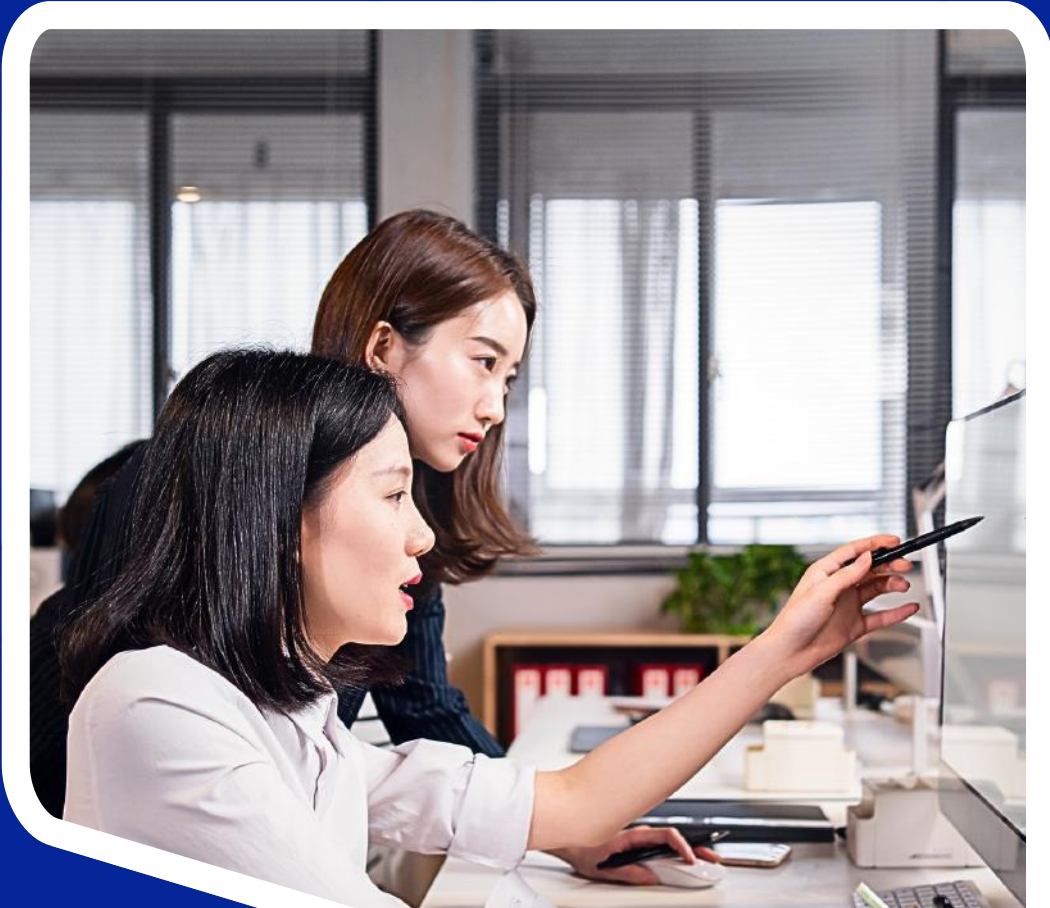


ATTRACTING, PROMOTING, AND RETAINING

WOMEN OF COLOR

WHERE WE ARE....

