

2022 | Delaine Anderson, Research Assistant



100 in 100 Report: Findings from our road trip across Minnesota

CAP Report # 254

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100 RURAL WOMEN

June 2022 | Delaine Anderson, Research Assistant

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The Southeast Regional Sustainable Development Partnership brings together local talent and resources with University of Minnesota knowledge to drive sustainability in agriculture and food systems, tourism and resilient communities, natural resources and clean energy. The Partnerships are part of University of Minnesota Extension.

100 Rural Women works to serve and support rural women: identify, connect, and create relationships, models of networking, leadership, mentorship, and civic engagement. They envision a future where more rural women lead positive change for themselves, their families and communities, the nation, and the world.

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Letter from the Founder

At 100 Rural Women, we aim to inspire leadership and create connections. This research report documents a signature initiative called “100 in 100” that was designed to inform our efforts.

When we created this organization—with the help of many hands and minds—my goal was to be a customer-centric and data driven engine to connect rural women with each other for leadership support and to lift up women leaders to be models for others. We want to demystify the pathways to leadership in careers, elected and appointed offices, and rural communities. We envision more women serving in decision making leadership roles across sectors, geography, and cultures.

Our “100 in 100” project was launched with a goal to hold 100 in-person meetings in 100 rural communities throughout Minnesota to cultivate 100 ideas and 100 network connections. Work was to begin in Spring of 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic put those plans on hold.

Embracing the new virtual environment, 100 Rural Women pivoted to ramping up educational, informational, and social media methods of connecting rural women who were increasingly isolated due to COVID-19 restrictions. The first 50 meetings were held virtually, targeting all regions of the state in 2021. Learnings from these convenings of more than 1,000 women has informed the “Next 50” meetings. These were launched in March 2022. Women identified the need for 30-to-45-minute sessions to network, to build wellness and resilience, and learn from experienced female leaders.

Our mission is to support rural women and to learn that from their voices, narrative, and via convenings. We strive for continual learning from each other about how we can best serve and support rural women by making connections which support them, identifying and removing barriers that stand in the way, discovering and building networks with information sharing, demystifying paths to leadership for all women across sectors, and identifying strategies and pathways to and for more women serving in decision making leadership roles.

Our model has been shaped by the labor, efforts and needed perspectives of students who represent the future of Rural America. We are forever grateful to the University of Minnesota RSDP Regional Sustainable Development Partnership and CURA the Center for Urban and Regional Affairs for the opportunity to work with Graduate Students, Interns, AmeriCorps Vistas and the ability to leverage the incredible assets of the Institution, invaluable research resources and human capital.

We invite you to comment on our work and join us in our efforts. Please reach out to me via email at teresa@100ruralwomen.org.

Teresa Kittridge

Teresa Kittridge, Founder

About 100 Rural Women

[100 Rural Women](#) is a non-profit and non-partisan organization committed to building leadership through networks, mentorship, education, and civic engagement. The mission of the organization is to serve and support rural women through identifying, connecting, and creating relationships, models of networking, leadership, mentorship, and civic engagement. The organization was founded in 2019 with a dynamic board of rural leaders spanning diverse ages, identities, and experiences.

Currently, the organization aims to produce research that uplifts the true experiences and voices of rural women. They have a variety of projects currently underway, including a focus on rural elected and appointed officials, power mapping in rural Minnesota, and media highlights of rural leaders.

Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships

100 Rural Women was extremely fortunate to partner with [The University of Minnesota Extension Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships \(RSDP\)](#), who support and sustain Minnesota's rural communities by working with communities.

The Regional Sustainable Development Partnerships (RSDP) brings together community and University knowledge and resources to drive sustainability in four focus areas: agriculture and food systems, clean energy, natural resources, and resilient communities. The RSDP supports local projects through five regional boards made up of community members and University faculty and staff. The RSDP also supports multi-region food systems work across Greater Minnesota and provides energy programming through the Clean Energy Resource Teams.

The five Minnesota regions where the RSDP works are the Northwest, Northeast, Central, Southeast, and Southwest portions of Minnesota. See Appendix I: RSDP Regions for a thorough description of each region.

Section 1: Executive Summary

Through 100 convenings across 100 communities, the 100 in 100 project is identifying the key support requests of rural women in Minnesota interested in making a difference for themselves and their communities. This report summarizes the research-intensive first half of the 100 in 100 work that involved 715 women participating virtually across the state beginning in March 2021. Responses, quotes, and feedback from participants identified nearly 3000 unique requests for support and connection.

These findings informed the second half of the 100 in 100 project titled ["The Next 50"](#) which offers a variety of virtual programming to address three identified resource gaps:

- **Authentic Connections:** One participant summarized it well—"*Leadership happens through relationships.*" Developing relationships take time, practice, and opportunity. As an organization, 100 Rural Women can provide low-stakes situations where women leaders can solicit advice, get help with problem solving, and learn from each other.
- **Skills & Leadership Programming:** Beyond traditional training topics, women requested to learn by example through hearing others' paths to leadership and to take time for themselves to rebuild personal resilience. All presented in short, 30-minute segments to fit with busy schedules.
- **Expanding Networks:** Rural women identified the need for a facilitated way to expand their own informal and professional networks. With virtual options, geographic barriers are reduced, and 100 Rural Women can match people with similar interests to create new connections.

Rural women are underrepresented in leadership opportunities and underpaid in most employment roles. The voices and experiences of diverse rural women were synthesized into several themes that directly provide actionable opportunities to develop and support rural women leading.

The 100 in 100 project launched in 2020 with five feedback meetings with community leaders to inform the length, content, and outreach for future meetings. Then, a series of four convenings and an online survey suggested that there are three main barriers that need to be addressed for rural women to fully participate in leadership: Structural Barriers, Institutional Mindsets, and Individual Mindsets.

Subsequently, a series of 37 focus groups and an online survey aimed to collect feedback and suggestions from rural women about what actionable support is needed for rural women

leaders to form and thrive.

The need for mentorship was an overarching concept reflected through the research, as well as six main themes that arose during the analysis and synthesis of responses.

1. **Community:** the lack of authentic spaces to connect with rural women in similar leadership roles or life circumstances
2. **Safe Spaces:** the ability to request feedback and criticism as well as practice skills in spaces away from the public eye
3. **Emotional and Mental Health:** the struggle to maintain multiple responsibilities in the public and private spaces of their lives as well as to take care of themselves
4. **Opportunities:** the availability of pathways and positions into leadership roles, no matter the size via in person and virtual offerings
5. **Skills:** the request for external trainings and support available to keep rural leaders up to date on new technologies and leadership techniques
6. **Peer Support:** the need for public and private leadership affirmations of rural women from those closest to them

100 Rural Women envisions a world where more rural women lead positive change for themselves, their families, their communities, the nation, and the world. The breadth and depth of responses from participants at all stages of this project illustrated the need for mentorship opportunities, specific skills and leadership programming, authentic connections, and expanded networks to better support and uplift the work of rural women.

Section 2: Background

Women are encouraged to pursue leadership roles but face unique barriers on the way to and within positions. This is exacerbated in rural communities, where social norms and expectations surrounding a woman's place can make it difficult to feel supported in work outside of career paths more familiar to their communities. Within Minnesota, women are underrepresented in national, state, and local elected positions despite making up 50.2% of the state's population.¹ Even in a female dominated field like education where 74% of teaching staff were women during the 2020 school year, only 20% of superintendents were women.² Only 25% of corporation-based board of director seats are held by women in Minnesota; only 4% of seats are held by indigenous women and other racial or ethnic minorities.³

While there is a record high for women's representation in the Minnesota Legislature— 36% in the 2020 to 2021 session⁴—recent press releases and news are reporting that significant numbers of women lawmakers are retiring as a result of redistricting and other causes.⁵

Furthermore, gender representation is not equitable among diverse identities and data on women's representation in elected roles becomes much more bleak at the region, county, and city levels. Beyond equity, research shows that women make important contributions in political and civil positions. Female legislators work harder to affect change, sponsor and cosponsor more bills, introduce more legislation than men related to women's rights, children, and family, and bring more federal money back to their constituents^{6,7} - regardless of party affiliation. A 2015 report by the Pew Research Center surveyed Americans via telephone about why more women aren't in top executive business positions or high political office. The report found consensus among both men and women that women are held to higher standards than men and that many Americans aren't ready to have a woman leader.⁸ Gender bias in the workplace, even for women in leadership roles, often adds responsibility for interpersonal relationships and conflict on top of the duties and responsibilities of their jobs.⁹

In Minnesota, women earn on average 5% less than men.¹⁰ This results in a lifetime loss of around \$447,960 in income for each woman.¹¹ In Greater Minnesota, the gender pay gap increases to around 7.7%, even when controlling for education and other relevant factors.¹⁰ The pay gap is larger for diverse racial and ethnic groups in Minnesota: when disaggregating by cultural affiliation certain African and south Asian groups are even more impacted.¹² Altogether, the current landscape for women's leadership is not conducive to equitable representation and achievement. This focus becomes especially bleak when zoomed into rural areas.

Rural women specifically experience social and structural barriers to running for, being

appointed to, and maintaining leadership roles.¹³ Rural areas tend to maintain a stronger indoctrination of gender roles, of which many expectations fall upon rural women to participate in the maintenance of both their family and community.^{14,15} This participation is only acceptable within certain 'ways', an unspoken expectation being that rural women are expected to prioritize the needs of their family and not challenge established male leaders in their community.¹⁵⁻¹⁸ These gendered expectations can result in constrained engagement with employment and rural politics.

Section 3: Methodology

To adequately address the needs of rural women in Minnesota for leadership, this 100 Rural Women's research project used a community-based participatory research approach that utilized a positive deviance framework to let rural women inform strength-based research questions and methods. Community-based participatory research allows researchers - often those with power, privilege, and resources - to complement the lived knowledge of individuals directly in a priority research group through the creation of high-quality evidence that policy and decision makers will respect.¹⁹ Positive deviance refers to behaviors that certain members of a group practice lending those individuals 'advantages' above the rest of the community.²⁰ In this project, participants were asked questions about what is working well or what types of support would help initiatives or leaders already in place. Quotes throughout this report are representative samples of themes and findings.

Northwest Pilot

In February 2020, graduate research assistant Kate Stower led the pilot phase of this project. In doing so, she completed a literature review and held five feedback sessions with community leaders in the Northwest upon the format and content of the agenda, timing, and how to conduct diverse outreach opportunities. Along with 100 Rural Women's Executive Director, Kate then held convenings in the Northwest region of Minnesota. During these convenings she explored barriers to leadership, what types of support was needed for rural women in this region specifically, and how to best connect women. She did this by asking women to find similarities in small breakout rooms and then inviting them to connect the peer that they were matched with to someone else in their real life.

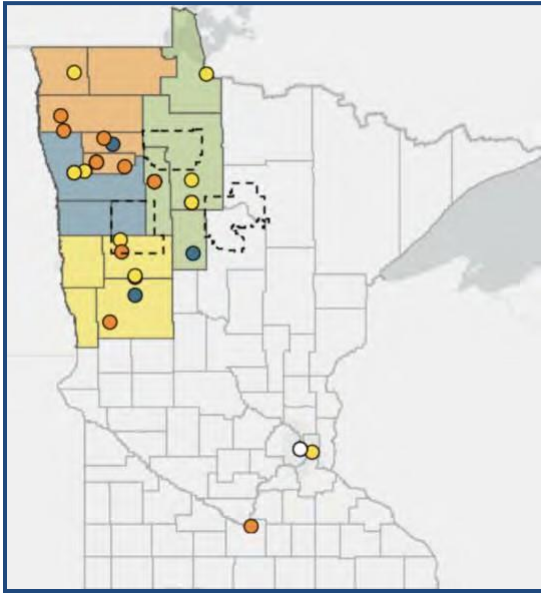
The pilot phase of the project aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. What leadership barriers do women face in NW Minnesota?
2. How can we support and empower women to take on more leadership roles?
3. How can we identify, connect and build stronger Women's Networks in NW Minnesota?

Timeline

- September to November 2020 - Literature review
- December 2020 to February 2021 - Design and implementation of survey
- February to March 2021 - 5 outreach and feedback meetings with community leaders
- March 2021 - 4 convenings
- April to June 2021 - Wrap up

Figure 1 - Map of Northwest Convening Participants



Dots represent each individual who participated and are color coordinated to match the convening they attended.

Survey

169 individuals completed the pilot survey in its entirety. The survey was administered via a “Snowball invitation” - individuals identified through web searches were emailed the survey and upon completion they were asked to share it with other women in their networks. To be sent the survey, individuals needed to identify as a woman, be over the age of eighteen, and have a connection to Northwest Minnesota. There were 22 questions, six of which were demographic in nature.

1. Do you agree with the following statements?
 - a. Women are held to the same standards as men.
 - b. Employers offer women equal opportunities for advancement.
 - c. Women do more “office housekeeping” jobs.
 - d. Women leaders get support from the community.
 - e. Most people believe women can be good leaders.
 - f. Women leaders are as skilled as men.
 - g. Women are as likely to ask for promotions and raises.
 - h. Women are tough enough for leadership.
 - i. Women have the experience needed to be a leader.
 - j. Women see themselves as leaders.
 - k. Women are confident and take risks.
 - l. Women communicate their desire for new assignments or promotions.

