



GIRLS INC. PROJECT ACCELERATE:  
**REIMAGINING WORKPLACE EQUALITY**

**A Prospectus Presented to Equality Can't Wait**

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY</b> .....	1
<b>THE PROBLEM</b> .....	3
- Workplace Inequality.....	3
- Gendered Segregation .....	3
- An Emerging Crisis .....	4
<b>OUR SOLUTION</b> .....	5
- A Dual Strategy.....	6
- Theory of Change .....	7
<b>WHY US?</b> .....	10
<b>IMPLEMENTATION PLAN</b> .....	12
- Changing Workplace Cultures.....	13
- Supporting Critical Transitions.....	14
<b>DATA, LEARNING, AND EVALUATION</b> .....	17
<b>RISK</b> .....	19
<b>DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY</b> .....	20
<b>COMMUNITY/STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT</b> .....	22
<b>RESOURCES AND BUDGET NARRATIVE</b> .....	25
<b>CONCLUSION</b> .....	27
<b>ENDNOTES</b> .....	28



*We cannot simply outperform inequality.*

**Megan Rapinoe**

Captain of OL Reign, National Women's Soccer League and the U.S. Women's soccer team

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2021, women are almost half of the workforce in the United States, but they still only earn an average of 82% of what men earn, and the wage gap widens for women of color. A visionary solution is needed to address this unacceptable reality. Girls Inc. Project Accelerate is a groundbreaking venture that partners and invests with Equality Can't Wait to ensure that workplace equality is achieved not in 208 years, but now.<sup>1</sup>

**Girls Inc. Project Accelerate will speed the entry of young women into positions of leadership with a dual strategy: by driving cultural change towards equity in the workplace, and by ensuring young women's educational attainment and skill development to facilitate compelling career trajectories.**

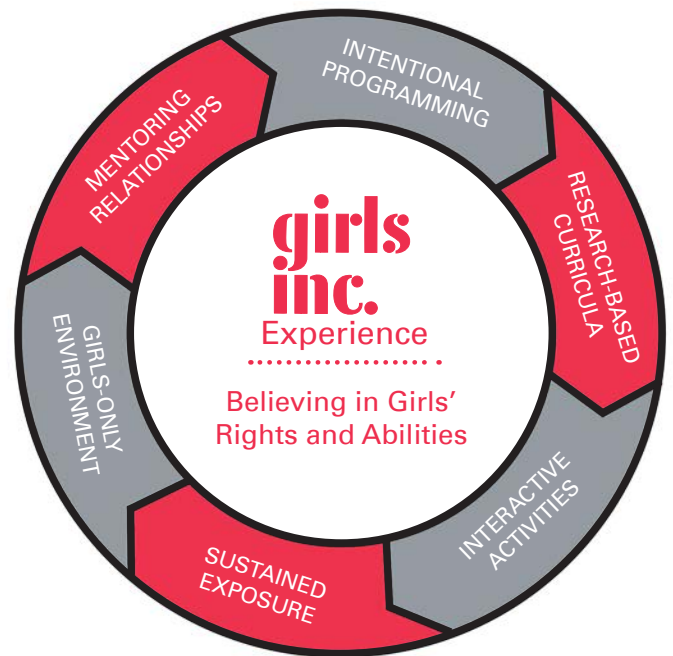
With these two interventions, Project Accelerate addresses inequality in the workplace, particularly the absence of women of color in positions of influence and leadership in the corporate and social impact sectors where pay inequity and gender disparities, including occupational segregation, are far too prevalent.<sup>2</sup> Equality Can't Wait and Girls Inc. together catalyze women's advancement to positions of power and influence, from which they have the means and the opportunity to elevate their status—and their families, neighborhoods, organizations, and communities.

Project Accelerate partners with leaders in the corporate and social impact space to reimagine hiring, development, promotion, and retention practices in order to dramatically increase the leadership trajectory of women. The confluence of conscious, intersectional professional development and equitable employment opportunities alters the status quo; it propels workplace advancement for women who in turn reach back and lift others to join them in newly defining equality. Organizations meeting defined standards of equitable practices and policies will be certified through Project Accelerate, and this achievement will serve as a beacon to thousands of young women leaders who are prepared to excel, exert influence, and exercise their power.