WHERE WE ARE GOING





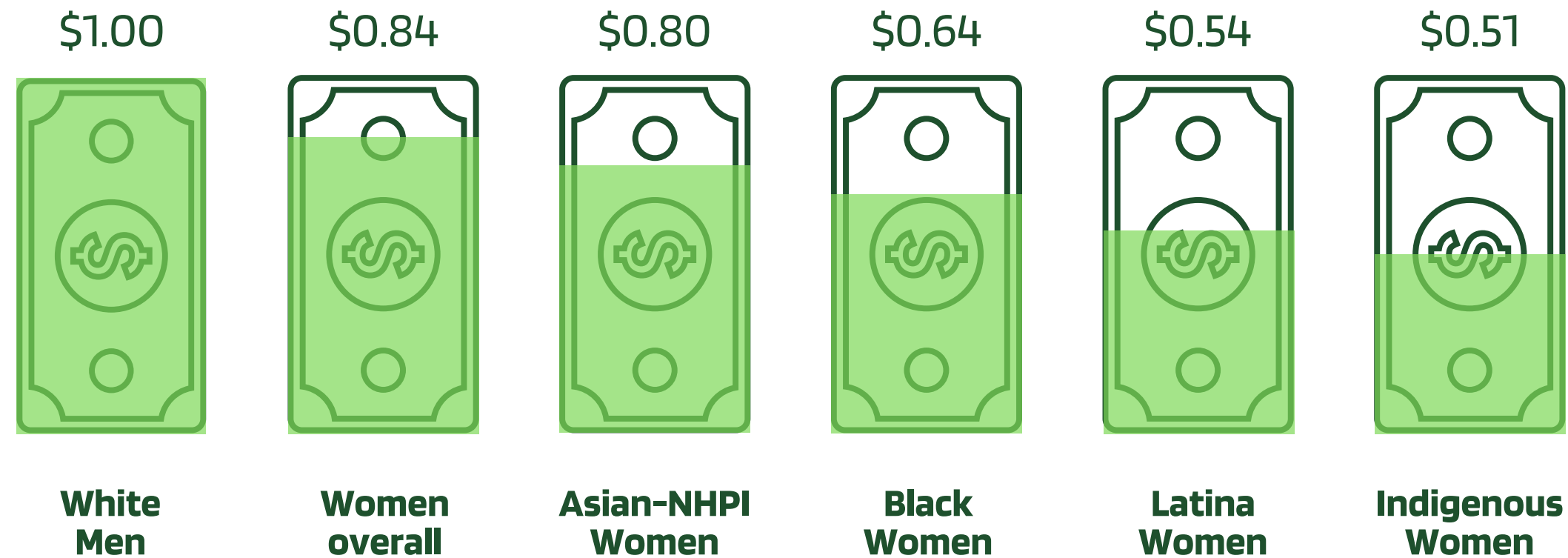
# ATTRACTING, PROMOTING, AND RETAINING WOMEN OF COLOR

WHERE WE ARE....  
WHERE WE ARE GOING

## THIS BRIEFING HAS THREE MAIN OBJECTIVES

- To cast light on the very real issues that Black, Asian, Latina, Indigenous and all Women of Color (WOC) face individually and collectively as they work to forge the careers of their choice.
- To provide facts, figures, and findings that both pinpoint problems and suggest solutions on how organizations can profit from true diversity.
- To encourage and motivate corporate leadership to embrace initiatives and strategies that address the specific challenges and opportunities of various racial and ethnic groups that comprise WOC.

**For every  
dollar earned  
by white men**



*Women of Color are ambitious and skilled yet remain overlooked and under-tapped. Latinas and Indigenous Women have the widest wage gaps to close. Unconscious bias is in large part the root of both disparities which remain too prevalent, under-reported, and under-addressed.*

**Esther Aguilera, Senior Advisor, Altura Capital and WBC Board Member**

## ADDITIONAL RESEARCH NEEDED

We compiled this briefing, based on reviewing and analyzing over 60 reports from business and academic sources, many of whom partner with Women Business Collaborative (WBC). We found a serious lack of specific data on the various races and ethnicities that fall under the umbrella of WOC. Information tends to be aggregated without considering the specific backgrounds, life experiences, expectations and barriers experienced by different WOC populations.

For example, there are over 500 different Indian tribes in the United States. There are marked differences in the countries and ethnicities that comprise Asian American Pacific Islanders. The life experiences and prejudices faced by African American and Caribbean women are decidedly different. Yet these differences are largely unaddressed in existing research and data.

We look forward to the body of data and research on the specific races and ethnicities that comprise women of color growing rapidly and significantly. When those specific facts, figures and findings are available, they will be an important contributing factor to building a solid foundation for truly equitable and inclusive corporate cultures.

# ATTRACTING AND HIRING WOMEN OF COLOR

In many ways the current system is stacked against WOC, and that inequity “begins at the very beginning.” If the gaps in representation at middle and upper levels of management, in pay, in inclusion and in acceptance are to be closed, the place to start is in attracting and hiring WOC across races and ethnicities.

Racial Group	Net Worth
Whites	\$188,200
Asian, Pacific Islander & Other	\$ 75,500
Hispanics	\$ 36,200
Black or African-Americans	\$ 24,100

Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances, 2019.