- m. Women have access to supportive mentors.
 - n. Women have equal access to informal social networks (happy hours, softball team, golf)
 - o. Women have more equal caregiving responsibilities to men.
2. What barriers have you faced in taking on more leadership in these networks?
 3. Do you think other people see you as a leader?
 4. Name one woman in your community who you see as a leader. Why?
 5. Name one woman in your community who you see as having the potential to be a good leader. Why?
 6. What has your workplace done to support employees in taking on new opportunities?
 7. Where do you get support for professional growth?
 8. If there is something that could help other women like you develop leadership skills, what would it be?
 9. Give one example of how another woman has guided or supported you.
 10. What forms of education have helped you up to this point?
 11. What “communities” (or networks or organizations) are you involved in?
 12. How do these communities/networks/organizations make newcomers feel welcome?
 13. Do you have any leadership roles in these networks?
 - a. What leadership roles have you had?

Pilot Convenings

The convenings invited specific participants who identified as leaders in Northwest Minnesota either via web searches or public positions. These meetings were hosted for ninety minutes on Zoom.

Figure 2 - Calendar of Pilot Convenings

March 2021						
Sun.	Mon.	Tues.	Wed.	Thurs.	Fri.	Sat.
	1	2	3	4 <i>Convening 1</i> 7:00-8:30 p.m.	5	6 <i>Convening 2</i> 8:30-10:00 a.m.
7	8	9 <i>Convening 3</i> 3:00-4:30 p.m.	10	11	12 <i>Convening 4</i> 12:00-1:30 p.m.	13

Agenda

- Welcome & Introduction to the 100 in 100 Project - 15 minutes
- Small Group Discussions in Breakout Rooms - 15 minutes
 - Introductions
 - Share examples of a women leader in your community
- Focus Group - 45 minutes
 - Report out from small group discussions
 - Discuss research findings
 - Individual work time on Jamboard
 - Large group discussion of Jamboard responses
- Network Building - 10 minutes
 - Partner discussions
 - Challenge to “Close a triangle”
- Closing & Evaluation - 5 minutes

Data Sources

- Registration (Google form)
- Menti poll (1st Convening)
- Shared facilitator notes
- Jamboard
- Transcript of large group discussions
- Chat box
- Final Thoughts eval (google form)

Statewide Phase

Upon completion of this pilot phase, an evaluation of the Northwest Pilot findings and participant feedback helped modify the survey and focus group questions and format for the statewide phase that followed.

The goals of our statewide phase were the following:

1. explore existing formal and informal networks of rural women
2. identify opportunities
3. connect local women to each other
4. ignite action in community, leadership, civic engagement, and rural entrepreneurship



Timeline

Project advertising began one month before the first focus group on June 22nd, 2021. 100 Rural Women virtually “toured” the state by visiting one region for a week with six to seven meetings offered on various days at various times. Focus groups were held in all five regions of the state and the Twin Cities metro area. The Metro meetings were held to gather the

experiences of women living in urban Minnesota who worked, previously worked or lived, or grew up in rural areas.

To register for a focus group, participants filled out a Qualtrics form that also allowed them to complete the survey if desired. The survey was open from early June 2021 until mid-August 2021.

Survey

334 unique individuals started the survey and 284 completed it entirely. The survey consisted of 40 questions that investigated individual's experiences of networks, leadership, and barriers to success in rural areas. Individuals who identified as male, not from Minnesota, or below the age of 18 were excluded from completing the survey.

1. What region of Minnesota or Native Nation do you live in or have a connection to?
2. Which Minnesota county do you live in?
3. What is your gender identity?
4. What is your age group?
 - a. Options: 17 or younger, 18 to 26, 27 to 44, 45 to 64, 65+
5. Please check one or more of the following groups which you consider yourself a member.
 - a. Options: Hispanic or Latine, Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, White, Other
6. Which "communities" (or networks or organizations) have you ever been involved in? (Check all that apply.)
 - a. Options: Social media networks (Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, Pinterest, etc.), Professional & national networks (MN National Organization of Women, Minnesota Paralegal Association, etc.), Church, Informal network (coffee circle, book group, dinner group, etc.), Kids & school (Girl Scouts, Boys and Girls Club, Dance, etc.), Local library (Friends of the Library, volunteer, etc.), Sports & recreation (rec softball league, card club, hunting, auto club, etc.), Arts & crafts (quilting, local arts committee, woodworking, etc.), Animals (training/ agility, volunteer at animal shelter, horse riding, etc.), Social action groups (Sierra Club, ACLU, etc.), Union (Education Minnesota, Teamsters.)
7. If you are a part of an informal network (book club, coffee klutsh, running group) please describe the benefits you receive from being a part of it.
8. How do these communities/networks/organizations make newcomers feel welcome?
9. Have you ever had leadership roles in these networks or others previously?
10. What were the positives of this leadership experience?
11. What was challenging about this leadership experience? What could have made it better?
12. What did you learn from this leadership experience?
13. What would it take to get more women to take on leadership roles like this?

14. What barriers have you faced in taking on more leadership in these networks?
- a. Please select all of the following that describe both your professional and personal responsibilities. Options: I am employed by an organization, business, school, or government., I am self-employed (farm, small business, etc.), I am a unpaid caregiver for a child with special health care needs, elderly adult, friend, or neighbor, I am a stay-at- home mom, I am currently unemployed, I am a student, Other
15. What has your workplace done to support employees intaking on new opportunities?
Mark all that apply.
- a. Options: Provides educational benefits (scholarships, tuition reimbursement, etc.), Offers on-site trainings/ workshops on-site to develop new skills, Offers on-site trainings/ workshops on-site to gain new certifications, Organizes groups to connect with other like-minded employees, Shares external training opportunities, Other
16. In any of my careers, I have been promoted to a higher role.
- a. Options: Yes, No, Not Applicable
17. Where do you get support for professional growth? Mark all that apply.
- a. Options: Professional associations, Continuing education, Trade organizations, Non-profits, Government agencies, Other
18. Do you think others see you as a leader?
- a. Options: Definitely yes, Probably yes, Might or might not, Probably not, Definitely not, Comment:
19. If there is something that could help other women like you develop leadership skills, what would it be?
20. Give one example of how another woman has guided or supported you.
21. What forms of education have you had up to this point?
- a. K-12 education, Technical or community college, Short-term trainings or workshops (less than one month), Long-term trainings or apprenticeships (1 mo.- 2 yrs.), 4-year college or university, Graduate or professional degree program, Other
22. Women are held to the same standards as men.
- a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
23. Employers offer women equal opportunities for advancement (compared to their male colleagues).
- a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
24. Women do more "office housekeeping" jobs (compared to their male colleagues).
- a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
25. Women leaders get support from their community (comparable to their male colleagues in similar roles).
- a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree

26. Most people in my community believe women can be good leaders.
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
27. Women leaders are as skilled as men (in similar leadership roles).
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
28. Women leaders are as likely to ask for promotions and raises (as their male colleagues).
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
29. Women are tough enough for leadership.
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
30. Women have the experience needed to be a leader.
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
31. Women see themselves as leaders.
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
32. Women are as confident and likely to take risks (as their male colleagues).
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
33. Women are as likely to communicate their desire for new assignments or promotions (as their male colleagues).
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
34. Women have the same access to supportive mentors (as their male colleagues).
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
35. Women have the same access to informal social networks such as happy hours, softball team, and golf outings (as their male colleagues).
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
36. Women have the same caregiving responsibilities (as their male colleagues).
a. Options: Strongly disagree, Somewhat disagree, Neither disagree or agree, Somewhat agree, Strongly agree
b.

Convenings

A total of 37 convenings occurred during Summer 2021. Convenings were grouped by region with all six meetings for a region occurring within the same week; there were seven meetings scheduled for the Metro region week. In the actual event registration and advertising, it was stressed that individuals could attend any meeting for any region that worked best for their schedule. The virtual focus group convenings were sixty minutes in length. These convenings

were offered at a variety of times during the week (Tuesday, Wednesday, and Thursday) and during the day (7:30 AM, 10:00 AM, 12:00 PM, 2:00 PM, 3:00 PM, 7:00 PM).

Table 1 - Regional Meeting Dates

Meeting Region	Virtual Meeting Dates (2021)
Northeast	June 22 to 24th
Southeast	July 6 to 8th
Southwest	July 13 to 15th
Central	July 27 to 29th
Northwest	August 10 to 12th
Metro	September 28 to Oct 2nd

The meeting agenda was as follows:

- Welcome & Introductions [6 mins]
- Breakout Rooms & Small Group Discussions [15 mins]
- Jamboard Activity [9 mins]
- Large Group Discussion [25 mins]
- Closing [5 mins]

The questions posed during the focus groups were chosen to facilitate camaraderie and develop themes by the participants through conversation and understanding for each other. Breakout rooms were facilitated by a 100 Rural Women staff member to ask questions and guide the conversation.

Data Sources

1. Pre-Meeting Registration via Survey
2. Small Group Responses
 - a. When have you felt like a leader?
 - b. What kind of leadership skills would you be interested in developing?
 - c. If there is something that could help other women like you develop leadership skills, what would it be?
 - i. What would make you feel better positioned to take on leadership roles?
3. [Google Jamboard](#) Responses
 - a. Where would you like to see more women leaders?
 - b. How do you find out about leadership opportunities?
 - c. What 'new normals' have we formed during COVID that we need to carry forward?
 - d. Where do you get support to overcome challenges in your life?
4. Large Group Discussion Responses

- a. Where would you like to see more women leaders?
 - b. How could we enable women to take on more leadership roles in these spaces? How do you find out about leadership opportunities?
 - i. How could 100RW connect these networks you have identified so more women get involved?
 - 1. Ex: Mentorship, Social Media Groups, Website
 - ii. What should this network look like? What would be useful for you?
 - c. What 'new normals' have we formed during COVID that we need to carry forward?
 - i. Ex: Virtual meetings, flexibility, travel requirements
 - ii. How can we make accessible leadership opportunities moving forward?
 - iii. How can 100RW help support these needs?
 - d. Where do you get support to overcome challenges in your life?
 - i. What kind of support?
 - ii. How might/does the community support you?
- 5. Feedback Form Responses**

Section 4: Participant Demographics

Knowing who is included or excluded in data is essential for accurate storytelling and representation in research. The following tables capturing participation data for the varying parts of this project aim to be as transparent as possible without compromising confidentiality. While reading through this data, bear in mind that population density varies by county - learn more about this at the [Minnesota State Demographic Center website](#). Additionally, the number of participants does not fully enumerate the varying networks each person participates in.

Table 2 - Project Participants Overall

Program Element	Number of Participants / Respondents
Pilot Connector Meetings	40
Pilot Survey	169
Pilot Convenings	41
Statewide Survey	284
Statewide Convenings	181
Total	715

Pilot Phase Convenings

Table 3 - Pilot Convening Participants by Age Range

Age Range (years)	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
<i>18 to 26</i>	1	2%
<i>27 to 44</i>	17	41%
<i>45 to 64</i>	16	39%
<i>65 and older</i>	4	10%
<i>Unknown</i>	3	7%
Total	41	.

Table 4 - Pilot Convening Participants by Race or Ethnicity

Identity	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
<i>American Indian</i>	3	7%
<i>Asian</i>	1	2%
<i>Hispanic</i>	0	0%
<i>Black or African American</i>	0	0%
<i>Two or more races</i>	0	0%
<i>White</i>	37	90%
People of Color	4	
Total	41	

Table 5 - Pilot Convening Participants by County

County	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
<i>Becker</i>	0	0%
<i>Beltrami</i>	4	10%
<i>Clay</i>	0	0%
<i>Clearwater</i>	2	5%
<i>Hubbard</i>	1	2%
<i>Kittson</i>	2	5%
<i>Lake of the Woods</i>	1	2%
<i>Mahnomen</i>	0	0%
<i>Marshall</i>	3	7%
<i>Norman</i>	2	5%
<i>Otter Tail</i>	5	12%
<i>Pennington</i>	2	5%
<i>Polk</i>	5	12%
<i>Red Lake</i>	2	5%
<i>Roseau</i>	1	2%
<i>Wilkin</i>	0	0%
<i>Connection to NW</i>	6	15%
Total	41	

Survey

Table 6 - Pilot Survey Respondents by Age Range

Age Range (years)	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
<i>18 to 26</i>	0	0%
<i>27 to 44</i>	43	37%
<i>45 to 64</i>	55	47%
<i>65 and older</i>	18	16%
Total	116	.

Table 7 - Pilot Survey Respondents by Race or Ethnicity

Identity	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
<i>American Indian</i>	10	9%
<i>Asian</i>	0	0
<i>Hispanic</i>	1	0.9%
<i>Black or African American</i>	1	0.9%
<i>Two or more races</i>	1	0.9%
<i>White</i>	98	87%
People of Color	12	11%
Total	113	.

Table 8 - Pilot Survey Respondents by County

County	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
<i>Becker</i>	10	6%
<i>Beltrami</i>	20	12%
<i>Clay</i>	6	4%
<i>Clearwater</i>	9	5%
<i>Hubbard</i>	10	6%
<i>Kittson</i>	10	6%
<i>Lake of the Woods</i>	3	2%
<i>Mahnomen</i>	1	1%
<i>Marshall</i>	9	5%
<i>Norman</i>	6	4%
<i>Otter Tail</i>	13	8%
<i>Pennington</i>	10	6%
<i>Polk</i>	29	17%
<i>Red Lake</i>	5	3%
<i>Roseau</i>	4	2%
<i>Wilkin</i>	0	0%
<i>Connection to NW</i>	24	14%
Total	169	

Statewide Phase Convenings

At the end of our 38 convenings, we had 333 unique individuals sign up for a session and 181 unique individuals who attended a focus group. We had participants from 80 of the 87 counties and from seven Native Nations: Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Reservation Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Lower Sioux Indian Community, Prairie Island Indian Community Red Lake Band of Chippewa, Upper Sioux Community, Urban Indigenous Community, and White Earth Nation.