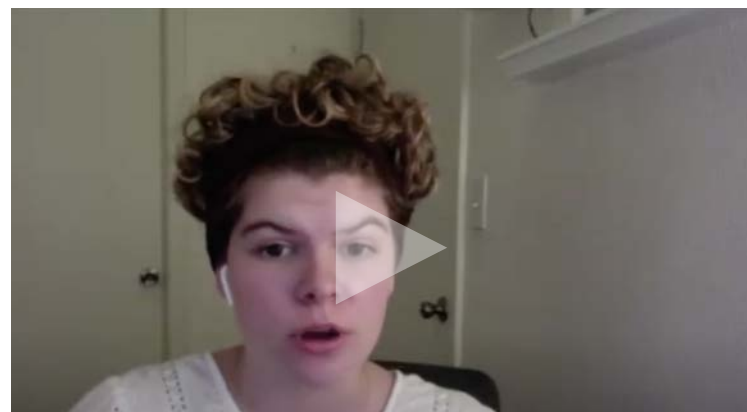
Girls Inc. currently serves young women, most of color and with historically-marginalized, intersecting identities,\* through high school graduation. As early as age five, girls benefit from the Girls Inc. Experience, a **potent, evidence-based, and intersectional** approach to building the transformational social emotional learning (SEL) and leadership skills necessary for success. The Girls Inc. Experience offers a proven combination:

- **people**  
(mentors, trained staff, and possibility models),<sup>3</sup>
- **programming**  
(evidence-based, skill-building, and developmentally and culturally appropriate), and
- **places**  
(girl-only, convenient, and safe spaces).



The Girls Inc. Experience works.<sup>4</sup> An external validation study has proven its efficacy. Young women’s voices are inherent to this success; Girls Inc.’s greatest strength is a reciprocal bond and connection with girls and young women. Girls Inc., an expert in this field, is hearing **these young women say they need “more Girls Inc.” after high school** as they navigate some of life’s most challenging transitions.

Project Accelerate is a targeted extension of the Girls Inc. Experience, designed to support young women through their next critical transitions—from high school through college and from college to career. Building on evidence-based models at Girls Inc. affiliates, Project Accelerate will scale throughout the Girls Inc. network of nearly 80 local organizations. The project will prepare thousands of young women leaders not merely to succeed in workplace environments, but also to affect cultural change from within.



**Hear from Katie, Girls Inc. of Indianapolis alumna, about the importance of continuing support—transcribed in Appendix B.**

*\*Historically-marginalized, intersecting identities: **Intersectionality**<sup>5</sup> is a feminist framework for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages. It takes into account people’s overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices they face (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, disability, religious minority, socioeconomic status, ESL). Consider the ways that the intersection of ethnic and gender identities affect indigenous women<sup>6</sup> who often face multiple discriminations in the workplace, or how a Black woman with a disability does not experience her engineering workplace only as a woman, Black person, or person with a disability but instead through her own unique perspective as someone who has all of these identities.*

# THE PROBLEM

## WORKPLACE INEQUALITY

**Equality in the workplace is, almost without exception, non-existent.**

In 2021, [IBM](#)<sup>7</sup> wondered if two years, and a global pandemic, would change the results of their 2019 women in leadership study, which examined whether the attention and resources devoted to women's professional advancement had made a demonstrable difference in closing the gender gap:

*Our findings suggest that they have, but not for the better. Despite increased awareness of gender imbalances, the number of women serving in senior leadership positions has barely budged over the last two years. Only one in four organizations are making the advancement of women a top ten priority. And perhaps most concerning, there are now fewer women in the pipeline to fill executive roles than there were in 2019.*

Beyond the broken pipeline, there is a still-pervasive pay gap<sup>8</sup>, particularly at executive levels. A recent Morningstar analysis revealed that senior executive women earned 84.6 cents for every dollar earned by male executives in 2019. Women also remain outnumbered in the C-suite by seven to one. Women of color, including Black, Asian, and Latina women, account for just three percent, while white men make up 66 percent.<sup>9,10,11</sup>

At the core of workplace gender inequality, pay inequity, and the leadership gap, there is a fundamental truth: unless systems and practices that historically limit and disadvantage women are redesigned to create new pathways and supports, there can be no meaningful change.

## GENDERED SEGREGATION

Research shows that women face two types of occupational segregation in the workplace—horizontal and vertical—that contribute to the gender inequality reinforced by the wage gap.<sup>12,13,14</sup> Horizontal segregation occurs when the workforce of a particular sector is predominantly one gender; in practice this means that women are overrepresented in fields with lower rates of compensation. Vertical segregation occurs when for one gender—most often women—opportunities for career progression within a particular organization are limited, again increasing pay discrepancies.

Young women must navigate challenging routes to enter well-compensated careers in fields traditionally dominated by men, such as STEM, fueling their persistent disinclination toward these fields.<sup>15</sup> At the same time, female-dominated fields with higher pay levels, such as design, are scarce and often crowded. The path to dismantling horizontal segregation involves educational attainment, exposure to career options, practical experience (through paid internships), and assistance navigating rapidly shifting job search norms and conditions. However, data show that the number of college graduates from low-income communities has barely increased over the past forty years. Only one in five graduates from high-poverty high schools finishes college within six years of graduating from high school, and the largest percentage of dropouts occurs in the first year of postsecondary education.<sup>16</sup>

Because it is most often a combination of racism and sexism that holds women back from career advancement within their field, strategies to eliminate vertical segregation and build real equity in workplace environments must be grounded in intersectionality, and corporate and social impact organizations need internal and external support to transform their work cultures. Even as reports show that corporations are frustrated by what they see as an exodus of female employees, organizations are not addressing the ways in which inequities within their systems and structures—their very cultures—create barriers to advancement.<sup>17</sup> A recent study noted in *Forbes* confirmed that 74% of female employees believe their workplace culture makes it more challenging for women to advance their careers than men.<sup>18</sup>

*The problem is this -  
women are not making it  
to the top of any profession,  
anywhere in the world.*

**Sheryl Sandberg**

Chief Operating Officer of Facebook  
and the founder of Lean In

Perhaps the most egregious limitations are the biases that restrict women's access to the workplace altogether.