## THREE WAYS HIRING PRACTICES WORK AGAINST WOMEN OF COLOR

**Job Qualifications and Candidate Credentials Are Too Narrowly Defined** Managers and recruiters tend to be “close-minded” about candidate credentials, college degrees and previous experience. These narrow qualifications do not always capture experience and expertise. Additionally, with the rise of technology, certain skills are obtainable with certifications and experience.

**Managers and Recruiters Practice In-Group Favoritism** According to [a Seramount study](#),<sup>1</sup> 78% of corporate leaders tap their inner professional networks to fill vacant roles, and they are significantly more likely to be from the same race or ethnicity, resulting in a failure to attract and hire diverse talent.

**Unconscious Bias Remains in Play** Interviewers and managers often subliminally favor candidates who, for example, look like them, have gone to the same college, or who have a geographic or socioeconomic connection.

# THREE MAIN STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING HIRING PRACTICES

## End Thinking of WOC as One Homogenous Group

- Seek out the advice and support of organizations connected to Black, Asian, Latina, Indigenous and other historically overlooked ethnicities on how to attract and hire women from their communities.
- Regularly track the progress of hiring WOC by race and ethnicity and make the needed changes to ensure the inclusion of diverse candidate.
- Add WOC of various ethnicities to internship programs. Starting early is a key strategy for developing a diverse talent pipeline.

## Attack Unconscious Bias

- Establish formalized programs to help managers acknowledge and address unconscious biases. Common unconscious biases include: Seeing Asian women as the “perfect minority,” Black women as “too pushy,” “Latinas as “too quiet and un-asserting.”
- Educate employees, organization-wide, to the various races and ethnicities that comprise WOC. Often racial and ethnic differences fail to be seen or understood, resulting in a form of unconscious bias.

## Expand Recruitment Channels and Reassess Position Requirements

- Develop relationships with historically Black colleges and universities and racially and ethnically oriented chambers of commerce and business organizations to pinpoint new streams of WOC to recruit. Additionally, bring career events targeted at WOC to all colleges, universities and business training and networking arenas.
- Assess and broaden position requirements to allow for the diverse experience of WOC. Place greater emphasis on life skills and skill-based training and certification.
- Structure interviews to use standardized questions to level the playing field for all candidates regardless of gender or ethnicity, and hold recruiters and hiring managers accountable for their decisions.



***In helping companies attract and hire diverse talent, I continually stress the importance of reaching out to a broader pool of candidates from various backgrounds and demographics. Organizations must 'go to where they are.'***