Figure 3 - Map of Minnesota with County Participation Frequency

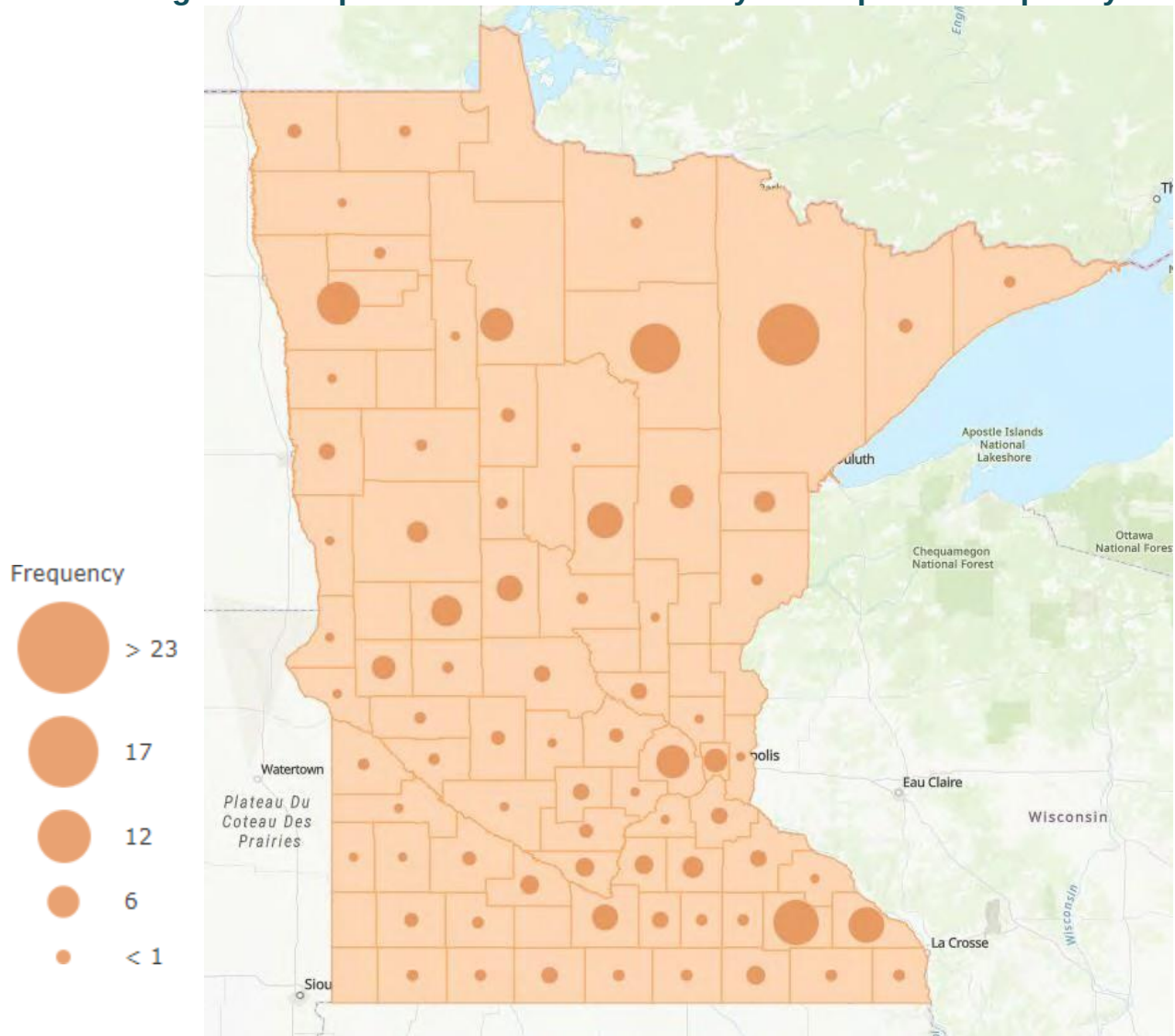


Table 9 - Statewide Convening Participants by Age Range

Identity	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
18 to 26	14	7.7%
27 to 44	66	36.5%
45 to 64	78	43.1%
65+	21	11.6%
Unknown	2	1.1%
Total	181	100%

Table 10 - Statewide Convening Participants by Race or Ethnicity

Identity	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
<i>American Indian or Alaska Native</i>	1	0.05%
<i>American Indian or Alaska Native, White</i>	4	2.2%
<i>Asian</i>	2	1.1%
<i>Asian, White</i>	1	0.05%
<i>Black or African American</i>	4	2.2%
<i>Hispanic or Latine</i>	3	1.7%
<i>Hispanic or Latine, White</i>	2	1.1%
<i>“Multicultural”, “Mixed BIPOC”, “Other”</i>	1	0.05%
<i>White</i>	163	90.1%
People of Color	18	9.9%
Total	181	100%

Table 11 - Statewide Convening Participants by Region

Region	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
<i>Northeast</i>	41	22.5%
<i>Southeast</i>	43	23.6%
<i>Southwest</i>	27	14.8%
<i>Central</i>	27	14.8%
<i>Northwest</i>	18	9.9%
<i>Metro</i>	26	14.3%
Total	181	100%

Survey

Our survey had 334 individuals start the survey and 284 complete it entirely. The analyses and demographics provided are for those individuals who completed the survey in its entirety. The survey participants represented 75 counties and nine Native Nations: Bois Forte Band of Chippewa, Fond du Lac Reservation, Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe, Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe, White Earth Reservation, Lower Sioux Indian Community, Prairie Island Indian Community, Urban Indigenous Communities, and the Upper Sioux Community.

Table 12 - Statewide Survey Participants by Age Range

Identity	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
<i>18 to 26</i>	15	5.3%
<i>27 to 44</i>	84	29.6%
<i>45 to 64</i>	143	50.3%
<i>65+</i>	42	14.8%
Total	284	100%

Table 13 - Statewide Survey Participants by Race or Ethnicity

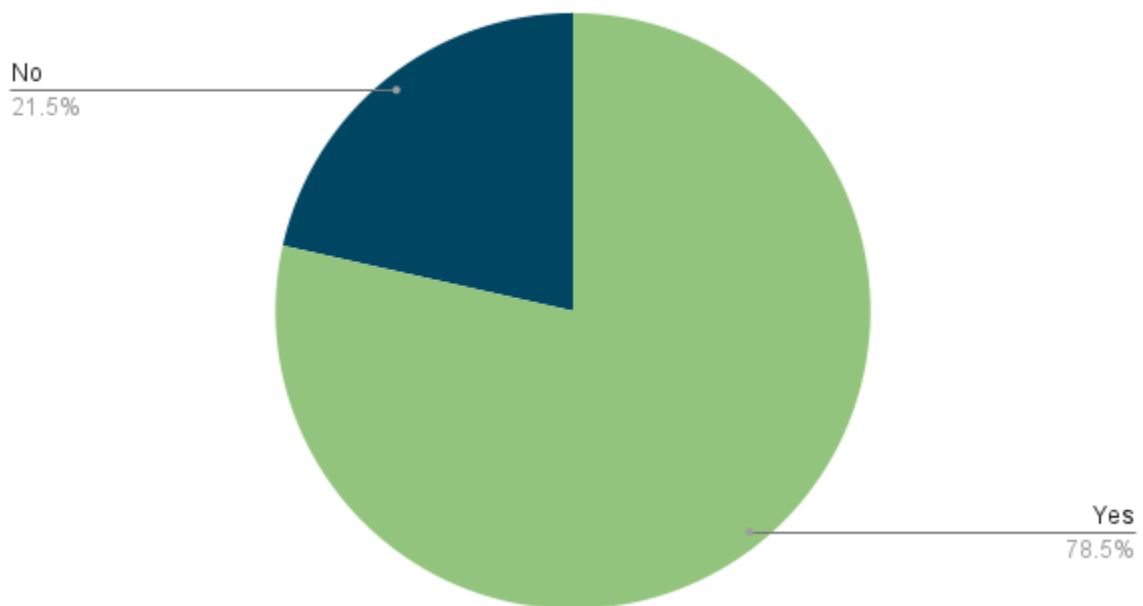
Identity	Number of Participants	Percentage of Participants
<i>American Indian or Alaska Native</i>	4	1.41%
<i>American Indian or Alaska Native, White</i>	8	2.82%
<i>Asian</i>	1	0.35%
<i>Black or African American</i>	2	0.70%
<i>Hispanic or Latine</i>	2	0.70%
<i>Hispanic or Latine, White</i>	2	0.70%
<i>“Multicultural”, “Mixed BIPOC”, “Other”</i>	4	1.41%
<i>White</i>	260	91.55%
<i>White, “Other”</i>	1	0.35%
People of Color	24	8.46%
Total	284	100%

Table 14 - Statewide Survey Participants by Region

Region	Number of Respondents	Percentage of Respondents
<i>Northeast</i>	65	22.9%
<i>Southeast</i>	62	21.8%
<i>Southwest</i>	61	21.5%
<i>Central</i>	44	15.5%
<i>Northwest</i>	34	12%
<i>Metro</i>	18	6.34%
Total	284	100%

Figure 4 - Leadership Experience for Statewide Survey Participants

Have you ever had leadership roles?



Section 5: Pilot Findings

The Northwest Pilot compiled both survey information and convening responses to illustrate the barriers, supports, and connections for rural Minnesotan women. Data suggested that there are three main groupings that need to be addressed for rural women to adequately participate in leadership.

1. Structural Barriers
2. Institutional Mindsets
3. Individual Mindsets

Structural Barriers

When asked a series of statements about potential barriers for women, the top barriers identified by the survey included responses in both personal and professional spheres.

The greatest barriers identified by participants related to burdens, opportunities, and discrimination. 95% of survey respondents did not agree that women have equal caregiving responsibilities; 90% of survey respondents did not agree that employers offer women equal opportunities for advancement; 88% of survey respondents did not agree that women are held to the same standards as men.

When asked about the barriers they had personally faced in taking on more leadership roles in networks or organizations that they are part of, the largest number of women made comments about time being the greatest barrier. Survey Respondents commented on things like juggling time for work demands, dinners with husband, responsibilities at home, other activities, and time for self-care.

Childcare is huge. I've seen a couple of leadership programs that would be really great to be a part of. I had to turn it down because of the childcare factor. We aren't from here so I can't drop a couple of young kids off with people that we aren't familiar with for an extended length of time. I think childcare networks or having some kind of access to that would help women be able to take on leadership roles, positions, or trainings that I know are out there. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

Childcare! Most of the executives golf and network that way. - Survey Respondent

It's important to me and my husband to have family dinners and time together. I won't compromise family time for more leadership roles. - Survey Respondent

It is so hard to leave the computer or not go back to put in more time. You went from working with the structure. You had things that you wanted or needed to do after work, and so you had to stop working. Now there's not a lot going on (due to COVID), and

you just keep working, 24 hours a day. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

It's hard to see behind the screen what's REALLY going on with someone's life. You forget to be real and let people in when it's just a screen. I feel like we find it easier to 'mute' ourselves in more way than one now. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

I think women have to be more organized, smarter, and more composed. Sometimes if we are assertive, we are seen as aggressive. Sadly, I think we have a long way to go... Rural Minnesota still holds on to some of those archaic beliefs about a woman's role. Sometimes I feel like it is a game we have to play to be heard. - Survey Respondent.

Institutional Mindsets

Convening participants and survey respondents highlighted that within the hiring and retention of a role, there are a variety of unhelpful circumstances that limit their ability to lead and succeed.

I have experienced the perceived notion that as a woman, I should automatically agree to be the committee Secretary, without being offered Chair or Vice Chair. - Survey Respondent

Socioeconomics and racial barriers are factors in other leadership networks. Sometimes you get asked to be on a board because of the color of your skin, but they don't want your input, you're just a checked item on the list of inclusivity. I get asked to be on committees and panels for my expertise, but they get my work and knowledge for free when everyone else is on payroll. - Survey Respondent

A year ago to have this Convening we would have had to invest many hours, energy, and a great deal of time and money. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

Leaders can and should be cultivated from within the communities that are most impacted by the issues, problems, events that are relevant today. They have the solutions and ideas! - Convening Participant

Women are targets, especially on social media. It's really debilitating to women to be attacked, so we have to have others speak up for us. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

A diversity of backgrounds, lived experiences, and perspectives should be encouraged! It's when differences of perspective and a variety of lenses can come together that we get a more complete, accurate picture of problems and solutions. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

Individual mindsets

Perceived gender roles can influence employers' inclination to offer a woman an opportunity for a promotion over a man. They could also influence the community's perception of who should have power and lead in the public sphere. As one survey respondent said, *"Men are the leaders in our community."* Lingering beliefs such as these may result in the perception that women are not held to the same standard as men. Women are still expected to prioritize domestic responsibilities over public life, so if a woman becomes a leader in the public sphere, she faces more criticism for her public and private life. Perceptions of family responsibilities could impact a woman's invitation by her co-workers to an after work happy hour.

Continuously, the lack of support from those around rural women leaders was acknowledged as a large barrier to overcome. There were individual concerns about self-confidence and seeing oneself as a leader, but participants and survey respondents strongly suggested that it was a lack of support from their communities that halted their upward mobility especially if the individual was a newcomer to a community.