Consider that a 2016 résumé study found that **LGBTQ+ women were interviewed 29% less than identical résumés without an LGBTQ+ indicator.**

LGBTQ+ women may rise in a company once hired but the reality is that the initial door is closed far more often because of conscious or unconscious bias against LGBTQ+ women.

**Only 35% of working-age women with disabilities are employed in the U.S. compared to 83% of those without disabilities, leaving 23% of women with disabilities to live in poverty.**

Research indicates that both sexism and racism, often in combination, adversely affect women of color in a variety of occupations through the ongoing persistence of sexual harassment, subtle but pervasive doubts about competence, intelligence, and skill unrelated to actual performance, and stifled leadership opportunities.<sup>19</sup> Young women can counter these forces if they build transformational leadership skills, more so if an organization provides opportunities for them to apply those skills. In supportive conditions, a woman’s intersecting identities provide tools and perspectives that enhance her ability to transform organizations and drive performance.

## AN EMERGING CRISIS

COVID-19 has exacerbated existing inequities for women, like unemployment and wage disparities, that are already at crisis level for the corporate and social impact sectors. The unequal and traumatic impact of the pandemic on women is widely acknowledged.<sup>20</sup> Companies and organizations now risk not only losing women currently in leadership roles, but also future women leaders—unwinding years of painstaking progress toward gender diversity. The December 2020 jobs report shows that while men gained 16,000 jobs, women lost 156,000, with Black and Latina women experiencing the majority of the losses.<sup>21,22</sup> According to U.S. Census Bureau surveys in April, more women than men report that they canceled plans to take postsecondary classes. In addition, 27% of women report increases in challenges related to mental illness, compared to 10% of men.<sup>23</sup> Younger women’s stress levels have soared along with barriers to academic success and career preparation, adding a new level of urgency to providing targeted support to young women navigating the balance of work, education, and family life.

Early data suggest that along with more senior women, younger women also left the workforce; many having to shoulder the responsibility of caring for younger family members so their parents could work. **Gaps will become chasms if younger women slow or even reverse their entry into the workforce.** Even in the post pandemic return to work, “young Americans—particularly women 16 to 24—are living an altogether different reality, with higher rates of unemployment than older adults and many thousands, possibly even millions, postponing their education, which can delay their entry into the workforce.”<sup>24</sup> This is particularly concerning for fields like STEM in which decades of effort have been invested in disrupting the predominance of white, male leadership. “The confluence of all of these factors creates this perfect storm...” said Michelle Cardel, a STEM researcher at the University of Florida. “My big fear is that we are going to have a secondary epidemic of loss, particularly of early-career women in STEM.”<sup>25</sup>

Further compounding its impact on women, the pandemic created a massive shift to working from home that is projected to continue indefinitely.<sup>26</sup> From Salesforce, which declared the 9-to-5 workday dead, to companies offering significantly more flex time, the effects on equitable practices are presently emerging. A [study](#) by Deloitte acknowledges that “actions taken by employers will be critical in working women’s advancement post pandemic,” and lists six steps to that end, including ensuring that reward, succession, and promotion processes address unconscious bias.<sup>27</sup>

**Taking informed, timely action to stop the losses and ensure equitable practices for women in rapidly shifting work environments requires innovative thinking, investment of resources, and uncompromising commitment to change, all of which coalesce in Girls Inc. Project Accelerate.**



*When women and girls hold equitable and active roles in societies, communities and countries thrive...their economic participation, financial inclusion, and labor force contributions have a direct influence on socioeconomic outcomes, prosperity and growth, and democratic resilience.*

**Natalie Gonnella-Platts**

Director, Women's Initiative, George W. Bush Institute

## OUR SOLUTION

**The persistent career advancement of women, particularly young women of color, would close the wage gap.** Research has shown repeatedly that women have a profound effect on the health of the economy as well as on the social fabric. Corporations and social impact organizations profit when women hold executive positions.<sup>28</sup> There is clear evidence that companies with a higher proportion of women in decision-making roles generate greater returns; a study by the Peterson Institute for International Economics suggested that a 30% share of women in corporate leadership positions was associated with a 1% increase in the net margin—equivalent to a 15% rise in profitability.<sup>29</sup>

Furthermore, women in positions of power and influence tend to promote other women.<sup>30</sup> Hear [Sam Saperstein](#), head of Women on the Move at JPMorgan Chase, share why gender equality is essential to corporate success. For decades, the Girls Inc. vision has been powerful girls in an equitable society, reflecting the truth that real equality exists only when women are compensated rightfully; when they have at least half of the seats at the proverbial table, and when their presence is deemed critical to success in the workplace.