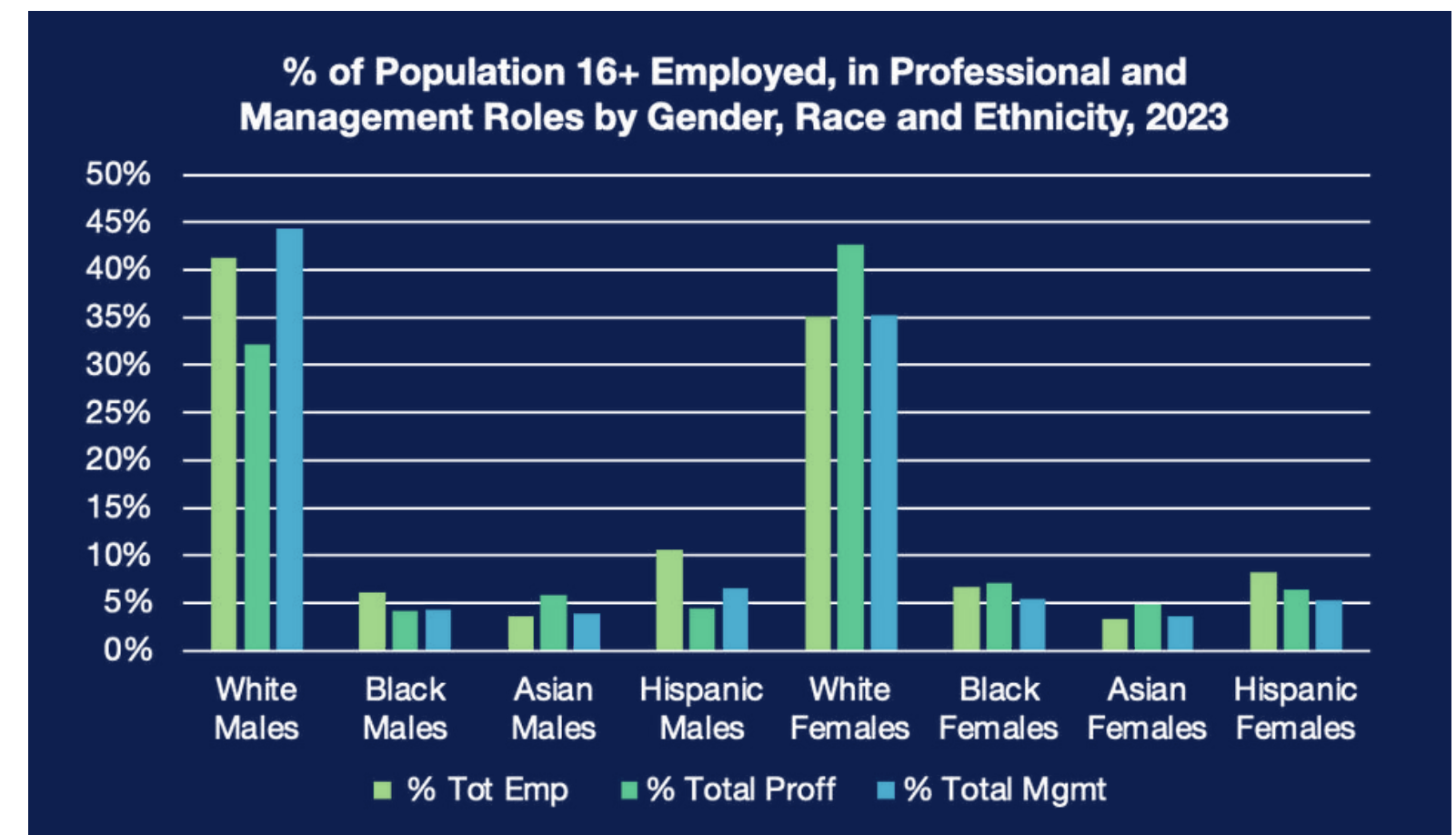
**Duc Nguyen Abrahamson Executive Director Asian Pacific American Chamber of Commerce**

# PROMOTING WOMEN OF COLOR

WOC of all races and ethnicities are largely excluded from managerial and leadership roles across industries, and the consequences to organizations are significant. According to a [2020 McKinsey report](#),<sup>2</sup> companies in the bottom quartile in ethnic and cultural diversity underperform the top quartile with relation to profitability by 36%.

## THREE MAIN REASONS WOMEN OF COLOR AREN'T GETTING PROMOTED

**The “Broken Rung”** While in many cases WOC account for a majority of hires, they are dramatically left behind in career advancement. This discrepancy is especially true of Asian women who experience what is often called the “bamboo ceiling” throughout their careers.



U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics Analyses of Current Population Survey Data, 2023.



# THE MYTH OF MERITOCRACY

## THE MYTH

Success is determined by individual achievement and not based on one's inherited social status.

## THE REALITY

Multiple factors contribute to an individual's achievement and status including that: we do not all start out on equal footing.

Systems of oppression inhibit marginalized populations from accessing resources that lead to health, wealth, power and privilege.

## **Corporate Cultures Dominated by Male Opinions, Prejudices, and**

**Predispositions** For example, Black women are least likely to be given high stakes, high visibility projects. (Walsh, 2023)<sup>3</sup> Asian Women, “the model minority,” are viewed as smart, reliable and hardworking, but weak leaders (Nguyen, 2021)<sup>4</sup> Latinas are often subject to two career-stalling stereotypes:

(1) They are supporters not leaders; (2) they prioritize family over work.

Additionally, intersectionality where racism and sexism interlap to foster prejudices and microaggressions further stall careers for all WOC.

