

Gender Parity In The C-Suite



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GETTING TO GENDER PARITY VIA ANTI-RACIST INCLUSIVE STRATEGIES

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We will only have gender parity in the C-Suite once we implement anti-racist practices in our own businesses. Here are some roadblocks and anecdotes, along with a roadmap of how you can join us in achieving this goal.

INTRODUCTION

In 2016, legal cannabis sales in North America reached \$6.7 billion, representing 30% growth year-over-year.¹ According to GQ magazine, in mid-2017, it was the second-largest cash crop in the U.S. after corn, and worth over \$40 billion.² Retail sales of medical

and recreational cannabis in the United States are on pace to eclipse \$15 billion by the end of 2020³, and if you include ancillary products and services, the industry is estimated to reach \$68.4 billion by 2021.⁴

Womxn⁵, however, are not equally represented in the cannabis sector's C-Suite⁶; those of color and nonbinary have even less representation. The lack of equal representation, including BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) and LGBTQIA+ womxn, negatively impacts every level of the industry, from products to marketing to access and, ultimately, revenue and the creation of generational wealth.

Businesses are not as competitive or profitable without womxn in their leadership ranks.

- **Companies with more womxn in leadership roles are more profitable.** A Pepperdine University study showed that twenty-five Fortune 500 firms with the best record of promoting womxn into high positions were 18 to 69 percent more profitable than the median firms in their industries.⁷
- **Companies with more womxn in leadership roles are more competitive than their peers.** One USA Today report found the stocks of 13 Fortune 500 companies led by a womxn for all of 2009 outperformed the S&P 500 (companies primarily led by men) by 25%.⁸

1 Nunley, K. (2017) America's marijuana industry will have a \$70B economic impact by 2021. Medical Marijuana, Inc. News. <https://www.medicalmarijuana-inc.com/news/americas-marijuana-industry-will-70b-economic-impact-2021/>

2 Lewis, A. (2017, August 23). The Great Pot Monopoly Mystery. GQ. <https://www.gq.com/story/the-great-pot-monopoly-mystery>

3 McVey, E. (2020, June 30). Exclusive: US retail marijuana sales on pace to rise 40% in 2020, near \$37 billion by 2024. Marijuana Business Daily. <https://mjbizdaily.com/exclusive-us-retail-marijuana-sales-on-pace-to-rise-40-in-2020-near-37-billion-by-2024/>

4 Annual Marijuana Business Factbook 2020. (2020, October 20) Marijuana Business Daily. <https://mjbizdaily.com/factbook/>

5 A womxn (used as an alternative spelling to be inclusive of trans and nonbinary women and to avoid the suggestion of sexism perceived in the sequences m-a-n and m-e-n).

6 To clarify, when we speak of the C-Suite, we are referring to the executive-level managers within a company, which can include, but are not limited to, chief executive officer (CEO), chief financial officer (CFO), chief operating officer (COO), chief marketing officer (CMO), etc.

7 Adler, R. D. (2001). Women in the Executive Suite Correlate to High Profits. Pepperdine University.

8 Shambaugh, R. (2013). Make Room for Her: Why Companies Need an Integrated Model of Leadership to Achieve Extraordinary Results. New York. McGraw Hill.

- **Companies with more womxn in leadership roles reflect the marketplace.** "[Women are Good for Business](#)," a report by Women on Boards, found that womxn are responsible for 83 percent of all consumer purchases in the U.S. and control nearly \$20 trillion of the world's spending power.⁹
- **Womxn-led startups produce more than twice the revenue for every dollar invested.** Womxn-led startups generate \$0.78, compared to male-led startups that generate \$0.31.¹⁰ They also perform better over time, generating 10% more cumulative revenue over a 5-year period.¹¹

Now, it's not as though companies do not recognize the need for gender diversity, equity, and parity. In 2003, MIT professor Thomas Kochan noted that companies were spending an estimated **\$8 billion a year on diversity efforts**. Yet, here we are 17 years and billions of dollars later, with men making up 85% of top leadership roles.¹²

No industry, especially the cannabis industry, can continue to believe that an all-white, straight, male leadership team produces a competitive advantage. The presence of diverse perspectives makes businesses more innovative and innovation is strongly linked to better performance.¹³ Embracing parity in all its forms will result in a diversity of thought, opinion, and experience at decision-making tables.

So, the real question is: **What can the cannabis industry do today to achieve gender parity?**

In order to champion gender parity in cannabis as an industry, we must recognize and address the root cause. Otherwise, we are offering insight and throwing money at solutions that don't address the core issues upon which every other issue sits. This paper provides that roadmap, and the first step along the journey is to **recognize systemic discrimination and oppression**.

BIPOC womxn and men do not own or have significant representation in today's cannabis C-Suite, despite the fact that the cannabis industry and market, as it exists today, was created by mostly Black and Brown people in the informal market. Racism is the reason cannabis prohibition exists, as cannabis was weaponized as a tool of state-sponsored systemic racism, filling prisons and marginalizing Black and Brown citizens and their communities. Practiced by both major political parties, voter suppression and exclusion was one of the major byproducts of supporting the prison industrial complex with these policies; it lies to us to change the cannabis narrative. You can read about the timeline of cannabis prohibition [here](#), or for a deeper dive, read Michelle Alexander's, *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Color Blindness*. BIPOC womxn and men were targeted in the War on Drugs. Black and Brown communities were systematically destroyed from actions and decisions rooted in anti-Black racism stemming from systemic white supremacy and patriarchy.

The next step on the path towards achieving gender parity is to **understand the interconnected nature of systemic discrimination and oppression**. Legal scholar [Kimberle Crenshaw's intersectional theory](#) asserts that people are often disadvantaged by multiple sources of oppression: their race,

9 Braund, C. (2011). Why Women are Good for Business. <https://www.womenonboards.net/en-au/reference-items/career-and-leadership/why-are-women-good-for-business>

10 Boston Consulting Group. (2018, June 6). Women-Owned Startups Deliver Twice as Much Per Dollar Invested as Those Founded by Men. <https://www.bcg.com/press/6june2018-why-women-owned-startups-are-a-better-bet>

11 Perez, C.P. (2019) Invisible Women, Data Bias in a World Designed for Men.

12 Caprino, K. (2019), How to Engage More Male Leaders in the Gender Equality Movement. Forbes. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/kathycapri-no/2019/12/16/how-to-engage-more-male-leaders-in-the-gender-equality-movement/?sh=6e26f88c2f0c>

13 Perez, C.P. (2019). Invisible Women, Data Bias in a World Designed for Men.

class, gender identity, sexual orientation, religion, and other identity markers.¹⁴ Intersectionality recognizes that identity markers (e.g. "woman" and "Black") do not exist independently of each other and each informs the others, often creating a complex convergence of oppression. More simply said, discrimination doesn't impact us equally as womxn.

In order to achieve gender parity in the cannabis C-Suite, we must **recognize and understand the systemic discrimination and oppression**. This paper, which includes pragmatic steps and an associated toolkit, is a start.

Our research addresses current trends, including personal anecdotes from womxn in the cannabis C-Suite. It highlights roadblocks that womxn face, specifically Black womxn, womxn of color, and LGBTQIA+ womxn. We lay out three pragmatic steps for remedying the overall lack of womxn in C-Suite positions. At the end of this paper, you can find a link to our [C-Suite companion toolkit](#). The purpose of addressing this issue is to give boards of directors, people in positions to hire or promote to C-level executives, and placement firms clear pathways to center womxn, BIPOC womxn, and LGBTQIA+ womxn when hiring for these positions. We are setting a course to remedy past harms and to hold cannabis companies accountable to creating a path to progress and parity. Gender parity will be achieved when the root of the oppression, white patriarchal systems, and culture, are systematically addressed in policies, the workplace, and in leadership.

The inequities addressed in this paper are certainly not limited to cannabis; however, we are the only sector creating itself in real-time. This paper was written in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic when many headlines have described the cannabis industry as going from "[illegal to essential](#)." The Black Lives

Matter movement has become one of the largest movements in U.S. history, amplified after the murder of George Floyd in broad daylight at the hands of police officers in Minneapolis. Tumultuous 2020 was also marked by a tense U.S. Presidential election, leading to Kamala Harris, a woman of color with both Black and Indian heritage, becoming the nation's first female Vice-President with President Joe Biden.