**Measures taken to increase the number of women in senior leadership roles in the corporate and social impact sectors must be bold and accelerated, if women are to attain power and influence.** It is critical that organizations shift their cultural context towards equity, and make a strong and visible commitment to providing the policies, practices and workplace environment that are imperative if women are to stay, advance, and succeed. Project Accelerate applies simultaneous strategies toward the cultural shift that will provide a roadmap for achieving real equality.

**The Girls Inc. mission is to inspire all girls to be strong, smart, and bold** and the proven, holistic approach that fulfills that mission—the Girls Inc. Experience—makes a meaningful impact daily on the lives of hundreds of thousands of girls and alumnae.



**Identify as girls of color**



At Girls Inc., girls build the knowledge, skills, and confidence to lead change in their lives and affect change in the world; they become self-sufficient, transformational leaders, ready to contribute to addressing disparities and making cultural change.

They receive academic enrichment and life skills instruction, including exposure to career opportunities, and learn to make healthy decisions about their physical and emotional wellbeing. The Girls Inc. evidenced-based, comprehensive approach recognizes that none of these components in isolation will result in girls' dreaming big and achieving their goals.

## A DUAL STRATEGY

**The five-year impact goal of Project Accelerate** is twofold: 1) transform workplace culture to prioritize equity and foster the advancement of women to positions of influence, and 2) ensure young women's educational attainment and skill development to position them for professional leadership roles in these improved working environments. Project Accelerate drives change in the workplace culture and creates the initial pipeline. This transformation is sustained as these cohorts of women and future Project Accelerate participants move into leadership roles, paving the way to advancement for women in the corporate and social impact sectors.

The **anticipated changes to workplace systems** in those sectors will be 1) the prioritization of equity and the transformation of practice and policies, 2) the realignment of power dynamics and of the value placed on intersectionality, and 3) the emergence of a critical mass of engaged leaders, mentors, and possibility models. (Hear from [Lonnitria](#), Girls Inc. of Central Alabama alumna, about the importance of mentors/possibility models.) Systems within the Girls Inc. network will benefit from lessons learned through project implementation and assessment. The Girls Inc. alumnae network, currently being established, will be a critical force in achieving Project Accelerate outcomes with young women, and a structural component supporting long-term project sustainability.

### Some core features of Transformative SEL include:

- Authentic partnering among youth and adults with a deep focus on sharing power and decision-making.
- Programming content that integrates issues of race, class, and culture.
- Enhancing and foregrounding social and emotional competencies needed for civic engagement and social change.
- Focus on creating belonging and engagement for all individuals.

Currently, Girls Inc. serves young women, a large majority identifying as young women of color, through high school graduation. (Girls Inc. considers any individual who self-identifies as a girl or young woman to be eligible for participation. See Appendix B for the Girls Inc. Gender Identity Policy.) Girls Inc. already invests in ensuring that young women (16+) are well prepared for a college education and experience. Project Accelerate invests in increasing the number of young women from Girls Inc. who graduate from college with both Transformative SEL and leadership skills as well as the support they need to advance in the workplace. The UN Commission on the Status of Women notes that this positive change requires **a lifecycle approach, which means strengthening and supporting girls' leadership, adolescent girls' leadership, and young women's leadership, as a means of supporting women's leadership.** Investing in young women's leadership will change the trajectory of their future and that of their communities as a result.

Young women's stories support the continuation of the effective and transformational work of the Girls Inc. Experience with girls beyond high school, emphasizing the development of identity, agency, belonging, curiosity, and collaborative problem solving. Tiara, Girls Inc. of New York City alumna, and computer science major at Vassar College, says, "For me [it] was about accepting that I was Black, an aspect of my identity I believed to be unworthy for many years. When I joined Girls Inc., all of that began to change[...]. I began to accept who I am, gain some self-esteem, and embrace my Blackness."

Girls Inc. alumnae are experiencing great success after college in both the corporate and non-profit social impact sectors. Symone Sanders, chief spokeswoman for Vice President Kamala Harris, writes, "I was lucky enough to participate in a special organization in Omaha called Girls Inc. I like to say I was good before I joined Girls Inc. but that program made me great." Karna Crawford, Girls Inc. of Greater Atlanta alumna and National Scholar, recently left her role as Head of Consumer Activation Strategy & Media at Verizon for her new position as Head of U.S. Marketing Communications for Ford Motor Company. Colleagues shared highly complimentary accounts of her competence, collegiality, and commitment to lifting up other women.

[Read her story on LinkedIn.](#)



Hear more from Symone Sanders about her experience at Girls Inc.



## THEORY OF CHANGE

### Through Project Accelerate, more girls will apply leadership and SEL skills throughout their career trajectories, and

- complete their first year and graduate from college;
- participate in valuable paid internship opportunities;
- connect and establish relationships with mentors and coaches;
- receive resources to pursue career and postgraduate education; and
- experience rewarding and well-compensated employment opportunities that effectively access their SEL skills and intersectional assets.