"I like the definition of a leader as someone who brings out the best in others. I could get behind that, that is more aligned with who I am. We need to get away from traditional, stagnant ideas of leadership around power and privilege and money." - NW Pilot Convening Participant

The biggest challenge in a small community is having full support as a female. - Survey Respondent

Strong community support is needed to encourage female leadership. Women have a high bar to clear in leadership roles as you must prove yourself. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

I moved into my small community and it takes a while to get your footing. A woman reached out to me to ask if I could help with this project. She gave me the welcome mat to enter into a project and showcase my talents and strengths. She provided me an opportunity. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

A lot of women in my community are doing these things already, but it's just what they do. They would not necessarily consider them leadership. It's just what they do, as far as being female in their family or their community. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

As an outsider, the biggest thing was to figure out how to meet and connect with people I don't work with. It took a lot for me to even find out about things going on. Most of the advertising is on the radio, but I don't listen to the radio so I didn't know. Most of the businesses here in town have never had Facebook pages. - NW Pilot Convening Participant

In some instances when I have been in leadership roles, the men on the boards aren't always supportive or willing to try doing things in new ways...frustrating!" - NW Pilot Convening Participant

It's important to encourage women to step into these spaces to practice leadership. Sometimes it takes someone else saying 'You can do this!' or 'You'd be great at that!' - NW Pilot Convening Participant

Section 6: Statewide Findings

Convenings

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the requests from participants in the statewide convenings did not differ dramatically from the Northwest pilot responses. Throughout all conversations and survey responses, the need for easily accessible mentorship was requested over and over. The power of virtual connections was highlighted as a great resource for many individuals, although some in-person aspects would be complimentary. Participants responded to question prompts focused primarily in six main themes.

1. **Community:** the lack of authentic spaces to connect with rural women in similar leadership roles or life circumstances
2. **Safe Spaces:** the ability to request feedback and criticism as well as practice skills in spaces away from the public eye
3. **Emotional and Mental Health:** the struggle to maintain multiple responsibilities in the public and private spaces of their lives as well as to take care of themselves
4. **Opportunities:** the availability of pathways and positions into leadership roles, no matter the size
5. **Skills:** the request for external trainings and support available to keep rural leaders up to date on new technologies and leadership techniques
6. **Peer Support:** the need for public and private leadership affirmations of rural women from those closest to them

Community

For rural women interested in or currently within a leadership role, they acknowledged the difficulty of being able to connect with other women in the same stage of life or beyond. Some experienced women shared how integral it was to their success that they were able to find a small group of women either via happenstance or accountability groups. While most women were able to name specific resources or organizations available to support rural women's leadership, the request for low-commitment spaces to meet and connect with other women resurfaced in each region's convenings. Connections could be easier facilitated through virtual meetings and spaces with in-person opportunities as a complimentary offering.

It's nice to have that structured space and time and, like, have a focus on leadership, but it's more about just connecting as women. [...] it's just an open space to have conversation and dialogue that's really authentic and genuine and it can help people not feel so isolated as well. - Northwest Participant

I know a lot of African women that own businesses but they're not able to really

communicate or connect with others because of the language barrier or just because they don't know that there's support there. - Southeast Participant

I think being inspired by other female leaders is a really important point. Through our personal time, more leaders, more female leaders should take leadership roles, to inspire other women to do the same. - Southwest Participant

I've always been a leader, but I think the secret sauce is cohort learning at a few pivotal times in one's career. Those times that you need to step your leadership to the next level, it's really empowering to work through those skill sets with a group of people who are both like you, and different from you. - Survey Respondent

I'm really just on the very beginning pieces of my career and [...] what's sticking with me, other than some of the skills stuff that I'm gaining [...] is just having the access to women who are, maybe even doing things that I have literally no interest in but they're willing to talk to me and oh sort of be that door opener. - Southeast Participant

Everyone is overscheduled and it feels as though there's never enough time to really connect with other women. - Survey Respondent

As a shy introvert, sometimes you just want a space where you can just go and lurk. You just want to be in the zoom meeting with your camera off like you're still involved you're still there you're still listening you're still learning, but like you don't want to feel like the pressure where you're like "oh my gosh I'm here I got a network, I meet five people I gotta do" like you just want to and be part of it, but like ease into it, where you can kind of just lurk or start in the chat box and then move up and it's really valuable if you're kind of just, like, testing the waters rather than having to make like this full commitment to something. - Northeast Participant

We're pretty good at finding friends that we can confide in and people that, you know, we can reach out to. But I wonder if we always find and maybe more importantly, have access to people who can really help us. You know, sometimes my husband just doesn't understand, well sometimes the people that I'm around don't have the experiences that I need in order for them to understand what I'm doing [...] We can form new friendships. We're not going to immediately pour our hearts out to somebody we don't know but, perhaps by adding some of those contacts it could expand our network. - Central Participant

It feels so validating to be in a group of positive women sharing similar challenges. Thanks for creating these spaces. - Feedback Form Respondent

In my opinion, having mentors who have been in successful leadership roles, who would be willing to provide support, encouragement, advice/council, tools and

resources to younger women - take them "under their wings" so as to speak - for a period of time would be very encouraging for young women to consider striving towards leadership roles. I think a barrier to more women taking on leadership roles is fear of the unknown, not knowing how/where to even start, not having healthy role models in their lives, lacking confidence, and feeling inadequate. Providing the opportunity for young women to have strong mentors in their lives could give them the confidence they need to pursue a leadership role because now, they have someone who believes in them! Someone who's invested in them, who cares, who will walk beside them, teaching them, encouraging them, and being that healthy role model for them. I also think it would be a huge plus if there were mentors who are married, have kids, etc. to show young women that it's possible to have a healthy/good balance between home and career. - Survey Respondent

Safe Spaces

Participants highlighted that many rural women do not choose to enter a leadership role or run for a position until they feel extremely certain that they can do 'it', despite not really knowing what 'it' entails. The desire to be able to learn skills and receive feedback on situations or behaviors in a closed space with other rural women (leaders or not) was requested by a variety of women with varying levels of experience. Specifically, rural women within current leadership roles wish for some form of an anonymous group where they could solicit advice and support from each other in a very low-stakes environment.

Leadership happens through relationships. And so, if you don't feel like you're ready to be a city councilperson, county commissioner, or sit on a board of a university entity, you know, then let's help women build relationships at the point of which they are ready and then segue them into lateral levels right. Progressive approaches into those more advisory or policy board kinds of positions. It is about the relationships and once you start to build them you understand your own power. - Southwest Participant

I have a core group of women that I can go to, and I can talk about a situation in practice, you know practice dialogue or you know think through multiple sides of a situation before I get in a group of other people that I'm trying to lead or trying to move an issue forward, so I think that kind of resource is important. - Northeast Participant

I think women just need a vote of confidence. A safe place for them to grow their skills while refining them. - Survey Respondent

Oftentimes in your role in leadership [...] you find yourself speaking to groups where you're looking at the faces and the people who you perceive to be intimidating [...] I do sometimes feel this sort of insecurity sort of flame up right and so practicing feeling

that and practicing being able to move through and continue on and persevere through that so actual literal practice would help, I think, because it has taken me a long time as an adult woman to get to the point where I am I wouldn't say I'm fearless I certainly still have fears, but I'm ready to move through it. - Northeast Participant

[It would be nice to talk with] mentors who have some understanding of whatever identities you hold and who are safe people so they're not necessarily making decisions about anything like, you know, your professional life or your personal life but just somebody that you can talk to. - Metro Participant

[We need to] share descriptions of the leadership roles and responsibilities and discuss with those who have held the role - many women will not take on leadership roles because of perceptions of "how much work it is" without having an accurate understanding of the commitment - Survey Respondent

I don't know if you can step into leadership easily. Just a statement because you have to fall on your face quite a few times to learn from it, and then to use that experience to share and with others, so that'd be a good question just you know. Not a question, but just want to make that statement. It is usually not an easy transition; leadership usually comes with trials and errors and heartache. - Feedback Form Respondent

I think about working with high schools, teachers and students and really preparing women to enter construction or manufacturing or business, and I think about how hard, even though we're working so hard and supporting them, once they enter into the workforce if there's no women in their setting and that's not a supportive environment. How can we set them up to succeed? And so, I think about resiliency and like sadly like having to teach resilience or having to teach conflict resolution or creating spaces for mentorship even if it's outside an organization. I think that mentorship piece that someone brought up is one of the ways to get more women in those leadership roles, connecting them with other women. - Northeast Participant

THANK YOU for the professionalism and seriousness! The conversation was well facilitated, and I appreciated the intergenerational leadership. To be honest, I was quite skeptical coming into the session tonight; I get my hopes up for new initiatives like this and feel so let down when I find out it's some manipulative marketing scheme for someone to take my money and leave me feeling betrayed. This was refreshing and quite nourishing for me. I think 'women in leadership' is approached too often as a sexy, cliché thing and a way to perpetuate victimhood instead of learning and growing as heroines that have profound strategy and approaches to literally change the world but have been wounded along the way. I see 100 Rural Women as an opportunity to ponder how we catalyze empowerment to move out of survival and hyper-alertness and into thriving change agents. - Feedback Form Respondent

Experience in safe spaces to build confidence in their ability to lead successfully and to be able to fail. We learn more from our failures many times than from our successes. We need more safe spaces to practice. - Survey Respondent

Emotional & Mental Health

Rural women participants usually brought up towards the end of convenings the personal mental and emotional health struggles they had experienced before, during, and after leadership stints. The public acknowledgement of discrimination, sexual harassment, and community stigmatization allowed several participants identify reasons that they left leadership roles. The desire by participants to help lead and to be seen as a leader in varying communities sometimes led the participants to sacrifice themselves, their health, or their time. Being 'successful' at balancing it all was described as an idyllic endpoint that many women wanted to achieve but very few felt like they currently had balance.

On a virtual web whiteboard, participant responses to the question "What 'new normals' have we formed during COVID that we need to carry forward?" spotlighted the benefits of increased flexibility and free time available to individuals as a result of increasing virtual engagement and shorter commutes, if any. Individuals highlighting the appearance of 'more time' for themselves resulted in time that could be spent on exercise, rest, family, friends, and hobbies. The increased access to virtual goods and connections was offset with concerns about quality internet broadband access for rural communities.

[I felt like a leader] when I sort of stood up for something that I felt was really important in this community and when I had to negotiate all the different hats that I wear. - Metro Participant

I think that women are socialized to see their self-worth in reflection for others and so that just, that reality, that it's not just about pleasing other people and getting through that barrier. - Northeast Participant

A lot of the challenges I've had in some of my leadership roles have been setting personal boundaries, burnout [...] not over committing and engaging other people in meaningful ways in the work so that we can spread it out a little bit and so that's something I'm constantly still working on. - Northeast Participant

I've always had a drive to lead, even as a kid, I was the one taking the lead, or taking charge. I struggled as a young woman in how to balance home, church, family, friends, etc., and also grow in leadership and find the thing in life that I felt most passionate about, career/volunteer-wise. BALANCE is an important aspect in every woman's life and should be a part of the conversation. - Survey Respondent

I still get very anxious and I find myself feeling silenced when I'm encountering like an old boy's club. And I still that happens a lot out here. Like a white man, older white man club that I'm trying to insert myself into for what? Either because I have to for my job or because of some other thing that's going on in the community. And I think that dynamic is still there, and we pretend it's gotten better and it probably has in some places but I don't know if it has in rural spaces as much. - Metro Participant

As I have thought about pursuing leadership positions, now I mean, one of the big hesitations is, like nothing seems to be off limits for people when it comes to criticism, you know? - Metro Participant

Helping women recognize that they don't need to be everything to everybody, and that it's ok to let some things go in order to focus on roles that really resonate with them. - Survey Respondent

I feel like a leader when I talk about my mental health and my difficult journey to wellness I share a lot on Facebook about I share you know not just memes and pages but also like you know I was reflecting about when I had my last panic attack or whatever and I get a lot of good responses on Facebook and I feel like that really makes a difference for people it took me a long time to get to that point and so I feel like a leader because it's just coming from a place that I think is a need even though I'm not sharing it to a group you know I'm not leading a I'm not facilitating anything all I'm doing is saying this is my experience I hope it helps you. - Central Participant

So many women possess great leadership skills but may not be extroverted or comfortable taking charge or public speaking. There are so many ways to be a strong leader that women need help recognizing within themselves, qualities that may not fit the male-dominated stereotype of leadership. Women also need to feel their voices matter. Too often we have been silenced or minimized to the point where, even if people say they value our input, we don't believe it. So how do we develop that confidence so we internalize the belief in our value rather than just hearing and disregarding it as lip service. - Survey Respondent

Opportunities

A recurring discussion point during convenings was the inability to see paid ways to be involved in rural areas. Rural women identified many ways that they could volunteer locally, but the search for well-compensated decision-making roles was difficult to navigate. Furthermore, the frustration of expensive childcare or other necessary support made some participants feel trapped in unfulfilling roles. Several participants identified how essential it is to reach out and communicate to women in their networks about opportunities they hear about not just once, but

multiple times in addition to providing or receiving mentorship.

Participants provided written responses on a virtual whiteboard to the questions “Where would you like to see more women leaders?” and “How do you find out about leadership opportunities?” Overwhelmingly, the responses highlighted the need for rural women leaders in government roles and private businesses. Specifically, respondents wanted to see more leaders in local government and as executive leaders. Respondents also showcased the value of interpersonal connections - the vast majority recognized their professional network and informal relationships (family, friends, neighbors) as connecting them to leadership opportunities.