Given this time of inflection, we have an opportunity to create an industry unlike any other. We must capitalize on this opportunity to be the first industry to successfully dismantle systemic discrimination. When we systemically uplift and power-share with the BIPOC community, and when we effectively advocate for the dismantling of the framework of white supremacy, we all benefit. This effort will require everyone, especially those in ownership and leadership positions, to accept anti-racism and inclusion as inherent values and take action to assure that their businesses are anti-racist and inclusive.

GENDER C-SUITE TRENDS

So what, exactly, does the C-Suite of the legal cannabis industry look like in the U.S.? First, let's look at some trends from other industries. According to [Fortune Magazine](#), today only 30 (or 6%) of CEOs in Fortune 500 companies are womxn.¹⁵ Sonia Syngal at Gap Inc, Lisa Su at Advanced Micro Devices, and Joey Wat at Yum China are the only three womxn of that 30 who are not white womxn.¹⁶ As of the writing of this paper, there have only ever been two [Black female CEOs](#) of a Fortune 500 (Ursula Burns at Xerox and Mary Winston as 6-month interim CEO at Bed Bath & Beyond).

Womxn make up only 25% of C-Suite positions in the U.S.¹⁷

14 Crenshaw, K. (2016, October). The Urgency of Intersectionality. Ted Talks. https://www.ted.com/talks/kimberle_crenshaw_the_urgency_of_intersectionality?language=en

15 Jones, S. (2017, June 9). White Men Account for 72% of Corporate Leadership at 16 of the Fortune 500 Companies. Fortune. <https://fortune.com/2017/06/09/white-men-senior-executives-fortune-500-companies-diversity-data/>

16 Connley, C. (2020, May 19). The number of women running Fortune 500 companies hits a new high. CNBC. <https://www.cnbc.com/2020/05/19/the-number-of-women-running-fortune-500-companies-hits-a-new-high.html>

17 Stevenson, J. & Kaplan, D. (2019). Women C-Suite Ranks Nudge Up—a Tad. Korn Ferry. <https://www.kornferry.com/insights/articles/women-in-leadership-2019-statistics>

skewing heavily towards the positions that have a lower potential for advancement (general counsel, human resources, chief risk officer, etc.).¹⁸ Womxn make up a mere 13% of the "high potential for promotion" positions of CEO, CFO, and Profit and Loss leaders. Why are these numbers so low if womxn make up 58% of the U.S. workforce?¹⁹ The imbalance at the leadership level is unacceptable. Having womxn in the C-Suite is good for every company's bottom line, regardless of industry.

Coming back to the cannabis C-Suite, there is an immediate and significant need for more research. Currently, it is difficult to even find statistics. The 2nd Edition of "[Women and Minorities in Cannabis](#)" report by Marijuana Business Daily found that the percentage of womxn in senior-level executive positions at cannabis companies had vacillated from 36% in 2015 to 27% in 2017 and back up to 37% as of June 2019.²⁰ Those numbers do make overall C-Suite representation higher than the average industry in the U.S., mentioned above. Trying to figure out the exact number of BIPOC womxn in the C-Suite level proved even more difficult. When talking about diversity in the C-Suite, statistics commonly show simply "all womxn" or "BIPOC diversity" (see, for example, Marijuana Business Daily's report, as referenced above). Some anecdotal stories can be found, but due to a lack of reliable research and statistics, those stories may not always have the full picture. For example, a [story from January 2020](#) celebrated Ericka Pittman as the first Black female CMO of a multistate operator. That story was actually overlooking at least one other Black female CMO, Valda Coryat at Trulieve. There is a need for more research and statistics on the exact number of BIPOC womxn at the C-Suite level in the cannabis industry.

The number of female cannabis CEOs is higher than in other industries, but it is still a bleak 8%, which means that 92% of

cannabis CEOs are male.²¹ Say that figure to yourself again - 8%. Statistics like this demonstrate a systemic issue. Before discussing the pragmatic steps that everyone can take to work towards achieving parity, let's discuss the systemic roadblocks that womxn face.

SYSTEMIC ROADBLOCKS FOR WOMXN

The Grass Ceiling

The "Grass Ceiling" is a term commonly used to describe an invisible barrier that blocks womxn's chances at advancement in the cannabis industry. It is a barrier exacerbated by multiple identities (intersectionality) and applies to womxn as a group, with BIPOC and LGBTQIA+ womxn sitting at the bottom of the pyramid and the last rung on the ladder.

There are numerous causes for this grass ceiling. We posit one important cause is occupational segregation. In our current labor market, outside of cannabis, we have seen executive positions segregated by gender. Womxn executives fill positions such as personnel, public relations, marketing, and some finance specialties. These are rarely pathways to the powerful top management positions and are often intentional. This is an example of tokenism²² or a way of practicing performative gender parity but not actual gender parity. The pathways that lead to those power positions, like President or CEO, are rarely offered to womxn in any significant way, thus limiting access to those positions.

18 Posner, C. (2020, May 1). The sorry state of C-Suite diversity. Cooley. <https://cooleypubco.com/2020/05/01/sorry-state-c-suite-diversity/>

19 Jardine, J. (2019, August 21). There Are More Women Executives in Cannabis Than in Other Sectors of the Economy, But There's Still Room for Improvement. TheStranger.com. <https://www.thestranger.com/slog/2019/08/21/41156882/there-are-more-women-executives-in-cannabis-than-in-other-sectors-of-the-economy-but-theres-still-room-for-improvement>

20 Women and Minorities in Cannabis: 2nd Edition. Marijuana Business Daily. <https://mjbizdaily.com/women-minorities-cannabis-industry>

21 New Bedford Report Details Cannabis Industry's Executive and Board Compensation in Canada & US. (2020, May 26).The Bedford Report. <https://bedfordgroup.com/specialties/compensation-services>.

22 Tokenism is the practice of making only a perfunctory or symbolic effort to do a particular thing, especially by recruiting a small number of people from underrepresented groups in order to give the appearance of sexual or racial equality within a workforce.

Many womxn in positions of leadership must constantly and consistently exceed performance expectations to move up the corporate ladder and must work harder and longer than their male counterparts to achieve similar success. There is a belief in bureaucracies across the spectrum that it is merely a matter of time before womxn close the parity gap with men in terms of leadership. This is not true. The lack of gender parity in leadership positions exists because patriarchal values hold up the structure of leadership. Womxn fail to get to the top because of systemic discrimination against them - period.

In a survey, the authors of this paper asked womxn in the cannabis C-Suite questions about their professional experiences. When asked about climbing the corporate ladder, one of our survey participants recalled, **"I have been told an all womxn's leadership team couldn't succeed because we didn't have the skills. I was told womxn as customers aren't scalable enough to deserve investment."**

Cannabis is following this standard set by other industries wherein the majority of womxn remain largely insignificant and are often used as tokens by corporate management; but we could lead. We are building the cannabis industry, and we can choose to create a different pathway for equity in all of its manifestations, including, but not limited to, the C-Suite. We can stop this avalanche of disparity, starting at the top and moving through all sectors of our industry.

THE "DUDE-BRO" NETWORK

In the informal market, many womxn ran their own cannabis businesses successfully for years prior to the regulated market. They created community, medicine, programs, and employed many of their community members. However, as cannabis is legalized, one of the most significant barriers to womxn was and continues to be the "Dude-Bro Network," that shuts womxn out of top leadership positions. The "Dude-Bro Network" consists of males who have been educated at the same institutions and/or who have climbed the corporate ladder together. Margaret Mitchell, an AI researcher at Microsoft, refers to the 74% of men working in and influencing norms as "the sea of dudes problem."²³ Intentional or not, it is a mechanism that upholds white patriarchy.

The "Dude-Bro Network" tends to be more comfortable promoting individuals who look and act like themselves. Men in these top level decision-making roles will often look to current or former colleagues and friends to fill these positions without ever considering womxn. Companies, including cannabis companies, claim that advancement is achieved through performance and skill, yet the reality is that even with similar education, starting salaries, and career commitment, men most often progress faster and receive higher compensation than womxn. (Please review the [Pay Equity: Minding the Gap](#) paper in this series to get a snapshot of how the cannabis industry is falling into this tried and true barrier to entry.)