### As they deepen their commitment to shifting workplace cultures and public opinion, corporations and social impact organizations will

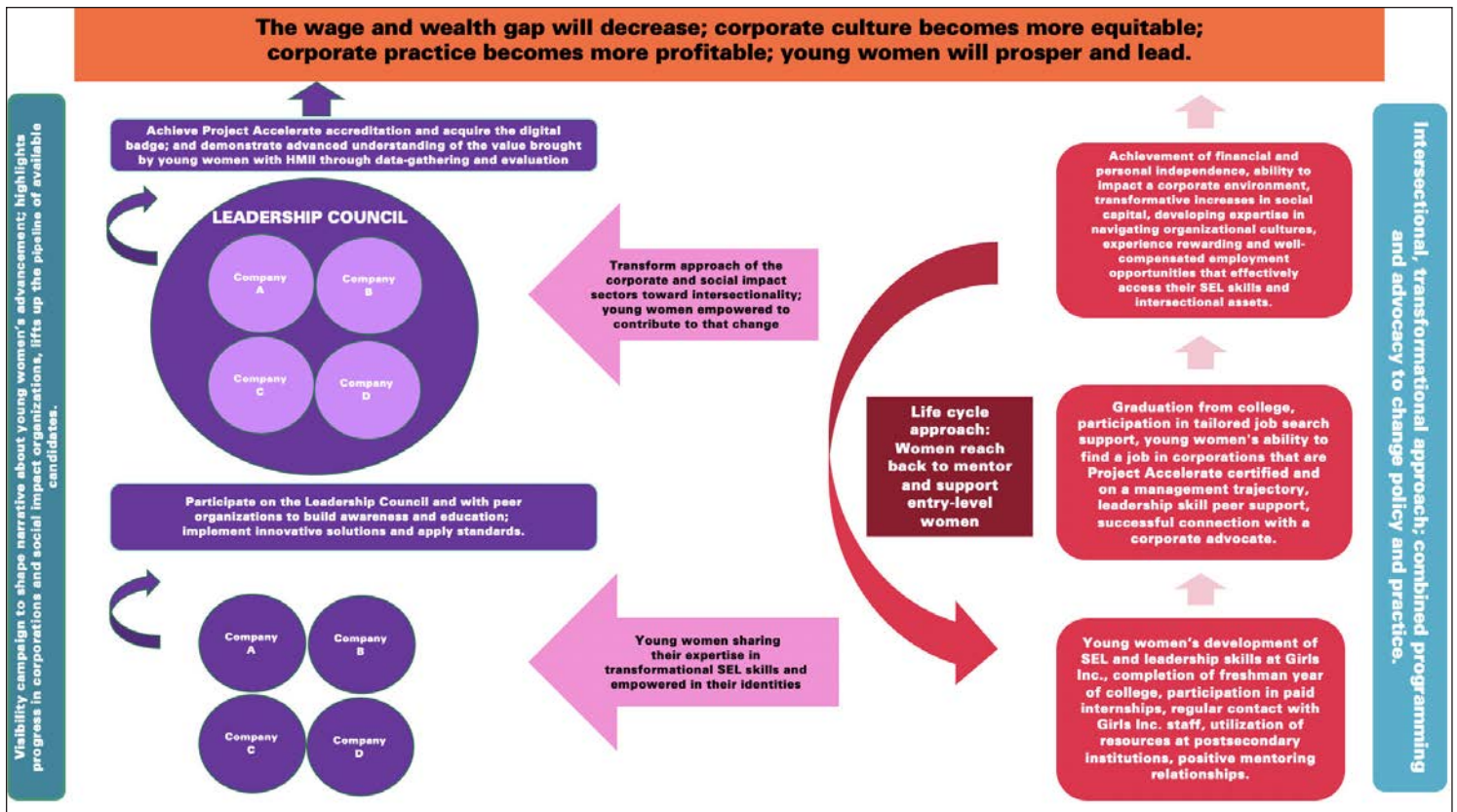
- participate on the Leadership Council and with peer organizations to build awareness and education;
- implement innovative solutions and apply standards;
- achieve Project Accelerate accreditation and acquire the digital badge; and
- demonstrate advanced understanding of the value brought by young women with historically-marginalized, intersecting identities through data-gathering and evaluation.

### As Girls Inc. and partners create a robust Project Accelerate visibility campaign to shape a narrative about women's advancement that

- highlights progress in corporations and social impact organizations; and
- lifts up the pipeline of available candidates;

## THEN

- wage and wealth gaps will decrease;
- corporate culture will become more equitable;
- corporate practice will become more profitable; and
- young women will prosper and lead, sustainably strengthening the social fabric.



A larger version of this chart is available in Appendix A 1.