I think I feel like a leader when I'm helping others, lifting other team members up. Not only leading and leading the meetings, the activities that we're doing but also just being part of them and being part of the community. - Northwest Participant

One resource would be just the opportunity to see other leadership roles that they could be in or a way to see a lattice or ladder to different leadership roles and what are the small steps it takes to get there? You know I see here [on the Jamboard] rural electric co-op board. I think that's a great place to start or commissions are great places to start to get to other places of leadership. - Northeast Participant

Many women need the support at home to be able to commit to leadership roles. I am fortunate that my husband and I really support each other in our endeavors and share the responsibilities of parenthood and managing the household. Not every family operates this way. - Survey Respondent

Recently a nonprofit in town had a series of webinars on how to start a nonprofit, how to build a website, how to get grants, and stuff like that. That was really helpful just to have an overview from people who have done those things before! We don't have to feel like we're starting from scratch--there are others who have successfully blazed a trail. I also wish leadership training was built into my job. And I think it would be great if managers had regular check-ins or reviews with staff to make sure they're getting enough opportunities to grow. I haven't had a single conversation with my manager about that in over 2 years. I thought she would bring it up, but I'm learning I have to advocate for myself. So, I reached out and now we have a meeting scheduled! - Survey Respondent

I think the pandemic has proven that we don't need a typical nine to five day. I feel you get the most out of your employees when they have that flexibility, and the pandemic has showed me and management and leadership that people can still function at really high levels if they're not sitting in an office. - Northeast Participant

It's just so nice to be able to get everybody together and we don't have a half an hour to 45-minute drive. I have a one-year-old, so I appreciate Zoom as someone with the

young child and on a board with so many rural members. - Southeast Participant

Skills

Rural women with diverse experiences of leadership consistently asked for the ability to learn and grow skills in low-cost and low-stakes environments. Many felt that as soon as they entered a leadership position, the requirements of them as a leader would suddenly change as their previous peers treated them more negatively. Furthermore, the current economic opportunities of rural areas are changing and several leaders acknowledged they do not feel adequately trained in new technologies to stay modern and competitive. Individuals also requested growing their interpersonal and leadership skills beyond just those used during employment.

When you're doing volunteerism the best kind of leader is the one that pushes others to the forefront. So, I found that by introducing ideas in a way you pull other people into the concept by highlighting other people or making changes as a group decision is more effective leadership when I was a paid leader. That's kind of hard because not everyone's gonna like the changes you want. - Central Participant

What I'm lacking in sometimes is conflict resolution or addressing a conflict head-on rather than letting it work itself out and being a leader in that sense and stepping in where needed but also knowing your role then as a leader in that conflict. - Southeast Participant

Leadership in most organizations is a zero-sum game. In my prior work, people purposely undermined me and stole my work to get ahead. Learning how to navigate such environments without losing principle. OR have women support groups to talk about other options to use your skillsets & become recognized for expertise. People to guide you to resources and hold you accountable for your potential and when you are stuck, to figure out how to move forward. - Survey Respondent

I think you need to be as strong in what your values, your positions are, and sometimes as caregivers as women we are, we tend to put ourselves down or feel we're not measuring up or that kind of stuff. So, building on that confidence base I think is something every woman can use. - Southwest Participant

Training in data driven decision making, in managing group conversations and in reconciliation techniques - Survey Respondent

We are trying to figure out how to attract a broader pool to our boards and commissions and you know you've heard the term, the idea of well offer childcare.

Okay, so how do we do that? I would love some guidance, examples, very detailed ones like “you have to find a space that has this” and “you have to have a provider that can do this” or whatever like that would be great. - Southeast Participant

We need to continue to foster ways to connect people over things like zoom because we might not be back to as much face to face for a while, as what we would all really hope to be. So, whether that's helping people understand how to use computers or what it is, use things like zoom. I mean, even this format. I've not used a jam board before, but this is a fun thing. The zoom doesn't have to be boring; this is really kind of cool. So how do we bring this understanding, this knowledge into communities and let them know that these kinds of things keep our connections vibrant. - Northeast Participant

Peer Support

The strongest takeaway of convenings related to the need for individuals around rural women to provide public support of leaders or their future leadership ability. Many participants felt that it took many asks from others before they even considered a leadership position; then once in a new leadership role, many rural women felt entirely isolated, abandoned, or competed against by their peers. The need for sustained public support - whether verbally, financially, or emotionally - was described as key to several experienced leaders' successes.

What I would love for us to think about is redefining that narrative about what leadership is [...] Because it doesn't matter if you when I was at home taking care of our kids for eight years, I was still a leader and involved in lots of stuff. But even if I wasn't, I was still a leader no doubt. - Southwest Participant

As a woman I think that's probably the biggest frustration I have is I'm told I'm too aggressive or too blunt but if a guy were to say the exact same thing it would be fine. I find that as my biggest frustration in any job but let alone a job and field that's dominated by men. - Southeast Participant

Recognize all the ways women are already leading but don't think of it as leadership. A stay-at-home parent is essentially leading a small business, but we don't frame it up that way. - Survey Respondent

Women who are reluctant leaders need other people to tell them multiple times that they are seen as leaders and that it's okay for them and good for them to lead. - Southeast Participant

One of the things that we've heard people talk a lot about is having people going in pairs, like helping cultivate folks to go into leadership, so that they're not alone. You know, like I'm now the one female voice in this room, you know, that is so scary and

finding ways for people to go in tandem can be just the thing that people feel like I've got somebody else in the room who I know will have my back, like I'm not here on an island. - Metro Participant

It comes down to having the right people helping you along the way. Because oftentimes in rural communities, the same people end up in the same seats because there's no one there to challenge them and there's no one there to support the challengers [...] we could start to be a presence of positivity around issues and around people that are working on these issues [...] if we put forth the effort to say we hear you we see what you're doing and keep going like we'll be behind you. - Northeast Participant

I think it's very important for us when we think of newcomers to town, when we see new faces and new people, it's important for us to make sure that we are introducing ourselves. Reaching out and just being welcoming so that we are bringing those people into our circle of friends, because if we are getting that support from our friends, those people need to get into a circle of friends in their new communities. - Metro Participant

We've always had a normal about you know when somebody gets breast cancer, gets injured, or something: we all band together and we have a big spreadsheet with the meals, you know what I'm talking about, and the childcare. [...] a lot of women don't go into leadership positions because they just don't have the time - so much falls on us. Can we find ways to network together to cover each other's butts? When we're going to that school board meeting or we're doing you know we're going on the campaign trail or just think of it as the same manner and support each other in the same manner? I think it would open it up to a lot more women being able to do a lot more of these types of.... take these types of risks. - Metro Participant

It can feel pretty lonely when you're a woman leader. You may be the only one in the room or you may be in a room with no one you know. Sometimes we like to eat our own, like if there's another woman who's pushing back at you, because she's navigated you know, good old boy network or whatnot it can feel pretty lonely. - Northeast Participant

If we could somehow see each other as partners instead of as competitors, it would help a lot. I think it's hard in our society to realize that someone else doing well does not mean that you are doing poorly or will necessarily do less well than you are right now. In other words, when someone else does well, it can feel like you go to that place of tearing her down or thinking she should not have that thing. But there's no reason she can't have that good thing while you ALSO get good things! - Survey Respondent

Survey

Community Connections

Survey respondents identified participating in a mosaic of communities, networks, or organizations. The top three groupings were that of social media networks (86% selected), informal networks such as book groups or coffee circles (69%), and professional or national associations (66%). Only 3.5% of respondents selected only one type of community, suggesting that most rural women have varying interests and community participation.

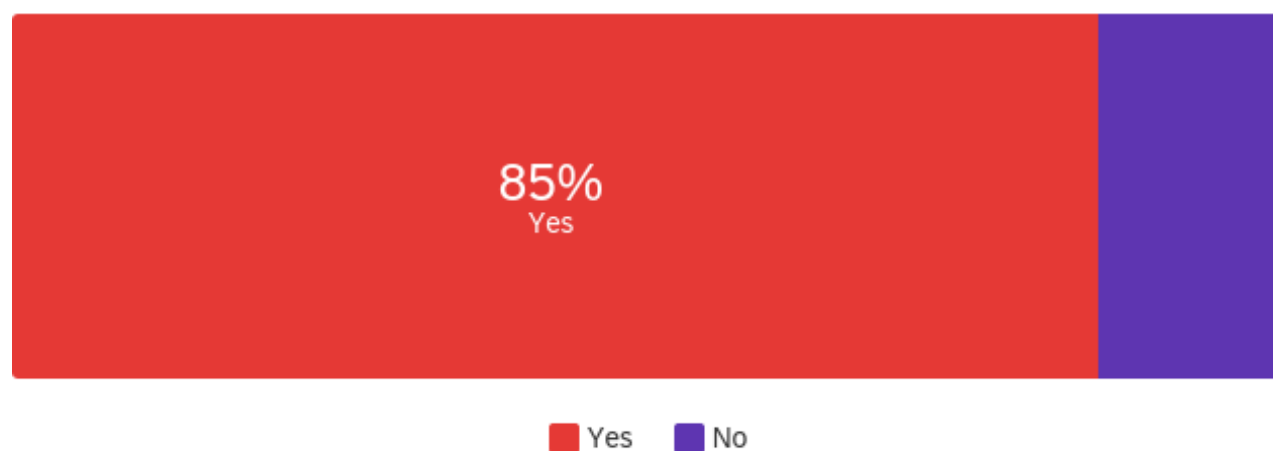
These multi-sectional identities were also on display through self-described personal and professional responsibilities - 22.2% of survey respondents identified as having more than one responsibility such as being a student, an unpaid caregiver, stay at home mom, or self-employment.

Personal Leadership

The majority of survey respondents (85.6%) identified that others saw them as a leader. This suggests that the voices of individuals who participated in this research had in some way acted as a leader and were recognized publicly for it. However, there can also be a mismatch between how others see them and how research participants see themselves. Individuals could agree that others see them as a leader without the individual seeing themselves as a leader and as a result, they may not try to gain public facing leadership roles.

Figure 5 - Promotions Experience for Statewide Survey Participants

In any of my careers, I have been promoted to higher role.



Perceptions

The final portion of the survey consisted of statements that participants were asked to rate on a scale from “Strongly Disagree”, “Somewhat disagree”, “Neither agree or agree”, “Somewhat agree”, or “Strongly Agree”. These statements ranged from questions about social standards, professional opportunities, personal responsibilities, and perceived leadership ability for women as a whole.

These scalar responses illuminated the slights felt by rural women, as they strongly agreed with statements about discrimination and bias in the workplace or in their larger communities due to their gender. The responses also showcased the strengths of women leadership and the barriers due to confidence or structural concerns.

Figure 6 - Gender Standards for Statewide Survey Participants

Women are held to the same standards as men.

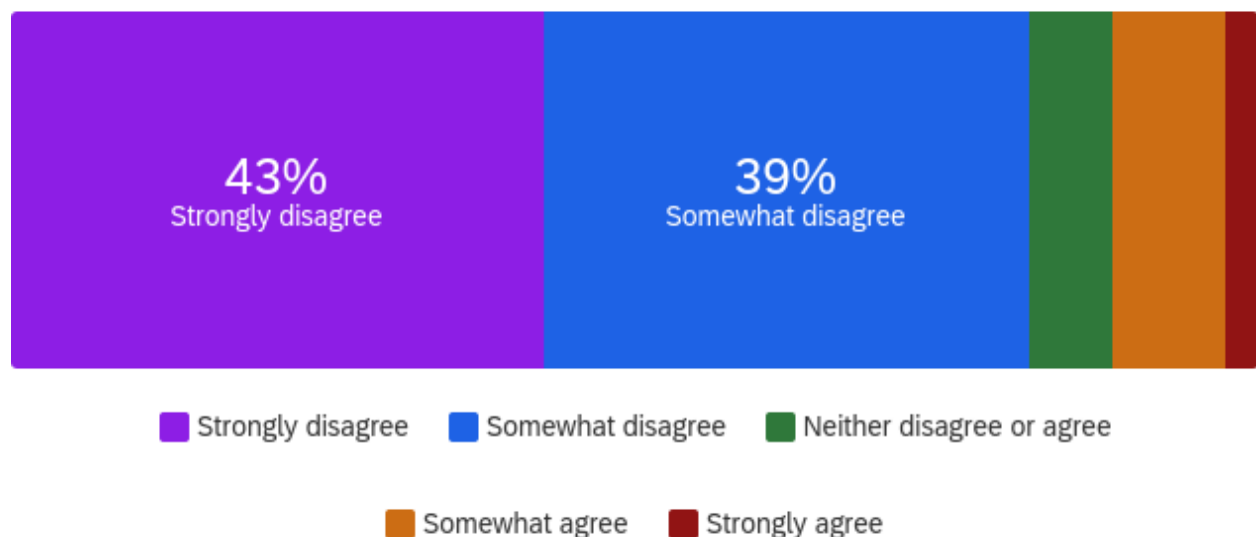


Figure 7 - Opportunities & Advancement for Statewide Survey Participants

Employers offer women equal opportunities for advancement (compared to their male colleagues).