23 Clark, J. (2016). Artificial Intelligence Has a 'Sea of Dudes' Problem. Bloomberg. <https://bit.ly/seaofdudes>

“I’VE BEEN LEFT OFF PANELS AND HAVE BEEN PREJUDGED BY OTHER INDUSTRY PROFESSIONALS IN THE INVESTMENT ARENA. ONE EVEN CHALLENGED IF I WAS ACCREDITED, AND THEN ASKED FOR PROOF, WHICH I PROVIDED. THEY STILL DIDN’T BELIEVE ME OR MY ATTORNEY. THEY EVEN BANNED ME FROM FUTURE SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS WITH THE ORGANIZATION.”

~ Khadijah Adams,

President at Khadijah Adams, LLC

As a [2019 Table Stakes study](#) points out, "due to the inclination to hire people like yourself, from your own network—the impact of the gender equity gap ripples through our economy and will continue to perpetuate itself."²⁴ By this same concept, more female executives in the cannabis industry will result in more opportunities for womxn. In many cases, within the cannabis industry, womxn are creating their own C-Suite positions outside of the "Dude-Bro Network;" creating their own gender parity within their own companies. Sometimes the only way around the "Dude-Bro Network" is to create our own space.

“I LEARNED IN MY EARLY CORPORATE EXPERIENCE HOW TO MANAGE SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND I SHUT IT DOWN IMMEDIATELY AND WON’T LET IT HAPPEN. THAT IS THE GOOD PART OF BEING THE BOSS OF MY OWN COMPANY.”

~ Erin Gore,

CEO of Garden Society

LACK OF MENTORS

Lack of a critical mass of senior, visibly-successful womxn, and diverse role models and mentors is another barrier, not only to womxn in leadership but to aspiring womxn in the cannabis industry who are not white. Mentoring is where an individual who has experience and knowledge in the cannabis industry can actively guide, facilitate learning, offer support, or help in

the development of another person. How can this be devised to help create diversity when people in power do not have direct knowledge of inclusive methods of mentorship that could benefit womxn, and ultimately companies' bottom lines?

Christine De La Rosa, CEO and National Co-founder of The People's Dispensary, The People's Holdings and the lead author of this C-Suite paper says:

“LACK OF TRUE MENTORSHIP IN THE CANNABIS INDUSTRY RUNS AMOK. AT THE BEGINNING OF OUR JOURNEY SO MANY PEOPLE WERE PREDATORY AND ENDED UP HURTING US MORE THAN HELPING US. WE LEARNED THAT WE HAD TO BE EXTREMELY CAREFUL WHO MENTORED US, AS IT COULD BE VERY DESTRUCTIVE. ADDITIONALLY, THERE WERE NOT MANY PEOPLE, IF ANY, IN THE CANNABIS INDUSTRY, AT THAT TIME, THAT KNEW HOW TO MENTOR A MOSTLY QUEER, MOSTLY WOMXN, MOSTLY BIPOC ORGANIZATION WHICH LED TO A LOT OF UNCOMFORTABLE SILENCES AND ILL-ADVISED STEPS THAT DID NOT ALIGN WITH OUR MISSION.”

~ Christine De La Rosa,

CEO and National Co-founder of The People's Dispensary

The Dude-Bro Network has been critical to men's advancement in cannabis. Lack of access to that network and socially-competent mentoring is detrimental to the advancement of those who do not fit that box, especially BIPOC womxn and LGBTQIA+ people. In the cannabis industry, as well as most industries, white men generally occupy leadership roles, therefore, white men are more likely to be in power positions to open doors for those they mentor. The basis of patriarchy has been organized around men's relationships with other men, excluding many other people.

As a strategy to achieve gender parity, white womxn in power could center socially-competent mentorship as an effective equity strategy, offering to serve in an advisory role to their marginalized counterparts, recognizing the inherent power of using privilege to dismantle systems of oppression that show up in corporate culture. Womxn of color, generally speaking, recognize that our success is not individual, but **individual and collective**. "Each one, teach one (or more)"²⁵ is an understanding of our experience. Accountability to the community is a heavy lift and an honor to fulfill.

SEXUAL HARASSMENT

Womxn, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and gender non-conforming people both in and outside of the cannabis industry continue to face sexual harassment and gender-based discrimination. Harassment is a form of power by an employer. Sexual harassment both intimidates and demoralizes these groups and creates an atmosphere of silence, because many people fear that reporting sexual harassment or gender-based discrimination will jeopardize their careers. Patriarchal value structures and preconceived notions of gender roles lead to a wide range of rules pertaining to gender-determined behaviors and expectations. Broad acceptance of these rules sets up the rationale for male supremacy and the potential for male harassment or violence against womxn.

The cannabis industry, thus far, continues to follow in this track.

25 Matthews, C. (2014, Dec 10). Each One, Teach One. Jacob's Rite of Passage. <https://www.jacobsriteofpassage.com/site/elders-ledger/each-one-teach-one>

“THE HEMP SIDE OF THE INDUSTRY SEEMS TO BE MORE PROFESSIONAL, AT LEAST IN MY EXPERIENCE, WHEN COMPARED TO THE ADULT USE MARKET. THE ADULT USE MARKET IS FULL OF CHARACTERS WHO (MAY HAVE) NEVER WORKED IN A PROFESSIONAL SETTING IN THEIR LIFE, AND IT SHOWS IN THEIR INTERACTION WITH EMPLOYEES AND COLLEAGUES. I’VE BEEN ASKED TO BEND OVER MORE WHEN TRIMMING PLANTS, SHOW UP IN A SWIMSUIT TO MOTIVATE MEN, AND HAVE HAD TO ENDURE ENOUGH “JOKES” ABOUT BEING A “BOMBSHELL” THAT I COULD START MY OWN COMEDY SHOW.”

~ **Nicole Foss,**

Vice President at NeXtraction Inc.

It is essential to implement structures that allow for reporting inappropriate behavior. One of our survey participants shared:

“WE HAVE A ZERO POLICY ON HARASSMENT AND HAVE A SECRET BUDDY SYSTEM IF SOMEONE IS FEELING UNCOMFORTABLE. THAT WAY THEY DON’T HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT “REPORTING” IT AND RATHER CAN TELL THEIR BUDDY, WHO WILL THEN REPORT IT. IT HAS WORKED VERY WELL DURING COVID TO ENSURE WE HAVE 100% COMPLIANCE WITH SAFETY. WE ALSO FOCUS ON INTENTIONAL HIRING FOR INCLUSION, MEANING MAKING SURE WE MAINTAIN A DIVERSE TEAM.”

~ Erin Gore,

Founder and CEO at Garden Society

SEX AND GENDER-BASED DISCRIMINATION

Sex and gender-based discrimination is an obstacle facing womxn, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and gender non-conforming persons in leadership. These are unique barriers that affect this diverse group’s ability to shatter the grass ceiling. Some barriers involve career assumptions by management and contradictory expectations about these groups. Discriminatory attitudes are often hidden in inaccurate ‘facts’ about womxn, BIPOC womxn, and LGBTQIA+ people’s capacity for leadership. Often presented

as ‘not aggressive enough’ or ‘too aggressive’, ‘lacking the self-confidence’ required for the job or being ‘too overconfident,’ and not having the right ‘soft skills’ or ‘hard skills’ required to lead. These prejudices and gender stereotypes persist because they allow white cisgendered²⁶ males to protect their privileged status and keep womxn, BIPOC womxn, LGBTQIA+ in their place. Despite overwhelming evidence that these stereotypes are wrong, they persist. Womxn, BIPOC womxn, and LGBTQIA+ people are simply overlooked and are often concentrated in low-status, lateral, and less prestigious positions.

²⁶ Cisgender (sometimes cissexual, often abbreviated to simply cis) is a term for people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth. For example, someone who identifies as a woman and was assigned female at birth is a cisgender woman. The term cisgender is the opposite of the word transgender.