**Absence of Mentors, Sponsors and Allies** Mentors and sponsors are vital for advancement and are often absent in the careers of WOC. Mentors provide reality-based advice, and sponsors make their protégées known to corporate leadership. As a result of the absence of mentors and sponsors, Black women, for example, are more likely to feel excluded, isolated, and invisible than white women or other WOC. (Williams, 2022)<sup>5</sup> Additionally, according to a 2021 McKinsey study,<sup>6</sup> allies are not showing up for WOC in ways that are needed. Less than 50% of white employees speak out against bias or advocate for WOC.



*Leaders at all levels need to directly engage with, get to know, and work with Women of Color. If possible, leaders should be assigned to mentor and help guide the career trajectory and success of Women of Color in an organization.*

Anne L. Alonzo, Independent Board Director and Senior Advisor, Sustainability/Climate/ESG

## THREE STRATEGIES FOR ADVANCING AND PROMOTING WOMEN OF COLOR

### **Repair the Broken Rung**

- Create and develop leadership programs that are open to all, starting at the earliest career levels.
- Collect and disaggregate information by gender, race, and ethnicity. Use the data to eliminate bias in job descriptions and to ensure performance criteria are related to the position.
- Hold managers accountable by providing clear, measurable metrics against which they are measured.
- Appoint more WOC to boards across races and ethnicities to create greater diversity at the highest levels.
- Set goals, require diverse slates and set evaluation criteria that, like hiring, are unbiased.

### **Assess the Corporate Culture at All Levels**

- Perform corporate-wide audits to pinpoint the barriers to promotion for WOC, including unconscious bias, stereotypes and microaggressions.
- Provide formal and informal training to dispel stereotypes and misconceptions about Black, Asian, Latina, and other underrepresented groups.
- Ensure that WOC know that the organization has a no-tolerance policy for microaggression, bias or harassment in any form. Create an environment where employees are encouraged to speak up about any incidents.
- Pinpoint the effects of inequality among groups. By doing so, major obstacles to promotion can be addressed including gender inequity, lack of professional development and sexual harassment. (WEF Report).<sup>7</sup>

## Create Avenues for WOC to Develop Relationships with Mentors, Sponsors and Allies

- Provide formal opportunities for women of color to create mentoring relationships with WOC and others from different races and ethnicities. Support participation in Employee Resource Groups (ERGs).
- Encourage managers to provide WOC with high visibility assignments that make them noticed by corporate leaders, making them more likely candidates for sponsorship.
- Educate managers to offer aspirational feedback to WOC. “Great job” should be the beginning, not the end, of on-going discussions. “Where do we go from here?” “How can we mesh your goals with corporate ones?” “How do we increase your visibility?” These should all be questions asked regularly.
- Assess if allyship is working, and if white men and women are stepping up to challenge biases, stereotypes, microaggressions or harassment against WOC. Additionally, WOC must be made to feel comfortable speaking out about their concerns and their issues.



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***Make sure the opportunities are real and give those opportunities to Women of Color. Match pipeline with qualifications and see representation at every level. If the numbers aren't showing it, then you are not doing it right or not doing enough.***

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**HOPE C. JOHNSON  
CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER  
HAVEN TECHNOLOGIES  
SUBSIDIARY OF MASS MUTUAL;  
WBC BOARD MEMBER**



# RETAINING WOMEN OF COLOR

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Attracting, hiring, and promoting WOC across all races and ethnicities are significant contributors to improving corporate growth, profitability, and creativity. However, without sustainable approaches for retaining the talented WOC hired and promoted, organizations will not achieve the long-term successful outcomes for which they are hoping.

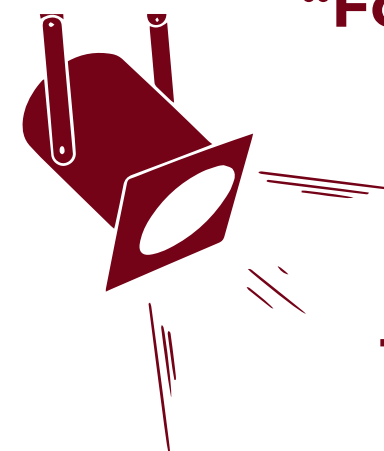
## Three Main Reasons WOC are Leaving Their Organizations

**Unable to See Themselves Advancing** In a 2020 survey by Seramount,<sup>8</sup> less than half of Black, Asian and Latina women believed senior management was open to promoting all talent. WOC in tech were 37.6% less likely than white women to see a future for themselves at their present organization (Williams, 2022).<sup>9</sup> Additionally, various research shows that Black, Asian and Latina women continually report that they “feel like outsiders,” and see themselves as unlikely candidates for promotion based largely on the lack of women at senior levels who “look like them.”