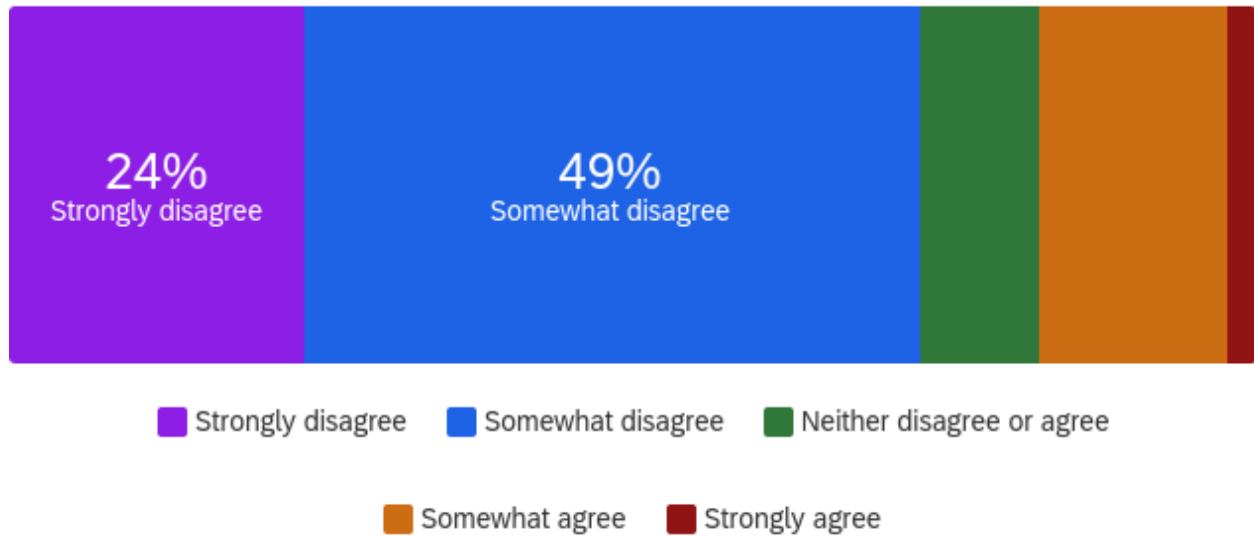


Figure 8 - Office Housekeeping for Statewide Survey Participants

Q64 - Women do more "office housekeeping" jobs (compared to their male colleagues...)

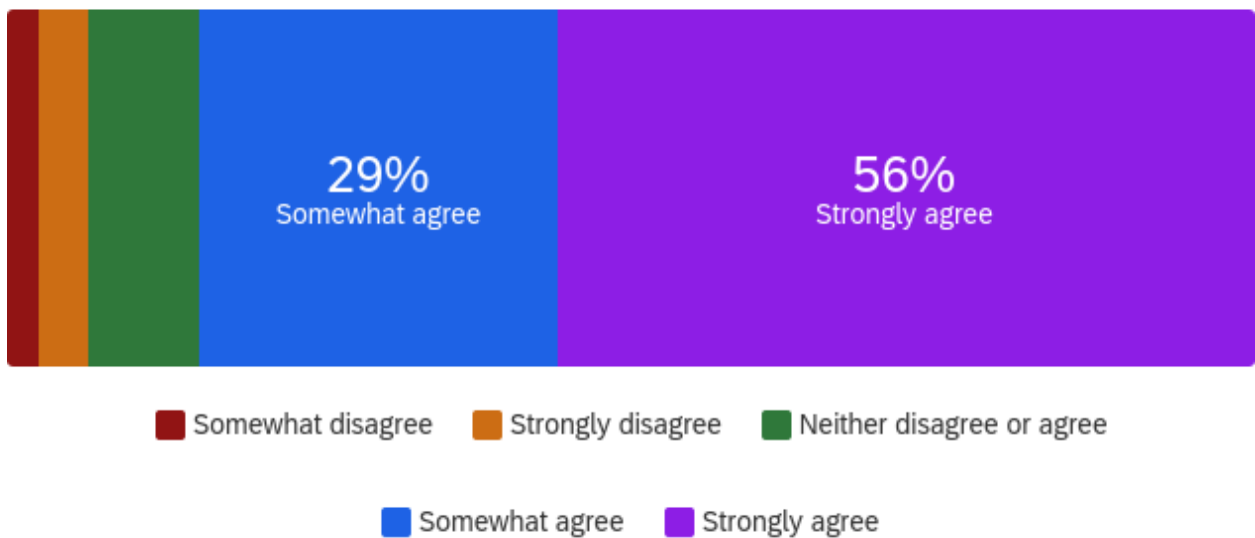


Figure 9 - Community Support for Statewide Survey Participants

Women leaders get support from their community (comparable to their male colleagues in similar roles).

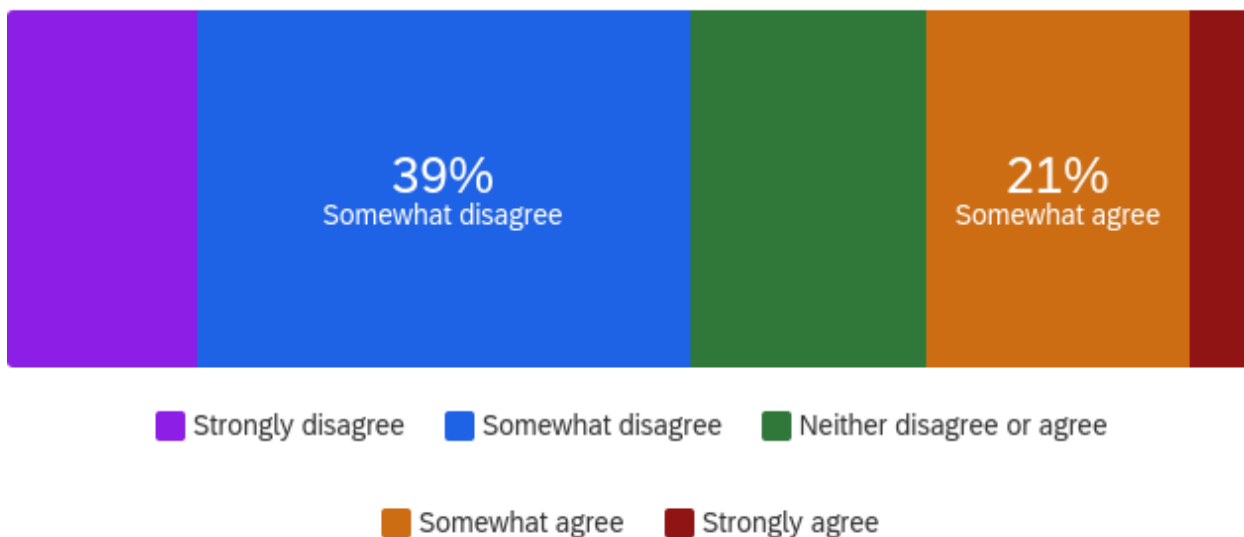


Figure 10 - Community Beliefs for Statewide Survey Participants

Most people in my community believe women can be good leaders.

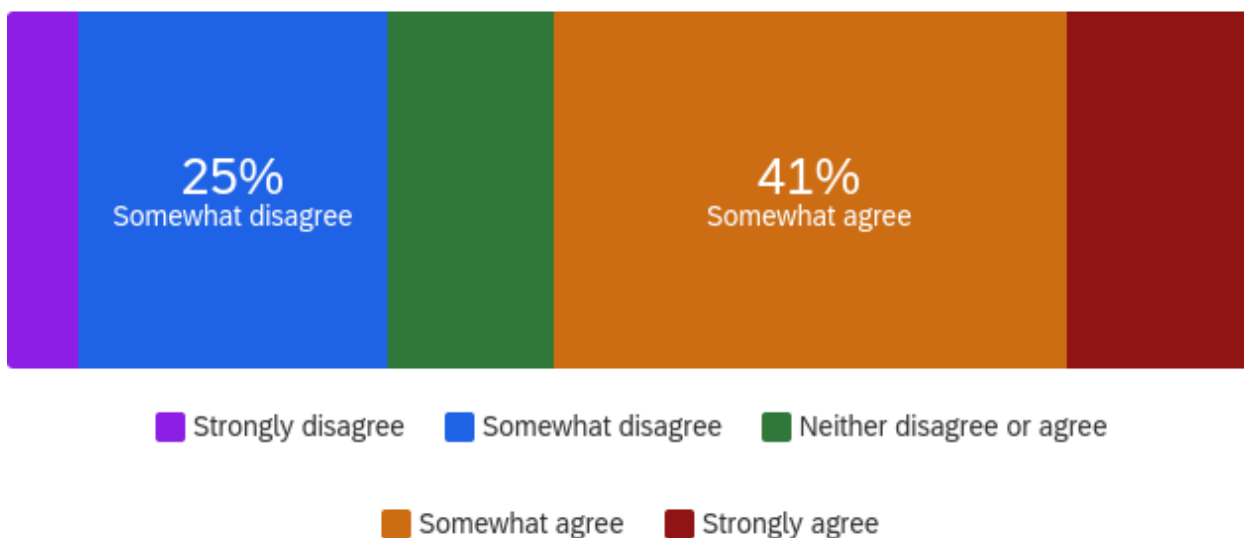


Figure 11 - Leadership Skills for Statewide Survey Participants

Women leaders are as skilled as men (in similar leadership roles).

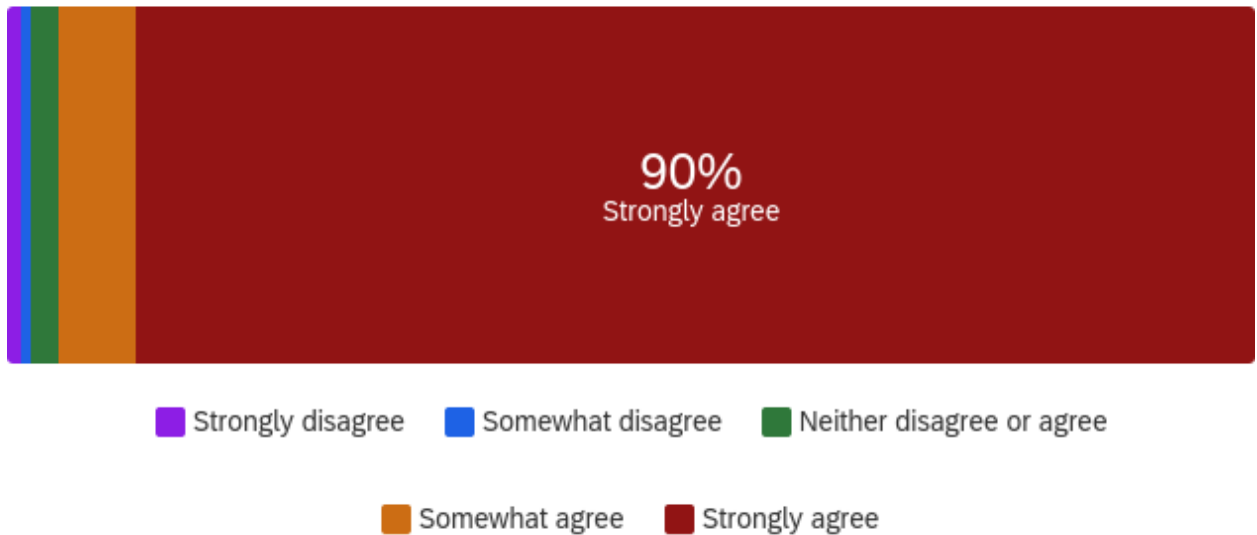


Figure 12 – Promotion Seeking for Statewide Survey Participants

Women leaders are as likely to ask for promotions and raises (as their male colleagues).

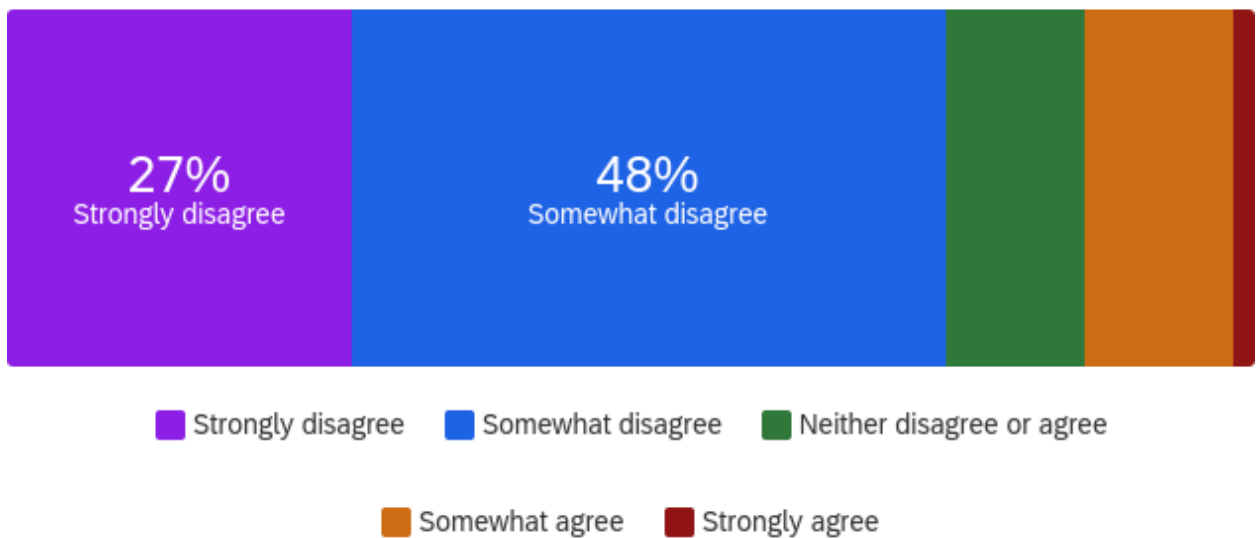


Figure 13 - Leadership Ability for Statewide Survey Participants

Women are tough enough for leadership.