“THERE ARE POWER STRUCTURES IN PLACE THAT INHIBIT WOMXN FROM THRIVING. IN MY PRE-CANNABIS CAREER IN FINTECH SALES, I HAD AN EXTREMELY TOXIC MANAGER WITH CISGENDERED-WHITE-MALE-CENTERED ‘HUMOR’ THAT THE OTHER CISGENDERED WHITE MEN WOULD LAUGH ALONG WITH. I STOOD UP TO HIM A FEW TIMES, WHEN HE WAS ACTIVELY SHAMING ME OR OTHER WOMXN IN THE OFFICE, HE RESPONDED WITH COMMENTS SUCH AS, ‘THAT’S WHY WE SHOULDN’T HIRE WOMXN. THEY’RE SO OVERSENSITIVE.’ OR ‘WHY DON’T YOU JOIN THE HR TEAM?’. ON THE DAYS I CHOSE TO SPEAK UP, SOME MEN IN THE ROOM WOULD APOLOGIZE FOR HAVING LAUGHED ALONG AND OTHERS WOULD REMAIN SILENT. I’D BE LEFT SHAKING AND UNABLE TO FOCUS. WHEN I EXPRESSED INTEREST IN PARTICIPATING IN THE COMPANY’S GLOBAL LEADERSHIP PROGRAM (I SPEAK FOUR LANGUAGES, BUT NEEDED MANAGER SPONSORSHIP), HE RESPONDED WITH “BYE FELICIA, MAYBE NEXT YEAR.” I WAS ENTRY-LEVEL AND HE WAS BRO-BUDDIES WITH THE CEO, SO I KNEW THAT TAKING THE ISSUE UP WITH HR WAS NOT IN MY OWN BEST INTEREST IF I WANTED TO KEEP MY JOB. LUCKILY, I WAS POACHED FROM HIS TEAM TO A FEMALE-LED TEAM THAT WAS DIVERSE ON ALL ACCOUNTS (GENDER, RACE, NATIONALITY AND SEXUAL ORIENTATION). I FELT MUCH SAFER ON THAT TEAM AND I THRIVED, KNOCKING MY SALES TARGETS OUT OF THE BALLPARK.”

~ **Elise Serbaroli,**

co-author of this paper and Director of Global Business Development at Strimo

There is no place for sex and gender-based discrimination in the workplace. In cannabis, we have an opportunity to shape the future. But, we need to start now. Our industry needs to adopt a zero tolerance policy for gender-based and racial discrimination. There is no room for error. There are no more excuses. It has to stop here and now, and our industry has a real opportunity to lead - to be the industry that says, "no more. Not on our watch."

THE FUTURE IS GENDER PARITY

Why should YOU, in positions of leadership in the cannabis industry, actively begin hiring, mentoring, and promoting womxn, BIPOC womxn, and LGBTQIA+ people within your corporate structure? Aside from the fact that it is **the right thing to do**, inclusive and diverse hiring practices increase your bottom

line. There are many hidden talents and important hard and soft skills that are invaluable to any organization that have been learned and honed by those who have not had access to traditional patriarchal power structures. Here we list just a few considerations YOU can use when making hiring decisions for your company.

OVERCOMING BARRIERS

Womxn, BIPOC womxn, and LGBTQIA+ people face many barriers—undetected prejudices from leaders, lenders, and potential clients. Many people still think they can take advantage of these groups, because they are not historically the "type" to own businesses. We know this stereotype is simply not true.

Exhibit A

U.S. Women Business Owners By the Numbers



To be successful in business, these groups have had to work twice as hard as men to be taken seriously, and they do this work all the while overcoming underestimation. This can make marginalized individuals more resilient, and more prepared to face the challenges that come with running a business. The cannabis

industry, prior to legalization, came with a multitude of barriers which were overcome in brilliant and creative ways to create today's global multi-billion dollar industry. Rather than continuing to ignore and find new legal ways to incarcerate creative thinkers, compensating these individuals for their knowledge base

and historical memory is invaluable for the cannabis industry and for market growth.²⁷

CALCULATED RISK TAKERS

Womxn, BIPOC womxn, and LGBTQIA+ people often consult members of their team when making big decisions. This collaborative approach may save their company from unnecessary and miscalculated risk. Womxn are less prone to being overconfident and non-factual in their decision-making and tend to be more realistic about the dangers ahead. This caution should not be interpreted as shying away from taking risks. On the contrary, it is more common for womxn to be more open and honest about the state of the business by discussing valid concerns and tackling big issues. Historically, these groups are not afraid that asking questions will make them "look bad". Rather, they deploy solution-oriented approaches that serve to better the business, not just themselves. We only need to look at the larger cannabis industry today to see the millions, if not billions, of investor dollars that have been squandered through uncalculated risks made by large, mostly white-male-owned cannabis companies. Having womxn, BIPOC, and LGBTQIA+ perspectives and approaches at the table, and better yet, running the table, is fiscal responsibility that results in higher ROIs (see the statistics at the beginning of this paper).

SOFT VALUE SKILLS ARE IMPORTANT

In the C-Suite, both in and outside of the cannabis industry, soft skills are not valued. In fact, in most cases, the term "soft skills" will elicit an eye roll. For the purpose of this paper, we are going to call them "value skills." These are historically skills that are often attributed to womxn and devalued by the patriarchal framework that currently exists in business. Yet, these skills are essential to increase access, parity, equity, and business revenue.

Womxn have spent much of their lives picking up social cues and reading emotional situations. Womxn inherently understand that it is essential to running a business to have greater consideration for the people they interact with—including employees,

customers, suppliers, etc.—making for better leaders and more willing counterparts. They want to take care of the people and the world around them, and they sincerely treat people with respect. Womxn value relationships which can be leveraged to advance the business.

It is those valued relationships that oftentimes make womxn better negotiators. They don't try to win negotiations in a way that implies that someone has to lose, which isn't always fair. Womxn value fairness, because they have had to overcome instances of unfairness to succeed. Womxn tend to go into most negotiations with a win/win attitude, thus creating situations where everyone succeeds.

Even though womxn are hard workers, womxn understand that the business is enhanced by nurturing oneself outside of it; making sure people whom they manage and they themselves get enough time with friends and loved ones which can make everyone feel good about going back into work on Monday. This is great for their own capacity to run the business as well as those who work for and with them.

These value skills contribute to the success of any business, but are particularly important to the cannabis industry, which is in its nascent stage. NOW is the time to value what has been undervalued for decades as the real needs of a business. NOW is the time to create a different kind of industry in cannabis, informed by historic and current issues. Value skills will help the industry do that and should be considered as important as education, recommendations and hard skills.

THREE PRAGMATIC STEPS YOU CAN DO RIGHT NOW

The level of change required is deep and will take time, but here are three steps that you can take right now to champion gender parity in your business. The most important thing to remember when reading these three steps is that they are interconnected.

²⁷ Historical memory refers to the way by which groups of people create and then identify with specific narratives about historical periods or events. <https://bit.ly/historicalmemory>

Establish Anti-Bias (Implicit Bias) / Diversity, Equity And Inclusion Training

If you haven't already done so, the authors of this paper highly recommend getting implicit bias training for your organization. According to Cherly Staats in "State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2013", implicit bias identifies ways in which unconscious patterns people inevitably develop in their brains to organize information actually 'affect individuals' attitudes and actions, thus creating real-world implications, even though individuals may not even be aware that those biases exist within themselves."²⁸ We have all been exposed to years of structural and cultural racialization and privilege. This exposure has ingrained

stereotypes and biases in our individual psyches and our broader culture, which of course includes structures in the cannabis industry. Cultural stereotypes, narratives, and systemic policies are all linked and inform one another. Implicit bias is one part of the system of inequity that justifies inequitable policies, practices and behaviors.

To de-bias your corporate structure is to understand what implicit biases currently exist in your organization and in yourself personally. In Biased: Uncovering the Hidden Prejudice That Shapes What We See, Think, and Do, author Jennifer L. Eberhardt says:

28 Staats, C. (2013) State of the Science: Implicit Bias Review 2013. Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity. http://kirwaninstitute.osu.edu/docs/SOTS-Implicit_Bias.pdf

“IMPLICIT BIAS IS NOT A NEW WAY OF CALLING SOMEONE A RACIST. IN FACT, YOU DON'T HAVE TO BE A RACIST AT ALL TO BE INFLUENCED BY IT. IMPLICIT BIAS IS A KIND OF DISTORTING LENS THAT'S A PRODUCT OF BOTH THE ARCHITECTURE OF OUR BRAIN AND THE DISPARITIES IN OUR SOCIETY.”