**Asian-NHPI Women are most likely to get hired but least likely to be promoted across the tech industry.**

**Latinas frequently endure the Maternal Wall bias and the “Forever Foreigner” stereotype.**



**Black women are least likely to be given high stakes, high visibility projects.**



**Lack of Flexible Work Options** Balancing work/life responsibilities is a frequent stressor for the many underrepresented populations that fall into the WOC category. Indigenous women, for example, with their deep-rooted tradition of loyalty to family and tribe, are especially impacted by the work/life balance. WOC overall often have a higher caregiving burden than others in the workforce; and 69% of women who off-ramped reported they would have stayed with their companies if they'd had more flexible work options.<sup>10</sup>

**Inability to be Authentic** For many Black, Asian and Latina women, fitting in at work means leaving their real selves at home. It is tiring and stressful, and can impact job performance. Only 28% of Asians, 40% of Blacks and 41% of Hispanics say they “feel comfortable being themselves at work.” Additionally, Asian women are less likely than people of other ethnicities to share new ideas or challenge a group consensus at a team meeting.

REGARDLESS OF WHERE WOC WORK, AN EGREGIOUS PROBLEM EXISTS

*According to Deloitte,<sup>11</sup> 40% of women belonging to an ethnic minority have experienced microaggressions at work, compared to 30% of women who are not from these groups. Additionally, a large percentage of incidences go unreported largely for fear of retribution or concern that nothing will be done.*

# THREE STRATEGIES FOR RETAINING WOMEN OF COLOR

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**We are often faced with the choice of either being a mom or excelling at our careers. I am blessed to be working in Indian law where I can be wife, mom, and attorney. The Indigenous community understands the importance of meshing career and family. I actually was able to hold my son while I gave my Attorney General Report.**



**THE HONORABLE  
VICTORIA (TORI) HOLLAND  
DELEGATE TO THE UNITED STATES  
HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES,  
UNITED KEETOOWAH BAND OF  
CHEROKEE INDIANS;  
TRIBAL COURT ATTORNEY**

## **Prove Women of Color Can - and Do - Advance**

- Create opportunities for WOC, across races and ethnicities, to serve in leadership roles and on boards. The benefits are twofold: The organization can be more profitable and innovative. WOC can see that their voices are represented at the highest levels.
- Show WOC at every level that there are paths to the top and that the company is invested in making sure talented WOC, of all races and ethnicities, advance.
- Provide formalized mentorship programs, as well as formal opportunities, for WOC to be paired with sponsors.
- Take a long hard look at individual departments. Are there areas where WOC feel less comfortable, less likely to be affirmed for their contributions, more likely to be ignored or overlooked? Work with those departments to create targets and plans to ensure opportunities for more WOC.
- Create data to see at what career point WOC are most likely to exit the organization, which departments experience the most problems with retention, and what common factors may emerge.