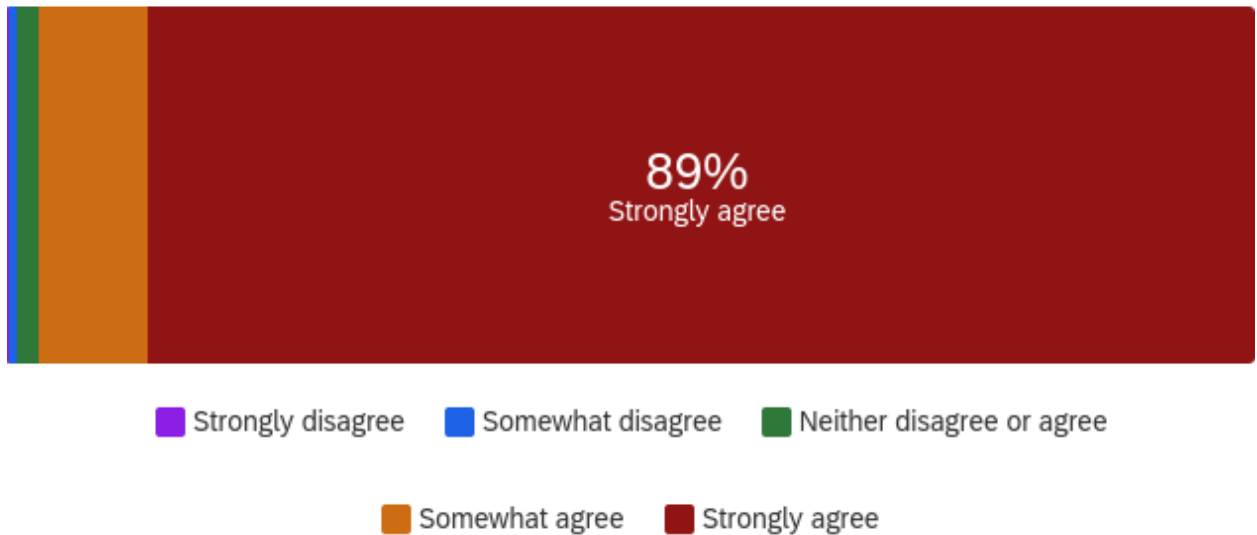


Figure 14 - Leadership Experience for Statewide Survey Participants

Women have the experience needed to be a leader.

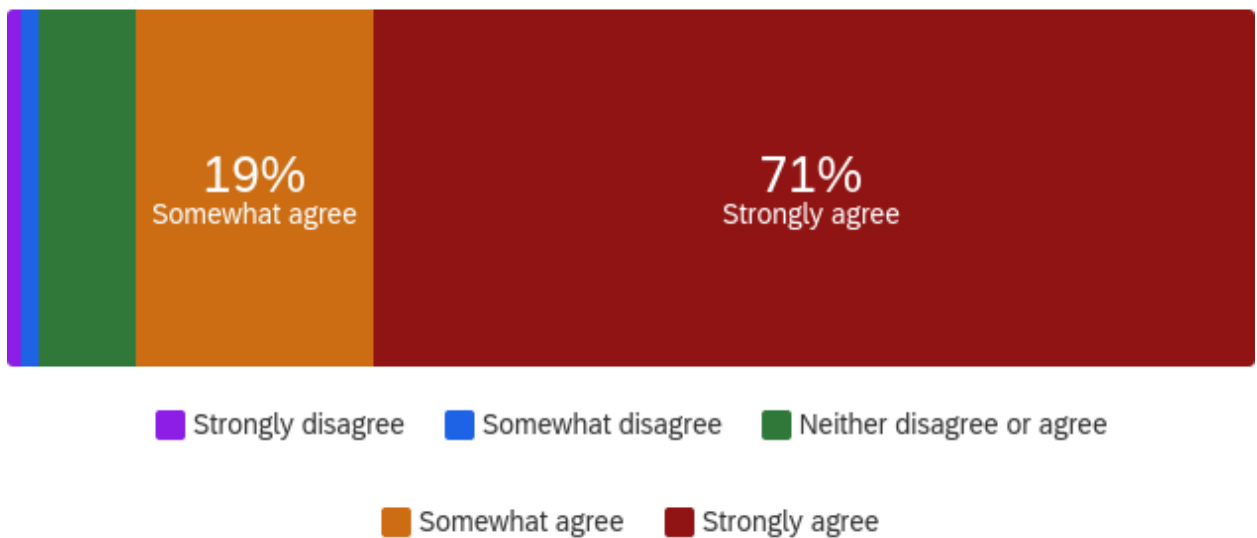


Figure 15 - Leadership Confidence for Statewide Survey Participants
Women see themselves as leaders.

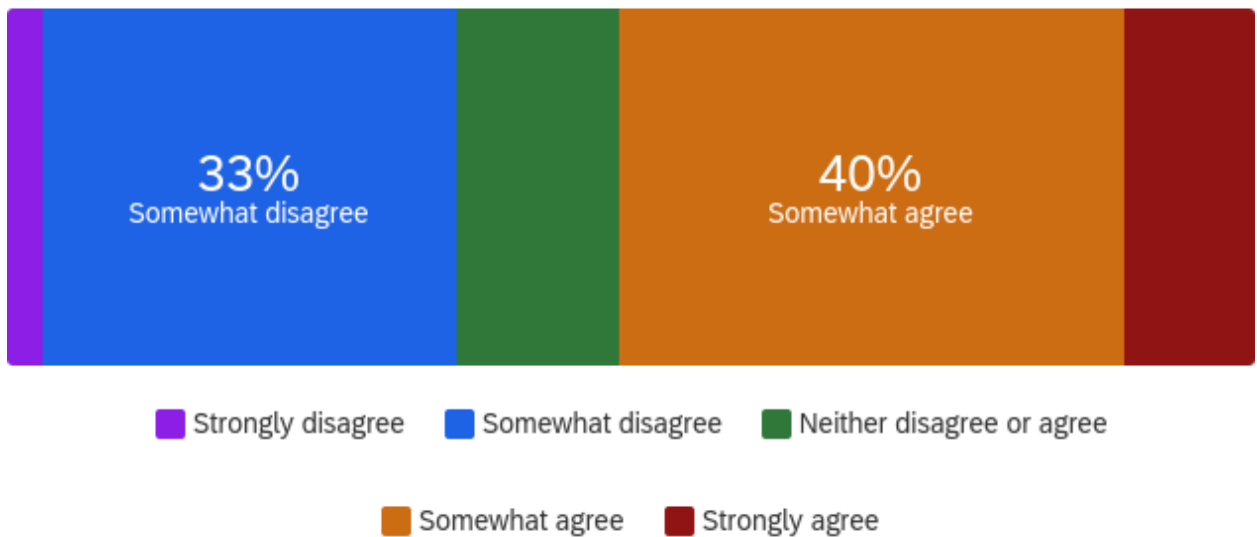


Figure 16 - Risk Taking & Confidence for Statewide Survey Participants
Women are as confident and likely to take risks (as their male colleagues).

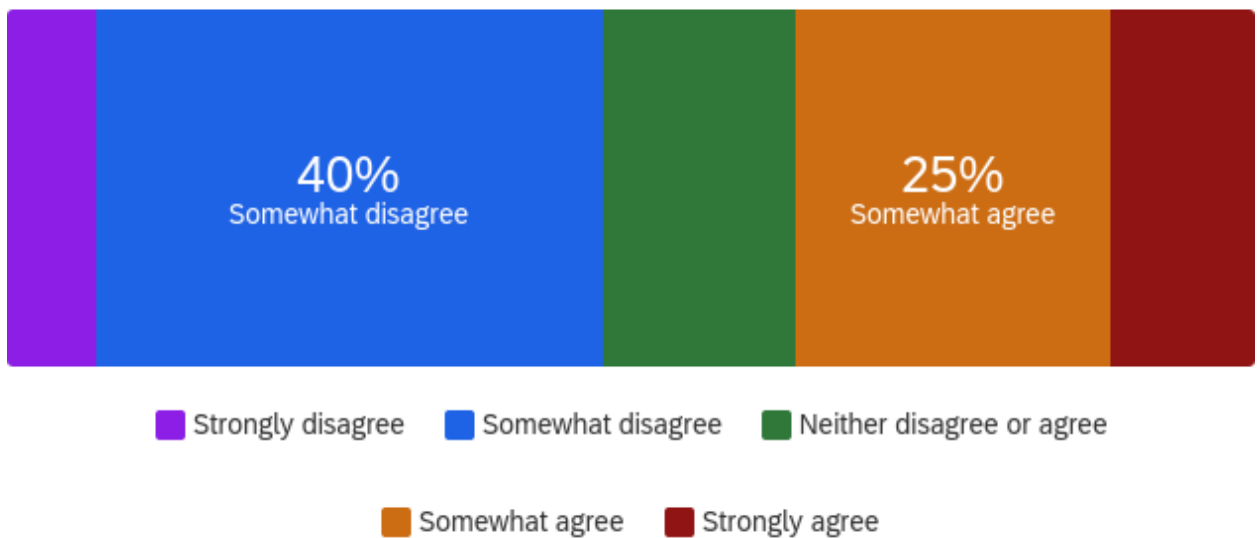


Figure 17 - Request for Upward Movement by Statewide Survey Participants

Women are as likely to communicate their desire for new assignments or promotions (as their male colleagues).

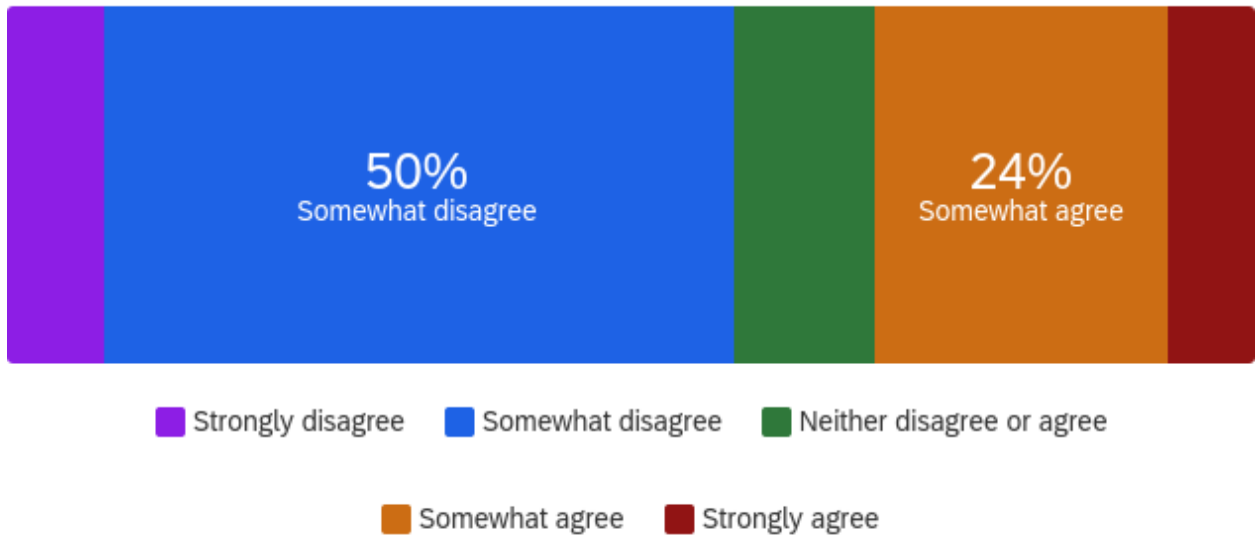


Figure 18 - Access to Mentorship for Statewide Survey Participants

Women have the same access to supportive mentors (as their male colleagues).