To understand implicit bias is to understand how you and your organization may be unconsciously biased against womxn, BIPOC, LGBTQIA+, and gender non-conforming people. If those biases can be changed at the individual level, then by definition, they can be changed at the societal level given sufficient will and investment. De-biasing your organization will contribute to slowing down or stopping a rapid, almost automatic, response in your hiring practices.

BECOME AN ANTI-RACIST ORGANIZATION

While anti-bias and diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) are referenced in this paper, we see these approaches as necessary, but insufficient, to move the needle. While many organizations have promoted diversity and inclusion over the years, the idea of being explicitly anti-racist may be a newer concept to some.

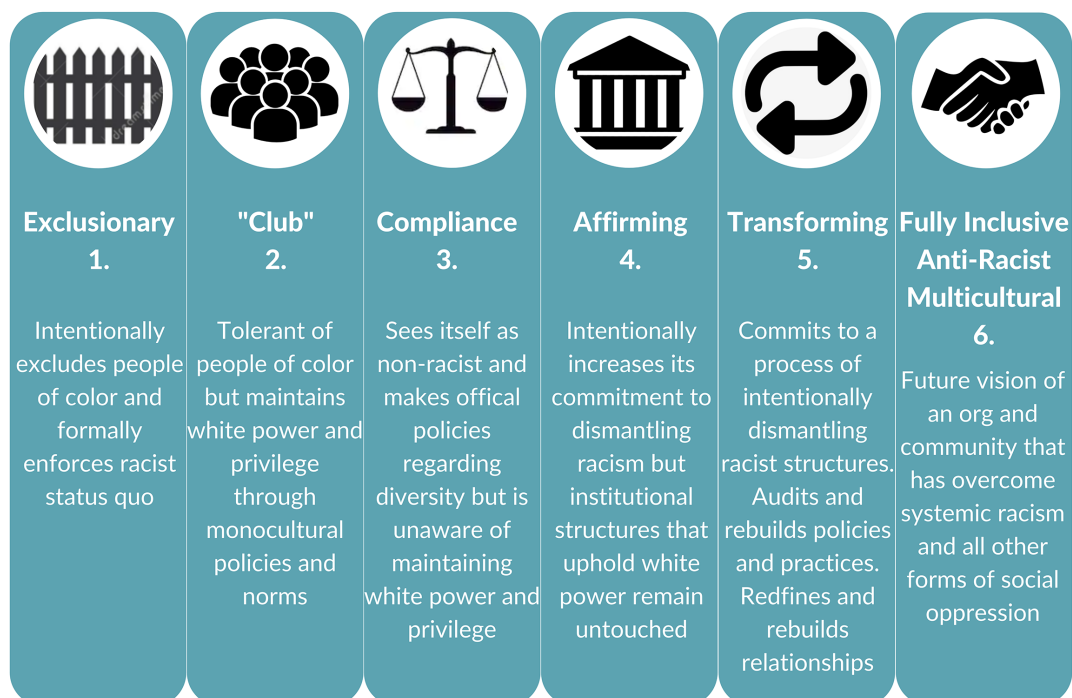
Without a basic understanding of anti-Black racism, which is foundational to understanding oppression, these efforts often fall flat. To truly succeed in achieving gender parity, we must first get to the foundations of white patriarchy, which are seeded in anti-Black racism.

While companies race to DEI to correct what they see as the problem-lack of diversity in their staff and leadership-often, the fundamentals of systemic racism are conceptually out of reach for many. We did not create majority white cannabis companies, white/male majority financial markets, and access to capital exclusions in a vacuum. We will not get out of it quickly or with one-off solutions.

“TO BE ANTI-RACIST IS TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE PERMANENCE OF RACISM THROUGH ORGANIZATIONS, INDUSTRIES AND COMMUNITIES, AND TO RECOGNIZE THAT RACISM IS A SYSTEM OF DISPROPORTIONATE OPPORTUNITY AND PENALTIES BASED ON SKIN COLOR,” SAYS LAURA MORGAN ROBERTS, A UNIVERSITY OF VIRGINIA PROFESSOR, AUTHOR AND SPEAKER.

The chart below was adapted and condensed from a more extensive [chart](#) posted on the [Philanos website](#).

Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Business



WHERE IS YOUR BUSINESS AND HOW DO YOU KNOW?

Adapted from the Continuum on Becoming an Anti-Racist Multicultural Organization by the Association of Educational Service Agencies

An anti-racist organization will acknowledge systemic racism within the workplace, from individual workers to C-Suite leaders, as well as the ways wealth inequality in society may impact their bottom line through their consumer base. Leaders can then take this critical assessment to examine where in the work experience

— from hiring to performance recognition to promotions — they can actively make existing systems of oppression more equitable by opening up paths of opportunity to workers who previously didn't have access to them.

What suggestions do we have for recruiters that have clients seeking diverse C-Suite candidates?

“DO YOUR PERSONAL WORK. THIS ISN'T AN EXERCISE TO FILL SLOTS BY GENDER, SEXUALITY, RACE OR ETHNICITY. YOU NEED TO BE ACTIVELY ANTI-RACIST AND ACTIVELY UNDERSTAND INTERSECTIONAL FEMINISM AND ACTIVELY BE PRO-LGBTQIA+ BEFORE YOU CAN ENSURE THAT YOU ARE SAFELY RECRUITING INDIVIDUALS TO ROLES. PRESS EQUALLY HARD ON THE COMPANIES YOU ARE RECRUITING FOR. WHY DO THEY WANT WOMXN IN C-SUITE ROLES? WHEN DID THEY ARRIVE AT THIS DECISION? WHAT DROVE IT? WHAT ARE THEY GOING TO DO TO ENSURE THAT THOSE GOVERNING (BOARD MEMBERS, INVESTORS) ARE ALIGNED AROUND THIS INITIATIVE AND HOLD WOMXN TO FAIR AND EQUITABLE STANDARDS?”

~ Helkin Berg,
CEO at Strimo

BUILD IT INTO YOUR PIPELINE

According to the latest gender-parity report from McKinsey & Co. and LeanIn.org, just 72 womxn for every 100 men are promoted and hired as managers. Only 58 Black womxn and 68 Latinas for every 100 entry-level men get promoted to the manager level, while 64 Black womxn and 57 Latinas for every 100 men are hired as managers. In fact, womxn of color, womxn with disabilities, lesbian and bisexual womxn report "by and large worse" experiences on the job than womxn on average. Black womxn and womxn with disabilities overall say they have received less manager support and less sponsorship than womxn in other groups.²⁹

Businesses need to set more aggressive goals for boosting womxn's numbers. The same report mentioned above suggests companies mandate a diverse lineup of job candidates at all levels — including the manager level — and make "unconscious-bias" training mandatory for anyone involved in performance reviews to reduce potential bias. The report points out that the building blocks to make this happen are not new — leadership training, sponsorship, high-profile assignments.

