



# The 12 building blocks of unity

A new approach to closing the gender gap across your community



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It's clear, based on the hundreds of studies conducted across dozens of industries – such as energy and resources, technology, construction, and finance – that what we are doing today to close the gender gap is not working.

In fact, in many industries, we are moving backwards and the gap is increasing. According to the World Economic Forum, at today's pace, it will take 170 years for women to achieve gender parity in the workplace. And, according to the Status of Women Canada, "women represent over 47 percent of the labour force in Canada, yet less than 5 percent of CEOs are women."

Studies show that gender-intelligent organizations that create greater opportunities for advancing women benefit from increased performance. A 2017 HAYS Recruiting Experts Worldwide Study states that "Fortune 500 companies with a higher percentage of women on their board see higher return on equity, return on sales, and return on investment capital." Moreover, increased diversity leads to stronger levels of innovation and overall productivity. Simply put, closing the gender gap increases organizational performance.

The time has come for local governments to recognize that workplace unity is an organizational performance driver. And, beyond the municipal

organization, there is a need for programs that better support local businesses in their efforts to close the gender gap and unify their workplaces as well.

## A New Approach to Closing the Gender Gap

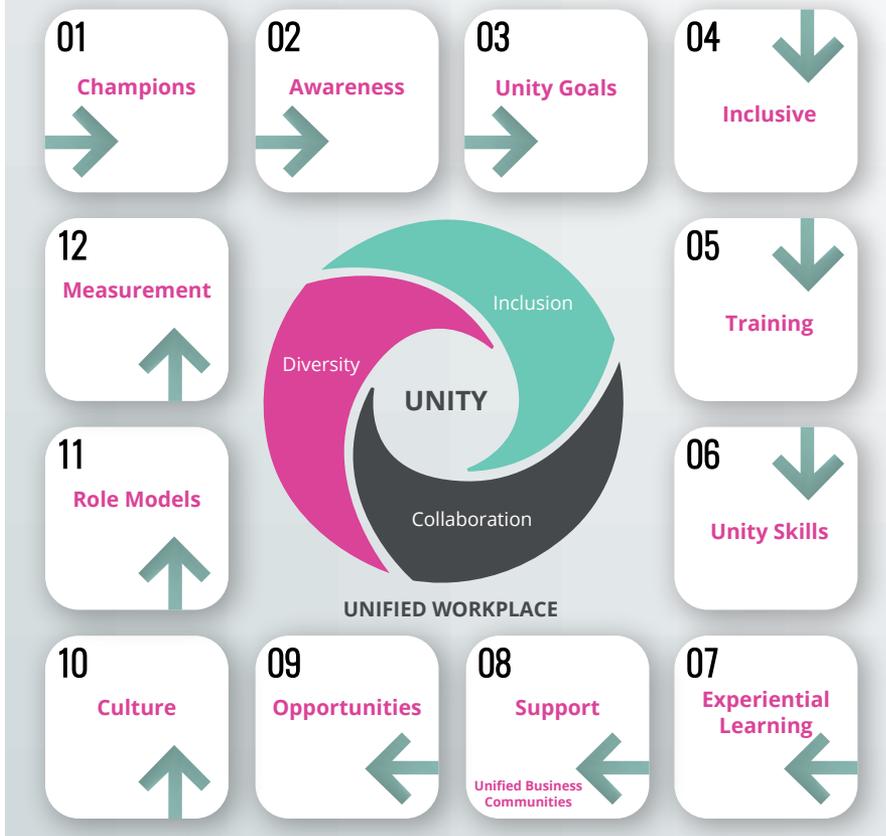
The glass ceiling metaphor arguably no longer adequately depicts the gender gap, as many women have successfully broken through the "glass ceiling" with companies like Facebook, General Motors, and IBM, where women hold top positions of authority in senior leadership.

Although women have broken through the glass ceiling, they still find themselves having to navigate numerous obstacles, roadblocks, and dead ends on their path to leadership. These obstacles, in many cases, are not solvable by leadership training alone and require changes to the entire ecosystem.

The fact is, women navigate the workplace differently from men, typically experiencing indirect pathways toward achieving their desired professional and personal goals. Some of the obstacles and roadblocks women must navigate on the leadership journey include:

- limited advancement opportunities;
- family obligations;
- pressure of balancing work/life; and

**Figure 1**  
12 Building Blocks of Unity



- discrimination or unconscious bias and harassment.

These are complex problems that require a holistic perspective and greater understanding of the various factors that contribute to these issues, including corporate culture, human resource policies, communities of support, and strategies for dealing with conscious and unconscious bias, and many more.