# THREE STRATEGIES FOR RETAINING WOMEN OF COLOR (CONT'D)

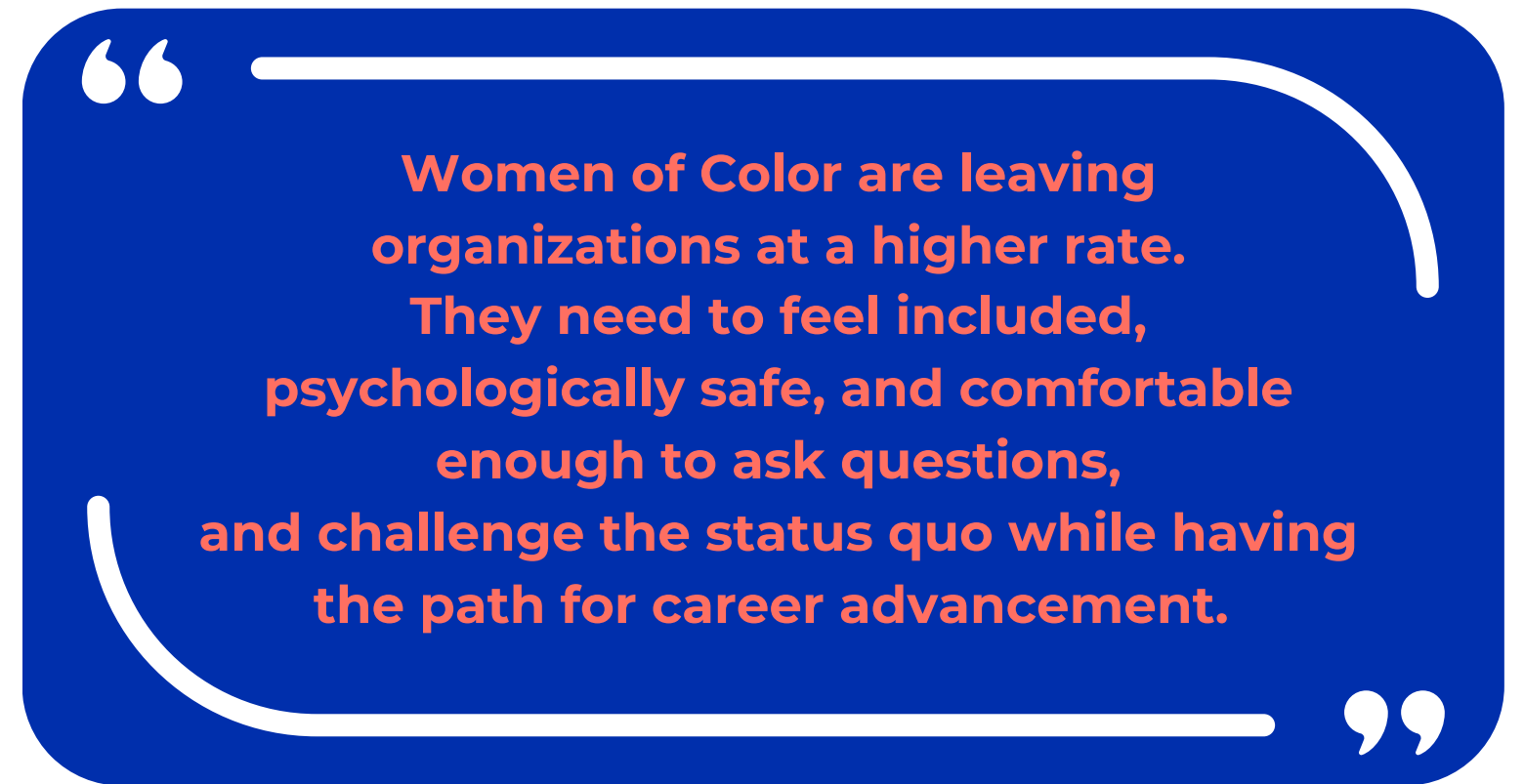
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## Encourage Authenticity

- Both formally and informally, make it clear to women of all races and ethnicities that there is great value in the unique, lived-life perspectives they bring to the organization.
- Educate managers at all levels on the importance of diverse backgrounds and points of view in fostering organizational creativity and in addressing the needs of a diverse marketplace.
- Provide opportunities for WOC to meet with women of the same heritage through ERGs so they can combat feelings of isolation and discuss issues that are specific to them. Additionally, facilitating the bringing together of groups from varying ethnicities fosters a sense of community and works towards reducing rivalry and distrust among racially and ethnically diverse groups of WOC.

## Provide Options for Flexible Work

- Formulate policies that allow for flexibility in where and when employees work. With WOC often balancing work/home responsibilities at a higher level than other employees, flexibility can both ease their stress and improve their performance.
- Study and reassess family leave and other policies to better support the higher caregiving burden often experienced by WOC.
- Listen to the specific needs and wants of the various races and ethnicities under the WOC umbrella and use the knowledge gained to improve corporate culture, employee engagement and employee benefits, all key factors in retaining talent.