One key action that cannabis organizations can take to increase the representation of womxn in their C-Suite is to "build a deep bench" of diverse, female executives, assuring that emphasis both in the hiring process and in the internal promotion pipeline. In the hiring process, assure that there are various womxn being considered for each open position and assure that the womxn in your organization are being promoted at every level, so that when it comes time to fill executive management roles, you have womxn to fill those positions. As mentioned in the above-referenced studies, womxn are underrepresented at every level of the corporate ladder. The "grass ceiling" that prevents womxn from reaching senior leadership positions is not the only issue. Studies show that one of the biggest obstacles womxn face is actually much earlier in the pipeline, at the first step up to manager. Fixing this "broken rung" is key to achieving parity.³⁰

Wanda James, the first Black owner of a cannabis dispensary in weed-friendly Colorado, is intentionally diversifying the cannabis industry with her own businesses. Of the 34 people she employs between Simply Pure and CGI, 45% are womxn, and one-third are people of color. That number is likely to increase soon, says James, as Simply Pure expands into the wholesale business.³¹

29 Huang, J. et al. (2020, September 30). Women in the Workplace 2020. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace#>

30 Huang, J. et al. (2020, September 30). Women in the Workplace 2020. McKinsey & Company. <https://www.mckinsey.com/featured-insights/diversity-and-inclusion/women-in-the-workplace#>

31 Dishman, L. (2017, October 18). This Weed Warrior Is Breaking Barriers In The Marijuana Movement, Fastcompany.com. <https://www.fastcompany.com/40479691/weed-warrior-wanda-james-is-breaking-barriers-in-the-marijuana-movement>



“WE HAVE BUILT A COMPANY ON A SOCIAL EQUITY FRAMEWORK. IT IS THIS FRAMEWORK WE USE TO CENTER MARGINALIZED COMMUNITIES IN BOTH OUR HIRING PRACTICES, PARTNERSHIPS AND WHOLESAL AGREEMENTS. IN OUR ORGANIZATION, 99% OF OUR CO-FOUNDERS AND EMPLOYEES ARE BIPOC, 50% ARE BLACK, 36% ARE LATINX, 10% ARE FILIPINO, 79% ARE WOMXN, 21% ARE MEN AND 79% ARE PART OF THE LGBTQIA+ COMMUNITY. THAT WAS INTENTIONAL AND CONTINUES TO BE CORE TO OUR MISSION.”

~ **Charleen Caabay,**
co-founder of The People's Dispensary and The People's Holdings

Talented womxn and those around them must be focused on creating a clear path for advancement. [Jane Stevenson](#), global leader of Korn Ferry's CEO Succession Services, shares, “We interviewed dozens of current and former female CEOs, and the majority of them said they hadn't even considered vying for the top spot until they had a sponsor (mentor) tell them they were well-suited for the role.”³²

It is up to boards, leadership, and shareholders to take responsibility for assuring that they are tracking the history of the company's leadership; who is getting hired and promoted, and who isn't. Everyone can contribute by asking about plans

to promote Black or Brown womxn into leadership and about internal programs specifically designed to close the gap when it comes to womxn of color in leadership positions.³³ There are many resources and case studies that can help HR teams, for example, books with case studies of how organizations like Xerox made adjustments to improve their hiring processes.³⁴ And don't believe the arguments that there aren't enough diverse candidates to fill those jobs.³⁵ There are organizations such as [Hack.Diversity](#), that specifically target diverse talent pools. As the old saying goes, “Seek, and ye shall find.”

32 Stych, A. (2019, April 24). Percentage of women in C-suite roles inching up. Bizwomen.com. <https://www.bizjournals.com/bizwomen/news/latest-news/2019/04/percentage-of-women-in-c-suite-roles-inching-up.html?page=all>

33 Quiamno, S.K. (2020, June 19). This is how women of color can navigate relationships with white 'allies'. Fastcompany.com. <https://www.fastcompany.com/90517404/this-is-how-women-of-color-can-navigate-relationships-with-white-allies>

34 Fulp, C. (2018). Chapter 2: Recruiting Like Roonie, Success Through Diversity, Why the Most Inclusive Companies Will Win. Beacon Press.

35 Vara, V. (2016, January 16). Why Doesn't Silicon Valley Hire Black Coders?. Bloomberg. <https://www.bloomberg.com/features/2016-howard-university-coders/>

We asked some female CEOs in cannabis what advice they have for womxn who want to reach the highest levels of the corporate level. There was agreement that first, you have to know and accept that the path will be harder for you as a womxn than a cisgendered man. Here are three pieces of advice that these womxn had to offer:

1. **"Know that you will run into obstacles that are both overt and covert, and you will have very few peers. Beware of phrases such as, "If you try harder, you'll succeed." Womxn aren't not in leadership roles for lack of trying. We try every day and there is a system in place that subverts our efforts. You have to be willing to work both within and around this system to get to the C-Suite, and it will likely come at a high price. Be kind to yourself and forgiving and have clarity around what your true goal is." ~Helkin Berg, CEO Strimo**
2. **"Focus on your strengths (not your weaknesses) and don't downplay your abilities. Apply for jobs, even if you only meet 60% of the qualifications." ~Gail Rand, CEO grand consulting, LLC**
3. **"Network, network, network!! There are opportunities for womxn, but it takes womxn connecting to other womxn to help find the opportunities. Also, be sure to pay it forward with people you meet. A small introduction may change someone's life. Finally, be respectful and professional to other womxn." ~Erin Gore, CEO Garden Society**

CONCLUSION: THE RACE PROBLEM IN THE CANNABIS INDUSTRY

Sonya Renee Taylor, author of *The Body is not an Apology*³⁶, tells us that we are all on a ladder of bodily hierarchy, (white over

black, male over female, binary or cis³⁷ vs. gender nonconforming or LGBTQIA+). The ladder is the system. When we divest from this system and stop trying to figure out how to attain the top rung, the system falls.

Systemic racism, the understanding that there are structures that have maintained ideologies of anti-black racism (redlining, segregation, Jim Crow, etc.,) throughout U.S. history, is a fairly new concept for many people, because many of us were taught to believe that racism is interpersonal, so that ending it just required us being nicer to one another. **Systemic, anti-Black racism** in America kills Black people and relegates Black womxn (especially trans womxn of color) to the least safe, least regarded, most at-risk demographic in the country. The fact that no one was held responsible for the reckless murder of Breonna Taylor³⁸ is just one example of the **system** we need to change. Many people are now becoming increasingly aware of **systemic discrimination** and how it impacts all of us differently.

Gender parity will be achieved when discrimination and oppression are systematically addressed: in policies, the workplace, and in leadership. When we, as an industry, center the populations with the least access (the least among us to create opportunity) and are explicit in our intent, take responsibility for our impact, dust ourselves off when we make mistakes and get back in there, we will make progress.

The National Cannabis Industry Association (NCIA) offers a window into what the legalized cannabis market has looked like for the last ten years of its existence, mirroring the mostly white, cisgendered, and male cannabis industry. It has been in the last year and half that the NCIA has made a conscious and concerted effort to seek more diversity and inclusion. In that effort, they sponsored the writing of this paper series, focused on gender parity in the cannabis industry. The process of writing the paper series, which was very well managed in terms of operations and

36 Taylor, S.R. (2018). *The Body Is Not an Apology: The Power of Radical Self-Love*. Berret-Koehler Publishers, Inc. a BK Life Book.

37 Cisgender (sometimes cissexual, often abbreviated to simply cis) is a term for people whose gender identity matches their sex assigned at birth. For example, someone who identifies as a woman and was assigned female at birth is a cisgender woman. The term cisgender is the opposite of the word transgender.

38 Oppel, R.A., et al. (2020, October 30). What to Know About Breonna Taylor's Death. New York Times. <https://www.nytimes.com/article/breonna-taylor-police.html>

efficiency, was not equipped with guardrails (anti-bias and anti-racist training) to ensure that the positionality and power of the participants would be taken into account and corrected. Without these guardrails, typical systemic and structural inequities surfaced. Discussing these issues here offers the industry an opportunity to learn and grow.

The volunteer group of womxn that were invited to join the project represented some aspects of diversity, but as brilliant and dedicated as the participants were, the majority were not well-versed in **recognizing and understanding systemic discrimination and oppression**. In order to truly make a diverse and inclusive working group, it's important to control for power, class, privilege, racial justice, and equitable inclusion of BIPOC womxn, LGBTQIA+, and gender non-conforming identities. There was no malice in this process, but the result was harmful nonetheless, because of the **interconnected nature of systemic discrimination and oppression**.

Kelly Perez, one of the authors on this paper, shared that she took for granted that the participants, keenly aware and dedicated to the cause of achieving gender parity, would

be attuned to the systemic and intersectional nature of discrimination and oppression. For example, those closest to the top of the ladder of success appeared to be the more valuable voices in practice. Another example was an idea being brought up that the audience for this paper would be white men, since they hold the power, and 'therefore' the levers of change. When discussing whether or not to use the spelling of 'womxn' instead of 'women', reasoning around not using it was because 'people might not take the work seriously with the use of the alternative spelling' (that spelling is intentionally inclusive of nonbinary and transgender people.) These are unacceptable positions for BIPOC womxn, LGBTQIA+, and other marginalized womxn. This was white supremacist patriarchal culture characteristics in practice. The intent on behalf of participants to make a diverse and inclusive working group was there; however systems of discrimination and oppression are exactly that, **systems**. Systems cannot be corrected without structured, systemic strategies that mitigate inequities. After months of effort, Perez decided to remove herself from every paper, except this one. There was not time, space or will to provide an overview of systemic oppression that could be laid out and acted upon in a months-long process.