Many organizations are tackling the problems of gender diversity and innovation gaps with a quick-fix mentality. Most of the approaches used today are focused on solving specific pain points, rather than addressing the root cause, which is a lack of unity.

The time has come to shift the focus toward achieving unity in the workplace and increasing awareness of the current situation, both internally and externally across the community.

The move toward creating a unified workplace will require support for the three dimensions of unity: diversity, inclusion, and collaboration.

### The 12 Building Blocks of Unity

The new approach involves creating the right environment in the workplace that

will drive innovation and other economic and social benefits. A holistic approach that addresses all 12 building blocks of unity (Figure 1) is needed to close the gender gap and create unity. These building blocks include:

**1. Champions** – Unwavering support from senior leaders with a vision and a commitment to achieving unity.

**2. Awareness** – Recognition and understanding of the current internal and external environment, including available resources, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats at an organizational, individual, and community level.

**3. Unity goals** – Establishment of specific, measurable, actionable, realistic, time-based (SMART) unity goals.

**4. Inclusive** – Solutions that include both men and women, internal and external partners, and key stakeholder groups across the industry, working together to create unity.

**5. Training** – Access to a comprehensive range of personalized training programs and resources, tailored to suit the needs of all employees, ensuring the entire organization is speaking the same unity language.

**6. Unity skills** – Introducing, practising, and celebrating unity skills as a core pillar within the organization's corporate culture.

**7. Experiential learning** – Practising, embracing, and living the unity training by creating new unity projects and initiatives that provide opportunities for growth and development.

**8. Support** – Building a community of support, both internally and externally across the industry. Encouraging women and men to support women.

**9. Opportunities** – Create new growth and development opportunities for career and expertise advancement.

**10. Culture** – Establish and nurture a corporate culture that encourages, supports, and rewards unity in the workplace.

**11. Role models** – Promote successes, and profile role models and success stories related to unity and career achievements.

**12. Measurement** – Track new unity activities and initiatives, and measure against established goals and milestones, making any necessary modifications along the way. Celebrate results and showcase success stories.

### A Role for Economic Developers

What role can economic developers play in helping local businesses create unified workplaces so their businesses and employees can thrive?

Local governments can help to increase economic growth by supporting local businesses in their efforts to create more unified workplaces. This can be done by creating a unified business community – a business community that supports business efforts to unify their workplace.

Unified business communities share five common characteristics:

1. a strong, action-driven commitment to unity
2. a radically engaged business community
3. a cross-industry network and support system
4. a readily accessible shared knowledge and resources
5. recognition and promotion as a unified business environment

Economic developers can play a role in helping local businesses in four of the 12 unity building blocks, including: awareness, training, support, and role models, with these approaches suggested below.

## Awareness

- Raising awareness of the value and benefits of creating a unified workplace by creating a “unity accord” that local businesses and organizations can support.
- Supporting businesses in their self-awareness efforts and providing them with opportunities to support each other in this discovery stage by creating networking opportunities.
- Helping businesses to understand where they are today to set realistic unity goals and effective strategies for moving forward.
- Becoming more aware of any road-blocks and barriers created by government policies and processes that business leaders and employees must navigate in their career.

## Training

- Providing opportunities for business owners to learn, experience, and practise new approaches to creating unity in the workplace, within networks, across industries, and in communities.
- Creating a safe environment for experimenting, creating new ideas, and

innovating by offering training sessions through the economic development office.

## Support

- Creating a supportive environment with purposeful and measurable mentorship, sponsorship, and peer-to-peer support in the business community and across all industry sectors.
- Providing an environment that supports and encourages radical cross-sector collaboration and innovation.

## Role models

- Profiling role models, accomplishments, and success stories that inspire and teach future leaders.
- Leading by example, and embracing a municipality or region with values and beliefs that align with unity.
- Measuring at the local, regional, national, and international level.

## Benefits of Unity across the Community

Beyond the municipal workplace, imagine what’s possible with a fully

engaged workforce and a unified business community. Benefits include:

**Increased business growth** – Local businesses will become more profitable and innovative.

**Higher retention** – Local organizations and talent will feel more supported, which increases loyalty and retention.

**New investment attraction** – New businesses will be attracted to a unified business community.

**New talent attraction** – New talent will be attracted to working within a unified business and business community.

**Increased competitiveness** – The local community will become more innovative and interconnected.

**Better measurement** – The ability to now measure the numbering and types include unity initiatives, progress made in creating unity, and the number of businesses actively committed to closing the gaps.

The time has come for local governments to embrace “unity” as a key performance and economic driver. It’s time for a new approach. **MW**

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