals to stay accountable.
- Invite feedback.
- Celebrate achievements!



Rajveer Hundal



CLOSING MESSAGE FROM THE WE FOR SHE EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

We For She is a true collaboration and partnership. We all need to keep working together to create a more equitable world—that includes business, government, academia and individuals.

As **Kory Wilson**, Executive Director of Indigenous Initiatives and Partnerships at BCIT put it, “pay attention to those who went before you, and think about what you can do for the women coming after you. You’re part of this legacy of change.”

More needs to be done, but don’t forget that what we are doing here is really cool and unique.

Thanks to our partners, sponsors and volunteers, and to the Province of BC for providing funding for the next generation to be included.

“It’s not just about one person changing behaviours, but about a collective of people working towards a common goal of decreasing the gap.”

~ Business Leader