“REMOVING MYSELF FROM THE PROCESS WAS NOT A PERSONAL FAILURE, BUT RATHER A STRUCTURAL FAILURE TO INCLUDE AND CENTER PEOPLE LIKE ME, BLACK WOMXN, BIPOC WOMXN AND COMMUNITY MEMBERS. WE AS AN INDUSTRY MUST CREATE AN ECONOMIC DRIVER FOR SOCIAL CHANGE. I AM IN CANNABIS TO UNDO THE WEAPONIZATION OF CANNABIS WHICH HAS BEEN USED TO DE-POWER BLACK AND BROWN COMMUNITIES. I AM BLACK, AND MY SUCCESS IS ABOUT “OUR” SUCCESS, NOT MINE INDIVIDUALLY. I SEEK TO BUILD A COMMUNITY OF CANNABIS FOLKS WHO SEE THAT WE CAN ACTUALLY CREATE A SECTOR THAT WE ALL WANT TO AND CAN BE A PART OF, ONE THAT WE ARE PROUD OF AND NOT THE TYPICAL EXTRACTIVE CAPITALISM THAT THRIVES ON DISCRIMINATION AND OPPRESSION.”

~ Kelly Perez,

co-author of this paper and CEO & Founder of KindColorado and Cannabis Doing Good

This is difficult work; no one needs to be shamed, but rather informed, courageous, and willing to grow. The most common issues that people say that they care about the most are, in fact, intersectional issues. We just haven't talked about them that way. "Intersectionality gives people who do not personally experience the unique combination of racism and sexism faced by womxn of color a framework for understanding how women of color experience distinct, multiple, and simultaneous forms of oppression. There have always been people in this country who want to be part of a multiracial coalition. Intersectionality allows the framework for that,"³⁹ says Aimee Allison, founder and president of She the People. It is not expected that everyone will become scholars on dismantling systemic discrimination and oppression, but as the Civil Rights Activist Fannie Lou Hammer said, "None of us is free until all of us are." We move forward

together. If our focus is gender parity, the interconnected nature of oppression, must be part of any strategy focused on correcting inequity.

Because of the interconnected nature of systemic discrimination and oppression, the actions of well-intentioned people who seek to be inclusive can have a very marginalizing impact. Conflicts between white and BIPOC womxn around solving for gender parity are not new, but rather well represented in any and every effort centered on increasing civil rights. White womxn in cannabis can take a step toward equity by recognizing that BIPOC womxn stand with them in seeking to achieve gender parity. We make progress towards gender parity when those who are not marginalized are able to courageously challenge systemic discrimination and oppression.

39 McShane, J. (2020, September 22). Why Kamala Harris' Nomination is Pushing this Academic Idea Further into the Mainstream. NBC News. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/why-kamala-harris-nomination-pushing-academic-idea-further-mainstream-n1240717>

“THIS IS NOT AN INTELLECTUAL EXERCISE OR FLUFF CONTENT CREATION. THESE CONCEPTS BEING OUT OF REACH IS DAMNING AND DANGEROUS FOR PEOPLE LIKE ME,” SAYS PEREZ. “I AM A BLACK WOMAN WITH CONSIDERABLE PRIVILEGE, AND HAVE MADE AND WILL MAKE MISTAKES HERE, TOO. I’VE BLOWN A PRONOUN OR MADE AN UNDUE CLASS ASSUMPTION. I’VE BEEN HETEROSEXIST INADVERTENTLY.”

The aim of being perfect is an aspect of the white supremacist patriarchal culture in which we all swim. We all must build courage and be shame resilient enough to recognize that discomfort can be survived; mistakes can be survived. We must own our errors, take accountability, and do better. It is not easy. It's simple, but not easy.

This paper has given boards of directors, people in positions to hire for or promote C-level executives, and placement firms clear pathways to center womxn, BIPOC womxn, and LGBTQIA+ womxn when hiring for these positions. As an industry, there is much work ahead. Silently looking on when you know something is wrong reinforces systemic and structural inequities. Being a

kind person is great, but if you want to be part of the solution, you need to speak up. Anti-bias and anti-racist training provides you with the core concepts and vocabulary that you and your organization need in order to move the needle on gender parity. The burden of finding solutions must be shared. Those who are experiencing the trauma and the marginalization should not be burdened with finding those solutions.

Join us in contributing to a concerted and sustained effort to achieve gender parity in cannabis, C-Suites, and beyond. This paper has provided current trends, highlighted systemic roadblocks and laid out pragmatic steps for remedying the overall lack of womxn in C-Suite positions in cannabis, and more specifically, the lack of Black womxn, womxn of color, non-gender conforming, and LGBTQIA+ people in those positions. We are in full support of a well-resourced effort to provide the most accurate data possible with a special focus on the intersectionality issues for womxn across the spectrum of womxn.

We hope that YOU will draw on the research and toolkit in this paper and the other papers in this series: Building New Foundations in the Cannabis Industry: Creating Gender Parity through Ownership, Leadership, Boards, Pay Equality, Branding, and Capital. The cannabis industry as a whole is filled with entrepreneurial thinkers. We can buck expectations, change systems, and engage in this cultural inflection point of racial reckoning to make history. We can teach other industries what equity, parity, and ultimately equality looks like. We are in the business of culture change; let's aim high.

KEY ACTIONABLE TAKEAWAYS

- Cannabis-specific research companies like BDSA and New Frontier Data should do more research and collect more statistics on the exact number of womxn, BIPOC womxn and LGBTQIA+ women in the C-level.
- White womxn in power should center mentorship as an effective equity strategy, offering an advisory role to their marginalized counterparts, recognizing the inherent power of using privilege to dismantle systems of oppression that show up in corporate culture.
- Companies should implement structures that allow for reporting inappropriate behavior safely, such as Garden Society's buddy system.
- Businesses need to set more aggressive goals for boosting womxn's numbers, such as mandating a diverse lineup of job candidates at all levels — including the manager level — and make "unconscious bias" training mandatory for anyone involved in performance reviews to reduce potential bias.
- Leaders must build a deep bench of diverse, female executives, assuring that emphasis both in the hiring process and in the internal promotion pipeline.
- Boards and leaders should track the history of your company's leadership; who is getting hired and promoted, and who isn't, to give you a better understanding on how your company is doing to increase gender parity.
- For more information on how to execute these takeaways visit our [C-Suite Companion Toolkit](#)



GENDER PARITY IN THE C-SUITE TOOLKIT

Companion



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C-Suite Companion Toolkit

Change must be intentional and ongoing; it is the responsibility of company leadership to ensure that all employees feel safe in their work environments. More than just safe, inclusive, diverse work environments offer rewards that include increased profitability, a culture of belonging, and growth. We have gathered a toolkit of resources to help you to begin to build your new foundation.

ANTI-BIAS AND DEI COMPANIES, CONTACT INFORMATION AND ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Below you can find a list of organizations with resources to help you and your organization identify and overcome biases. These organizations and resources will help you create an effective, diverse, equitable and inclusive environment, to assure that all of your employees can focus on high performance.

Anti-bias Cannabis Specific Trainers:

The Cannabis Impact Fund in collaboration with **Regan Byrd Consulting** provides training/workshops to establish a common understanding of systemic racism in the U.S., and the link to ongoing anti-black policies, and practices, and cannabis regulation in general. By providing an upstream ground setting for cannabis businesses, (brand, agency, retail, etc.), anti-racism work downstream, is informed and grounded, in the ways systemic racism shows up in the cannabis sector. Effective dismantling of systemic racism is an ongoing effort, but the levers of change in cannabis are prevalent and actionable now.

Anti-bias Trainers (All industries, including cannabis):

The Equity Project is a culmination of 30+ years of experience in government, for-profit and non-profit sectors. We sought to create a company where the sole objective is to level set definitions of these terms to deliver equitable services to all people, in all systems. Our vision comes alive through sharing effective solutions and creating data analytics around what people need to do to create equity-based systems.