**AAYSHA NOOR**  
**VICE PRESIDENT DIVERSITY, EQUITY, & INCLUSION,**  
**ERIE INSURANCE; FOUNDER & PRINCIPAL, DELIVERING**  
**OPPORTUNITIES TO SUCCEED (DOTS) BY NOOR**

*A commitment by both profit and non-profit organizations to disaggregate data by gender, race, and ethnicity is critical.*

## WHERE WE NEED TO GO

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The purpose of this Briefing is twofold: To pinpoint what we already know and understand about equity and inclusion in the workplace for Black, Asian, Latina and Indigenous women; and to look at where more needs to be done to ensure ALL who fall under the umbrella of WOC are treated equitably.

Lack of disaggregated data and research about the many underserved populations that comprise the WOC population continues to be a major barrier to truly equitable corporate cultures, working to the disadvantage of both the women themselves and corporate profitability.

As a result, a commitment by both profit and non-profit organizations to disaggregate data by gender, race, and ethnicity is critical. Corporations must then use the data to remove bias across all career inflection points: attracting and hiring WOC, promoting them and retaining them. And managers need to be held accountable for what the numbers reveal.



# A CHECKLIST OF ACTION STEPS

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As we continue to conduct research and gather data by specific races and ethnicities, we must keep the work of equity and inclusion moving forward without interruption.

## Major ongoing action steps include:

**Develop Metrics** Regularly updated data and research is needed on the state of hiring, promoting and retaining women of color across both the company as a whole and in individual departments. As a result, assessments of the status of WOC throughout the organization should be an ongoing process.

**Continually Confront Unconscious Bias and Stereotypes** Because managers and leadership can fail to recognize the barriers for women of color, increasing awareness through formal and informal programs is critical. Often, managers and leadership need to be made aware that there are a wide variety of races and ethnicities, not just two or three, that fall under the WOC umbrella.

# A CHECKLIST OF ACTION STEPS (CONT'D)

## Encourage Men and White Women to Step Up as Allies and

Sponsors There is not only an absence or underrepresentation of WOC in corporate leadership, there is also an absence of men of color. As a result, organizations must work to link WOC with top executives, with sponsors, and with allies who, regardless of their race or ethnicity, understand the talents WOC bring to the table, listen to their needs and concerns, and help them mesh their skills and abilities with those of the organization.

Start Early To build a truly diverse talent pipeline, organizations must start early. They must seek out WOC at colleges and universities. They must sponsor internships, career days and events where young WOC see that the organization is committed to attracting, hiring, promoting, and retaining people just like them.

## A CHECKLIST OF ACTION STEPS (CONT'D)

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### Combat Isolation, Foster Inclusive Cultures, and Encourage

Authenticity WOC often feel isolated and alienated at work, which increases stress, impacts job performance and frequently causes them to leave their jobs. By actively acknowledging the value of diverse backgrounds and points of view, by increasing the number of WOC at senior levels, by providing opportunities within and outside the organization for WOC to meet other underserved populations, organizations can decrease the sense of isolation and help WOC show up to work as their authentic selves. The result: inclusive cultures where all feel a sense of belonging.

This Briefing will hopefully serve as an impetus for corporations to more aggressively focus on attracting, retaining, and promoting WOC. If they rise to that challenge, they will be benefitting both women of color and their bottom line. They will be helping ensure that the following goals set by WBC and our partners will become realities on or ahead of schedule:

- 15% of Fortune 500 and S&P 500 CEO roles are women by 2025 and 20% by 2030.
- Women constitute 20% of those being considered for CEO roles by 2025 and 30% by 2030.
- 10% of all women in the C-Suite are women of color by 2030.
- 8% and 17% of women occupying the C-Suite have substantial P&L responsibility by 2025 and 2030 respectively.
- 25% and 30% of candidates assessed for C-Suite roles are women by 2025 and 2030 respectively.
- Equal numbers of men and women receive detailed information on career paths leading to line management roles by 2025.
- 30% of the Fortune and S&P 500 and Russell 3000 board seats held by women by 2025 and 40% by 2030.

## ENDNOTES

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### About Women Business Collaborative (WBC)

Women Business Collaborative (WBC) is an unprecedented alliance of over 80 women's business organizations and hundreds of business leaders building a movement to achieve equal position, pay, and power for all women in business. Through collaboration, advocacy, action, and accountability, we galvanize thousands of diverse professional women and men, business organizations, public and private companies to accelerate change. For more information on the Women Business Collaborative visit [wbcollaborative.org](http://wbcollaborative.org).