## 1) Transforming Workplace Practices

The strategy for changing workplace culture centers on the Project Accelerate Leadership Council, comprising high-level leaders from across sectors and representative Girls Inc. alumnae. Collectively, the Council will design and advance innovative solutions to longstanding equity challenges. In addition to finding ways to maximize existing approaches (paid internships, mentoring, paid leave and pay transparency, women's networks and affinity groups, etc.) workplaces will create outlets for young women to share and provide feedback on their experiences. With intersectionality at its center, this new approach to collaboration will result in the Leadership Council establishing innovative criteria for gender-equitable and diverse workplace environments as the requirements for Project Accelerate certification. Criteria will emphasize actions that will accelerate young women's advancement, particularly as some pandemic-related work practices become more permanent. Motivated to meet the criteria set by their peers on the Council, organizational leaders will prioritize acquiring the certification.

A Project Accelerate Digital Badge, earned with certification, will make it easier for women to identify equitable places of work and make informed decisions about applying their talent in environments that value their intersecting identities. A focus on advancement, particularly for young women of color, is inherent in this badge, making it unique among professional certifications and recognitions. Other factors setting this badge apart are the cross-sector structure of the Leadership Council creating the criteria; a grounding in intersectionality; a focus on ensuring equity in new work structures (work from home, flex time); and, a commitment to identifying and addressing the causes of women leaving the workforce. Girls Inc. will monitor the process with annual updates from certified organizations.

We anticipate that corporations and organizations will achieve these outcomes:

- Join the Leadership Council along with peer organizations to build awareness and education;
- Implement innovative solutions and apply new standards;
- Achieve Project Accelerate certification and acquire the digital badge; and
- Working with an expert external evaluator, share insights and advanced understanding from Project Accelerate of the value brought by young women with historically-marginalized, intersecting identities to workplaces in the corporate and social impact sectors.

Girls Inc. will jointly create a robust visibility campaign with partners to highlight progress in corporations and social impact organizations and lift up the pipeline of available candidates. The Project Accelerate campaign will shape a narrative about women's advancement, garner significant public recognition for certified organizations and partners, recruit possibility models and others interested in advancing young women leaders, and highlight equitable companies and organizations for all women seeking employment.



## 2) Young Women’s Educational Attainment, Leadership, and Career Development

Project Accelerate implementation takes the form of lifecycle development described above, from the final years of high school to entering the workforce. Affiliates will establish cohorts of young women, providing ongoing support from staff, multiple opportunities to interact with mentors and possibility models, and connections to resources through partners’ networks. This group approach emphasizes peer support and builds on the connections and trust of established Girls Inc. sisterhood as young women navigate transitions and new environments. Relationships with mentors and coaches are key to providing the specialized expertise that contributes to full wrap around services for the young women; services that have been provided by Girls Inc. through middle and high school. Advances in technology make possible a high level of remote support through novel means of service delivery that align with complex college schedules, including the use of video conferencing, channel-based messaging platforms, social media platforms, texting, and app-based communication. Girls Inc. staff will help participants secure a paid internship. Young women will develop the SEL skills necessary to navigate these systems on their own, a critical career advancement skill.

We anticipate that young women will achieve these outcomes:

- Complete first year and graduate from college;
- Participate in paid internship opportunities that offer valuable experience and acquaint young women with organizational cultures;
- Access resources and support to pursue a career or postgraduate education; and
- Experience rewarding and well-compensated employment opportunities that maximize their skills and assets.

By 2030, the project will have directly served 5,400 young women, with approximately 1,000 having entered the workforce, and the remainder advancing toward college graduation. Over four years, Project Accelerate will scale to 30 Girls Inc. affiliates, each implementing the program with young women for at least two years. Affiliates will serve an average of 20 girls per year, with larger, urban affiliates serving significantly more girls and smaller or rural affiliates having the option of engaging fewer girls. All affiliates will meet basic criteria (see Appendix C) for inclusion in the project.

At least 25 corporations and social impact organizations will complete Project Accelerate certification through 2026, enacting standards identified by a select Leadership Council toward transforming workplace cultures and achieving Project Accelerate certification and digital badge.

The Girls Inc. Research and Evaluation Department will employ several internal and external approaches to data-gathering and evaluation, to learn from the project in a number of dimensions. For example, a case study by external evaluators will help determine the organizational impact of the transformational leadership skills acquired by young women from Girls Inc. This learning contributes directly to project sustainability. Sustainability is also bolstered by the engagement of the full network of Girls Inc. experts which brings a large and exceptionally experienced team to the project, and puts in place structures that support the continued momentum for not only funding, but visibility, heightening young women’s awareness, and maximizing the alumnae network.

As scaling and assessment continue throughout the network, refinements to the project will ensure that each year more young women, many with historically-marginalized, intersecting identities, will enter the workforce with identified options for choosing Project Accelerate certified organizations. And, building on the sisterhood that is embodied in Girls Inc. culture, they will lift up thousands more women.