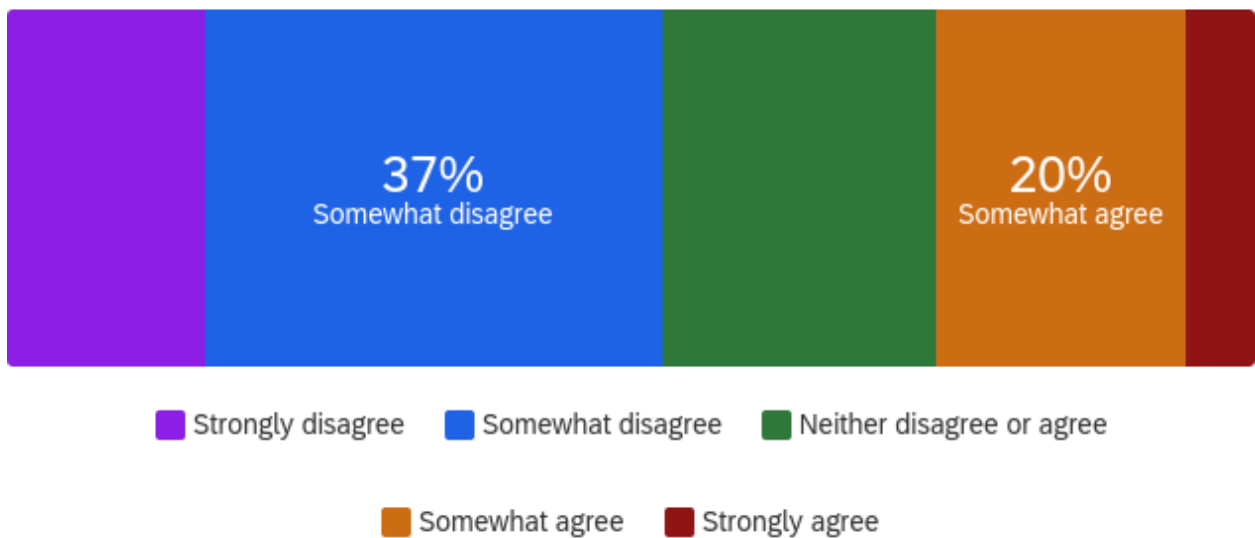


Figure 19 - Access to Informal Spaces for Statewide Survey Participants

Women have the same access to informal social networks such as happy hours, softball team, and golf outings (as their male colleagues)

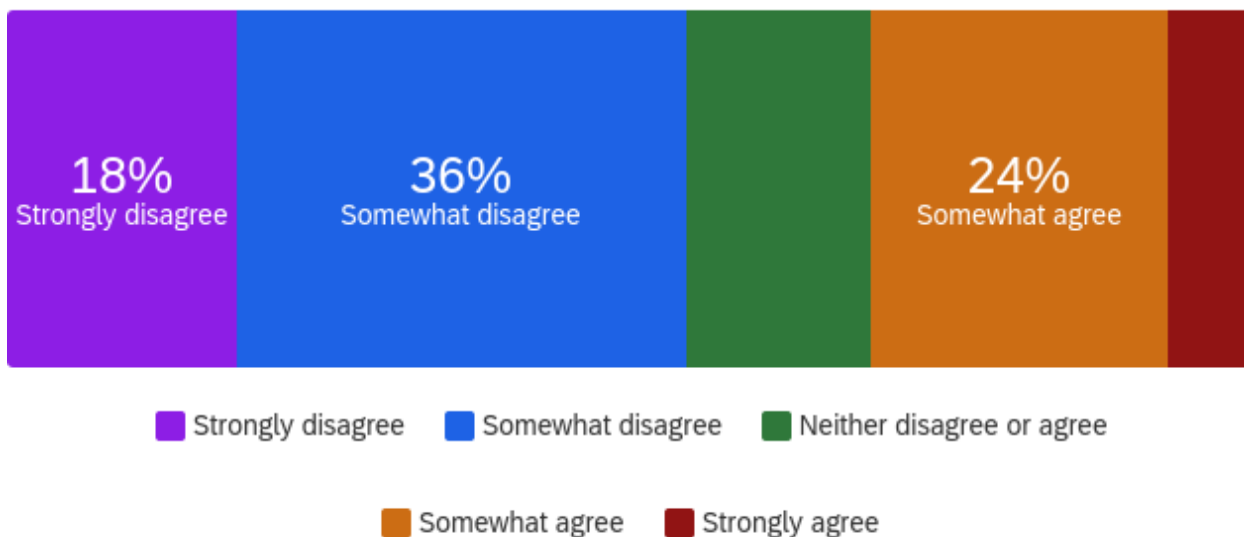
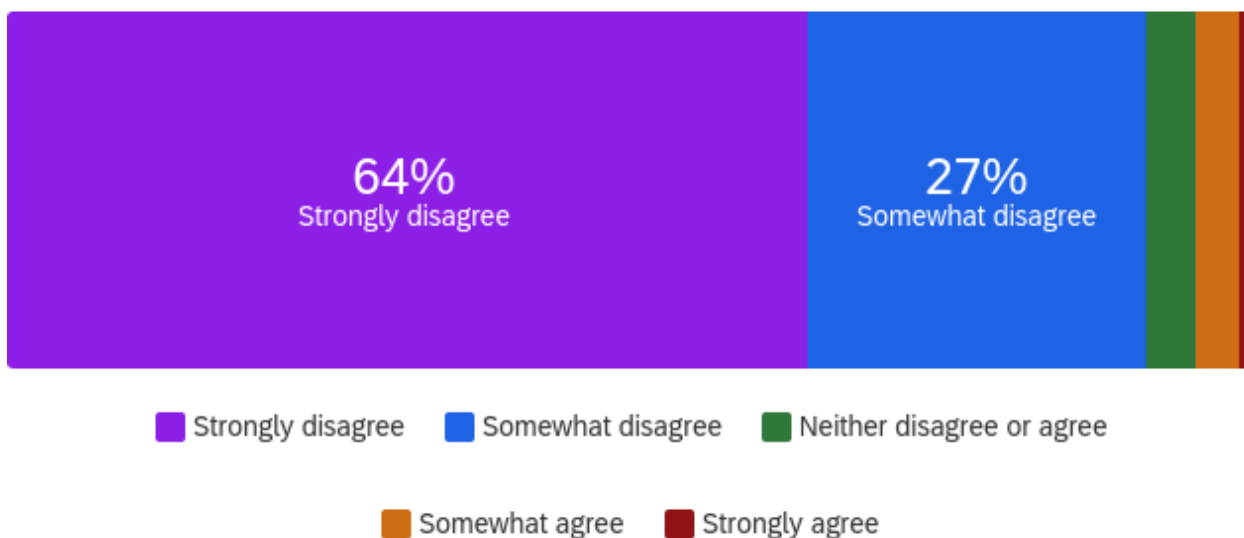


Figure 20 - Caregiving Responsibilities for Statewide Survey Participants

Women have the same caregiving responsibilities (as their male colleagues).



Section 7: Limitations of the Research

Overall, the entirety of this project occurred during the COVID-19 global pandemic. This snapshot in time provides a unique look into the lives of rural women perhaps during some of the hardest professional and personal tribulations. While all efforts were made to host meetings at varying times of day and throughout the week, participation was not compensated and as such working rural women were likely more encumbered with professional responsibilities. This was reflected in the high rate of participation by college educated women in the statewide survey. This likely means that the majority of participants are within a higher income bracket than the median population of Minnesota. With the majority of participants identifying as non-Hispanic White individuals, continued research to focus exclusively on the experiences of diverse rural women in Minnesota would illuminate unique supports that may be needed.

Furthermore, the entirety of the research was conducted virtually via video-conferencing software and online survey software; individuals with inadequate access to high-quality broadband internet access would have had trouble joining meetings, participating fully, or otherwise engaging with the content.

Pilot

The Northwest pilot phase was essential for laying the groundwork on what a successful summer of convenings should look like. However, quantitative analyses should be interpreted with caution when making larger generalizations because it was a small sample size. The facilitators were also able to identify that some barriers to participation consisted of participants having different ideas and attitudes around what “leadership” should be considered as well as what a “network” is, which likely means that there is response bias present in the data.

Figure 21 - Pilot Mentimeter Poll Responses to “What do you see as leadership?”

What do you see as leadership? (In a single word or phrase)



Statewide Convenings & Survey

Statewide convenings were held during the summer and early fall, which likely limited the participation of rural women with young children. Survey respondents identified what types of professional training or education they had received and only 10.2% identified not having a four-year degree. In the Midwest specifically, recent estimates suggest that only around 21.9% of the population has a Bachelor's degree.²¹ This suggests that our survey sample was skewed to include the responses of highly educated women.

Section 8: Future Directions

100 Rural Women envisions a world where more rural women lead positive change for themselves, their families, their communities, the nation, and the world. The multitudes of responses from participants at all stages of this project illustrated the need for specific skills and leadership programming, authentic connections, and larger social movements to better support and uplift the work of rural women. These findings explicitly led to our programming initiative “The Next 50” which offers a variety of virtual programming to address these resource gaps.

Authentic Connections

The opportunity to connect with women across the state of Minnesota has been facilitated through a variety of virtual spaces. Currently being offered are intentional **Network** spaces, convening women around a theme or economic sector to connect and learn from each other, and **Morning Connections**, an open coffee chat to connect rural women and supporters for light conversation about their lives and their current struggles.

The conversation was engaging and stimulating. Sharing and learning views and experiences is beneficial for connecting women who would otherwise, most likely, not ever meet. Who knows what will occur as a result!?!

Building connections with woman I otherwise wouldn't connect with

I really enjoyed the topics of conversation around education, the hosts, and participants as hosts. The organic flow of the conversation and centering one another in an uplifting space.

100 Rural Women is also in the process of developing a mentorship network - stay tuned!

Skills & Leadership Programming

The need for ongoing learning and mentorship opportunities outside of what is traditionally offered by workplaces and educational programs led to the development of **Ask a Leading Woman**. These sessions host a leader - whether from a volunteer group, local government, or large corporation - to share their story and pathway to leadership. All present for 20 minutes and end with around 20 minutes for discussion so attendees can ask questions or further their engagement with one another.

The presenter was phenomenal! I'm inspired by the change she is making and the way she

talked about advocating for rural, women in politics and decision-making roles, and people of color as all embedded intersecting goals in her work. Such a great session! - Attendee

Hearing inspirational stories from our area really gets the story out in a positive way that can lead to solutions for our community.

Requests for professional and personal skill building are being addressed in a variety of different ways. **Resiliency Sessions** are being offered, consisting of short virtual guidance through all-level yoga and meditation. These sessions are being offered at a variety of times in a short, thirty-minute format to make it easier for busy schedules as a moment to reflect and take care of one's body and mind in a supportive environment.

It is what a busy, mom, employee, volunteer needs.

Great inspiration to take a break for myself

I have wanted to get started in yoga and right now my schedule allows it. Hoping this will keep me focusing on my health in order to handle the stress of running 3 businesses

This was such a lovely session! I felt so much better and less stressed after the loving kindness meditation. I found that later in the day I was more focused and confident in my work, and things felt more fulfilling than usual. I plan to attend future sessions!

Expanding Networks

100 Rural Women employees participate in a variety of community-based coalitions and initiatives. The barriers highlighted by the participants suggest that larger social change is needed to truly allow all rural women to have an equal seat at the table. This focus on fair compensation, racial equity in hiring and retention, diversity in leadership, and accessible childcare is reflected through our work in the larger community.

Building connections is at the core of our work - but building an infrastructure for all women to take advantage of opportunities and be supported in leadership roles will allow these connections to be nourished and strengthened.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix I: RSDP Regions

Northwest Region

rsdp.umn.edu/northwest

"RSDPs are on the front lines. By listening to the community members' innovative ideas, RSDP acts as a conduit and connector between the U of MN and outstate groups in order to empower, build capacity and incorporate sustainable practices all across the state."
- RSDP Board & Work Group Evaluation



Sovereign Nations

- Red Lake Nation
- White Earth Nation

Counties

- Beltrami
- Clay
- Clearwater
- Kittson
- Lake of the Woods
- Mahnomen
- Marshall
- Norman
- Pennington
- Polk
- Red Lake
- Roseau
- Wilkin



Northeast Region

Sovereign Nations

- Bois Forte Band of Chippewa
- Fond du Lac Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa
- Grand Portage Bands of Lake Superior Chippewa

Counties

- Aitkin
- Carlton
- Cook
- Itasca
- Koochiching
- Lake
- Pine
- St. Louis



Central Region

Sovereign Nations

- Leech Lake Band of Ojibwe
- Mille Lacs Band of Ojibwe
- White Earth Nation

Counties

- Becker
- Benton
- Cass
- Crow Wing
- Hubbard
- Kanabec
- Mille Lacs
- Morrison
- Otter Tail
- Stearns
- Todd
- Wadena



Southeast Region

Sovereign Nation

- Prairie Island Indian Community

Counties

- Blue Earth
- Dodge
- Faribault
- Fillmore
- Freeborn
- Goodhue
- Houston
- LeSueur
- Mower
- Nicollet
- Olmsted
- Rice
- Steele
- Wabasha
- Waseca
- Winona



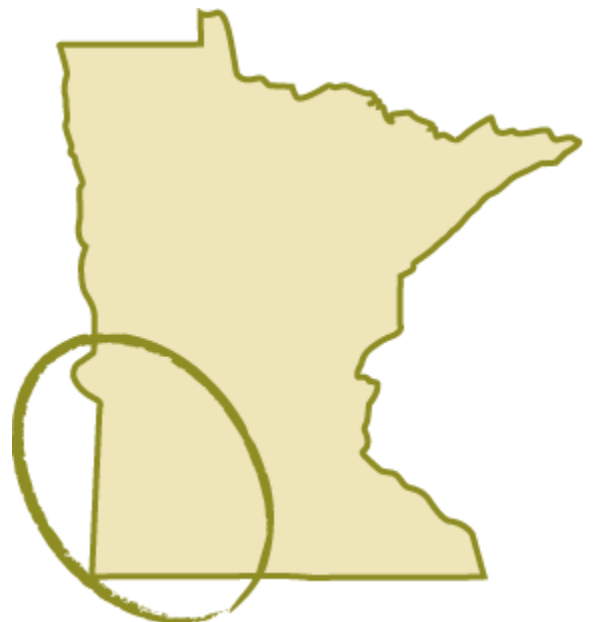
Southwest Region

Sovereign Nation

- Upper Sioux
- Lower Sioux

Counties

- Big Stone
- Brown
- Chippewa
- Cottonwood
- Douglas
- Grant
- Jackson
- Kandiyohi
- Lac qui Parle
- Lincoln
- Lyon
- Martin
- McLeod



- Meeker
- Murray
- Nobles
- Pipestone
- Pope
- Redwood
- Sibley
- Renville
- Rock
- Stevens
- Swift
- Traverse
- Watonwan
- Yellow Medicine

Metro

Note: the Metro designation is not an RSDP region but is included for clarity of later data.

Counties

- Anoka
- Carver
- Chisago
- Dakota
- Hennepin
- Isanti
- Ramsey
- Scott
- Sherburne
- Washington
- Wright