The Gemini Group is a consulting firm that helps city and state government, state legislators, educational institutions, and for-profit and not-for-profit organizations work to address and eliminate institutional and systemic inequities, most specifically starting with race, through training and technical support.

CIRCLE believes every organization or agency can intentionally reflect the community in which they support and serve. CIRCLE is committed to working with educational and non-profit communities to cultivate inclusive practices that support all members of diverse communities in living and working more fully as themselves. CIRCLE supports the work of a small group of consultants and trainers who offer half-day, full-day, and ongoing transformative professional development in areas of diversity, inclusiveness, and cultural responsiveness. Consulting and training offered on topics including but not limited to: Understanding Race and Dismantling Racism, Gender Equity, LGBTQ+ Inclusion, Culturally Responsive Teaching and Understanding and Dismantling Privilege.

ANTI-RACISM RESOURCES (specifically intended for White audiences):

Anti-Racism Resources for White People

This document is intended to serve as a resource to white people and parents to deepen our anti-racism work. If you haven't engaged in anti-racism work in the past, start now. Feel free to circulate this document on social media and with your friends, family, and colleagues.

Anti-Racism Daily

Features diverse voices that report on critical current events related to racism and systemic oppression.

Showing Up for Racial Justice

SURJ's role as part of a multi-racial movement is to undermine white support for white supremacy and to help build a racially just society. That work cannot be done in isolation from or disconnected from the powerful leadership of communities of color. It is one part of a multi-racial, cross-class movement centering people of color leadership. Therefore, SURJ believes in resourcing organizing led by people of color, and maintaining strong accountability relationships with organizers and communities of color as a central part of their theory of change.

PIPELINE BUILDING

Offer womxn in your organization professional development opportunities. Management literature is overflowing with advice on becoming the boss, yet as womxn ascend closer to the top slots, the paths to the C-suite narrows. **The MIT course about 'Strategies for Career Development: Charting Your Path to the C-Suite'** is just one example of a program that helps individuals better understand and communicate the value they bring to the C-suite.

Learning from others is invaluable. Here are links to some of the womxn-centric networks in the cannabis industry:

Women Grow was created to connect, educate, inspire and empower the next generation of cannabis industry leaders by creating programs, community and events for aspiring and current business executives. The organization serves as a catalyst for womxn to influence and succeed in the cannabis industry.

Supernova Women, a space for womxn of color in the cannabis industry, is a womxn of color led non-profit organization with a mission to empower people of color to become self-sufficient shareholders in the cannabis industry.

The Minority Cannabis Business Association is a business league created specifically to progress the cannabis industry by increasing diversity of owners, employees and consumers. Our mission is to create equal access for cannabis businesses and promote economic empowerment for communities of color by creating policy considerations, social programming, and outreach initiatives to achieve equity for the communities most affected by the war on drugs.

WEiC: Women Empowered in Cannabis is a global community of 10K+ womxn working in the cannabis industry. There are industry veterans and newbies, professionals and farmers, lawyers and product makers. The group is diverse in backgrounds, origins and location. WEiC was created as a place for womxn in the industry to gather, share resources and provide support. Their Facebook sub-groups, such as Womxn in Supply Chain and Womxn of Color in Cannabis, are a great space for womxn to connect virtually.

THC Staffing Group is the only cannabis recruitment firm whose mission is to build a diverse and inclusive cannabis industry. For more than 15 years, they have mentored and helped match numerous candidates to companies seeking quality talent. THC Staffing Group staffs the needs of cannabis companies including dispensaries, cultivation centers, ancillary businesses and nonprofit organizations focused on drug policy. Their deep pool of qualified and diverse candidates helps them maintain a professional commitment to the growth of a diverse and inclusive American cannabis industry.

Out In Tech has 40K+ members and is a space for the LGBTQIA+ community to advance their careers, grow their networks, and leverage tech for social change. They host various events, some focused on the cannabis industry.

Arcview Women's Inclusion Network, a network dedicated to supporting women in the cannabis industry, is redefining the word "investor" to include all those that are invested in the success of women in the cannabis industry, empowering one other with facts, conversations, mentorship, and deal flow.

GENDER PARITY IN THE C-SUITE TOOLKIT

*Writing your Gender
Parity Statement*



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Writing your Gender Parity Statement

Writing a gender parity statement for your company can be incredibly useful to help guide the company and its employees in the right direction. The writing itself could also be useful as it will challenge you to think through what your company's focus will be related to gender parity. Below are some considerations, guidelines, and examples that will be useful as you endeavor to write your own gender parity statement.

CONSIDERATIONS

Before making a corporate statement about gender parity, consider the following:

1. Are you **listening and engaging with your workforce** on issues relating to gender parity and social justice? Often, individuals and businesses are uncomfortable to speak up due to the sensitivity of these issues. Creating an environment in which employees feel empowered to have open dialogue and raise any issues they encounter is a step in the right direction, and a prerequisite to any external-facing statement.
2. Consider establishing a **diversity and inclusion committee or diversity champion** to drive change. It is imperative that a company's values and business practices reflect the public statement that is made.
3. Many employers have some kind of equal opportunities policy in place, but they may not have reviewed the effectiveness of their procedures in responding to and dealing with allegations of gender inequality in the workplace. **Review your policies and consult with your employees on ways processes may be improved.**

4. **Review your recruitment practices and your diversity and inclusion statistics.** Look for ways to make improvements.
5. **Explore ways in which your company could support women-** owned / operated enterprises, ancillary businesses, or organizations aimed at promoting gender parity.

GUIDELINES

When crafting your company statement, we recommend the following guidelines:

- Be clear - say what you mean and mean what you say.
- Keep it simple - remember that sometimes less is more.
- Make it meaningful - put your money / time where your mouth is.
- Provide resources.



Examples of Gender Parity Statements:

VODAFONE:

“WE SEEK TO BE A COMPANY WHOSE GLOBAL WORKFORCE REFLECTS THE CUSTOMERS WE SERVE AND THE BROADER SOCIETIES WITHIN WHICH WE OPERATE. WE EMPLOY OVER 36,500 WOMEN DIRECTLY AND PROVIDE EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES FOR HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS MORE ACROSS OUR GLOBAL SUPPLIER BASE. WE BELIEVE THAT ACHIEVING GREATER GENDER PARITY WILL STRENGTHEN OUR COMPANY SIGNIFICANTLY THROUGH UNDERSTANDING THE NEEDS OF THE WOMEN, MEN, FAMILIES AND BUSINESSES WHO RELY ON OUR NETWORKS AND SERVICES.”

BNY MELLON:

“OUR COMMITMENT TO GENDER EQUALITY IS EVIDENCED AT EVERY LEVEL OF BNY MELLON, FROM OUR BOARD THROUGH OUR SENIOR LEADERSHIP TO OUR NEW HIRES. IN 2016, WE EXPANDED OUR BOARD TO INCLUDE THREE ADDITIONAL FEMALE DIRECTORS. WOMEN REPRESENT 42% OF OUR TOTAL GLOBAL WORKFORCE AND 36% OF VP-LEVEL EMPLOYEES, AND WE ARE COMMITTED TO INCREASING REPRESENTATION OF WOMEN THROUGHOUT THE ORGANIZATION.”

GENERAL MOTORS:

“AT GENERAL MOTORS, DIVERSITY IS CRUCIAL TO OUR SUCCESS. WE BELIEVE THAT DIVERSITY IN ALL ITS DIMENSIONS – INCLUDING OF THOUGHT AND EXPERIENCE – CREATES A STRONGER WORKFORCE AND PROMOTES FRESH, INNOVATIVE THINKING. OUR ORGANIZATIONAL FRAMEWORK AND EMPLOYEE RESOURCES SUSTAIN LONG-TERM COMMITMENT FROM OUR EMPLOYEES, AND ULTIMATELY LONG-TERM VALUE FOR OUR BUSINESS. GENERAL MOTORS HAS ESTABLISHED POLICIES, DEVELOPED PROGRAMS AND SET STATISTICAL BENCHMARKS TO REACH GREATER GENDER EQUALITY AND DIVERSE REPRESENTATION.”