*For the first time in history, we can state with certainty that our next generation of leaders will be a generation of women leaders—particularly women leaders of color, many of whom will start out at a socioeconomic disadvantage. This means that more girls, and more girls of color, need to be prepared to step into leadership roles, inspired to lead healthy lives, succeed academically, and advocate for themselves and others.*

**Stephanie J. Hull, Ph.D.**  
President & CEO of Girls Inc.

“

**I came to the U.S. from Mexico when I was in the first grade. The people who supported Girls Inc. were interested in all of me, not only in getting me to learn one thing or in improving a specific statistic in my low-income community. They were about supporting us girls to live up to our potential.**

**Ultimately, this all helped me pursue my educational goals of studying at Stanford University and to complete a master's program in sustainable energy systems at top universities in Europe. I have been bold enough to live in several countries and travel extensively for work, studies, research, and fun. Perhaps more importantly, my experiences at Girls Inc. helped me navigate my studies, jobs, relationships, travels, and other experiences knowing who I am and the respect I deserve.”**

**Nayeli**  
Girls Inc. of the Central Coast alumna

## WHY US?

**Girls Inc. brings the collective power of the network, a lengthy history and deep experience, and the proven capacity to apply evidence-based strategies to solving the problems stemming from inequality.** Girls Inc. is the right organization to undertake this innovative approach to transforming the workplace for women. Project Accelerate leverages the two core Girls Inc. strategies, working directly with young women and advocating with them for change.

Project Accelerate is a direct response to girls asking for support from a trusted source, Girls Inc., as they faced transitions and situations that challenged even the best prepared. (Hear from [Aaliyah](#), Girls Inc. of Central Alabama alumna, about facing challenges.) Beyond a grounding in the knowledge that Project Accelerate meets needs articulated by young women, Girls Inc. is confident in this approach because:

- Girls Inc. brings experience to the scaling of network-wide programming. In 2010, through a Commitment to the Clinton Global Initiative, Girls Inc. set out to scale the Girls Inc. Eureka! Program, a five-year, intensive, STEM-based program for rising eighth graders that takes place on college campuses, from four sites to 24 by 2019. The goal was achieved and Eureka! is currently in place at 27 affiliates.
- Girls Inc.'s federated structure supports innovation by allowing new ideas to spread quickly through the network.
- Project Accelerate builds on the blended Girls Inc. approach of advocacy and direct service that brings girls' voices to the center of any issue. The project engages with sector leaders in new ways to challenge the status quo, creating direct connections with young women, working together to redefine systems, structures, and policies, and developing creative approaches to advance young women.
- The Girls Inc. Experience, the approach that led to the level of listening and trust at the heart of Project Accelerate, has been proven effective for developing young women who, despite facing marginalization and intersecting barriers, are inherently strong, smart, and bold. Based on results from model programs at affiliates, the Experience builds transformational leadership skills that, when extended beyond high school graduation, will support young women through the challenges and transitions of college completion and successful preparation for careers.
- Girls Inc., at the national and local level, has deep and sustained partnerships within the corporate and non-profit social impact sectors that have persisted through changes in economic and political climates. These relationships will serve as the foundation for the Leadership Council. Leaders from Moody's, Apple, JPMorgan Chase, Comcast, Mastercard, and College Promise are among those expressing interest in signing on.
- The Project Accelerate certification process and visibility campaign will attract more qualified women to each organization's pipeline. Situated in an enlightened workplace, women can use their newfound influence to continue positive change. Establishing a public perception of an organization as Project Accelerate-certified will compel their continued participation.

Girls Inc. affiliate executive leaders are the bedrock of this effort. The project team brings valuable perspective and expertise, and many decades of collective experience leading and supporting organizations that strive to rectify gender inequality with an intrinsic intersectional lens. Select affiliates that are currently implementing the model programs Girls Inc. is building on (e.g., Project REACH in New York City, a college completion program getting remarkable results [See Appendix A1] and Ascend STL in St. Louis) will play an integral role in bringing the project to scale.

The national Girls Inc. organization brings extensive experience with partnerships and an effective and efficient infrastructure to the project, providing expert support systems for key implementation pieces including communications, research and evaluation, and an Affiliate Services model that ensures the capacity of participating affiliates. Decades of experience piloting and scaling programs for girls and young women will inform Project Accelerate, and the system of large-scale affiliate grant making developed as part of a recently concluded \$20M Growth Capital Campaign provides the structure for selecting Project Accelerate affiliates.

Project Accelerate is aligned with and supported by the five-year Girls Inc. Strategic Plan (see Appendix B), adopted across the network for implementation beginning April 1, 2021. The plan's focus on the development of an alumnae network, and its grounding in the principles of innovation and diversity, equity, and inclusion, allow for strong integration of core pieces of Project Accelerate into the overall Girls Inc. agenda for the long term.

**For all of the reasons stated above, Girls Inc. is the right organization to take on this timely and unprecedented project, fulfilling its vast potential to accelerate change and advance gender equality.**

## PROJECT ACCELERATE AFFILIATE TEAM

**Dena Herrin**

Girls Inc. of Greater Philadelphia  
& Southern New Jersey

**Connie Hill**

Girls Inc. of Central Alabama

**Cheryl Jones**

Girls Inc. of St. Louis

**Pam Maraldo**

Girls Inc. of New York City

**Lea Rosenauer**

Girls Inc. of San Antonio

**Lucy Santana**

Girls Inc. of Orange County



*Power is getting things done without having to demonstrate that you can bulldoze it through. I'm most effective when I've studied an issue, when I can make a credible argument, and then bring people along.*

**Donna Edwards**

Former U.S. Representative

## IMPLEMENTATION PLAN

**Trailblazing and innovative, Project Accelerate builds on the foundation of an established network to scale programming with young women, maximize connections with partners, and garner the resources essential for success.** The dual strategy approach to bringing women to their rightful positions of power and leadership in the corporate and social impact sectors includes the following:

1. Altering **workplace environments and creating a clear data-informed roadmap for sustained cultural change** at corporations and social impact organizations by working with sector leaders to find innovative solutions to advance policies and practices, incentivize adherence to workplace standards, and provide young women with opportunities to assert their transformational leadership.
2. Working directly with **young women** starting as early as junior year of high school to facilitate their successful transition through college to a strong career trajectory, reaching 5,400 young women by 2030.

Project Accelerate will launch with a four-month planning period on September 1, 2021 with project inception on January 1, 2022. To accomplish this work, the oversight of Project Accelerate (details in Appendix C) will be guided by the Project Accelerate Steering Committee, a team of seven affiliate CEOs, four national staff, and three Girls Inc. alumnae responsible for the conception and development of Project Accelerate, under the auspices of the Girls Inc. National organization and its Affiliate Services Department. Two Councils will undertake and inform the work of Project Accelerate: the Alumnae Council representing the Girls Inc. alumnae network, and the Leadership Council, representing leaders from the corporate and social impact sectors, alongside Girls Inc. staff and alumnae representatives, committed to establishing and meeting Project Accelerate standards, and achieving Project Accelerate certification.



**Hear from Simone, Girls Inc. of Greater Philadelphia & Southern New Jersey alumna, about the support young women need.**



## CHANGING WORKPLACE CULTURES

The first strategy to create cultural change in workplace environments will be implemented primarily by select Steering Committee representatives and national Girls Inc. staff. Girls Inc. will recruit a Project Accelerate Leadership Council of high-powered leaders from the corporate and social impact sectors. Initially, a core group of five to seven leaders will establish the process for the work, set forth approaches to measuring change, and focus on innovative approaches. High level leaders from Apple, Moody's, IBM, Microsoft, Deloitte, Mastercard, Travelers, and JPMorgan Chase have indicated interest. Social impact organizations will be recruited to the council when the project initiates, with a focus on sectors other than youth development. Organizations of interest include Feeding America, led by a woman of color and currently undertaking their own DEI work, GLSEN (an LGBTQ+ education organization and a current partner of Girls Inc.), and Unidos US (advocates for Latinos, formerly National Council of La Raza).<sup>31,32</sup> Other possibilities include fellow members of Leadership 18 (Habitat for Humanity or Mental Health America), service organizations, and foundations.

Growing to as many as 25 members after year one, the Leadership Council will work together to create standards and guidelines for equitable organizations, testing innovative ideas based in research (e.g. flexible internship opportunities or the recruiting and connecting of young women with intersectional identities to possibility models, mentors, and coaches) and scouring the field for existing resources, policies, and practices.<sup>33</sup> Once defined, the organizational standards for practice will become the basis for a Project Accelerate certification. Qualifying organizations will receive a Project Accelerate digital badge that signifies an equitable workplace to potential applicants. The certification also establishes a new level of credibility with stakeholders. Internal and external approaches to measurement will serve to regularly incorporate learning as well as define results. A social media campaign to recognize Project Accelerate organizations will maximize and further solidify each organization's commitment to continuing adherence to the standards.

### YEAR ONE

- Identify Steering Committee members leading this work and hire staff and consultants, including external evaluators.
- Recruit five to seven interested participants to a core group for the Leadership Council.
- Work with the core group to design an approach to standardizing practices in support of culture change, establishing innovative strategies for engaging young women and identifying policies such as flex-time arrangements and mandatory family leave that help establish an equitable culture.
- Elaborate on and codify the certification process, including approaches to monitoring.
- Establish measurement approaches and protocols.

### YEAR TWO AND BEYOND

- Expand the Leadership Council to up to 25 members. Conduct a continuous cycle of reviewing existing strategies, learning new approaches, and updating Project Accelerate certification criteria in pursuit of improved equity.
- With standards and processes established, formalize Project Accelerate certification and begin certifying organizations.

**Interim milestones include the realization of the Leadership Council, the completion of the certification process, conducting a visibility campaign, and implementing measurement and evaluation strategies.**



## **SUPPORTING CRITICAL TRANSITIONS**

The implementation approach for the second strategy has its roots in Project REACH, a program developed by Girls Inc. of New York City (see Appendix A1 for detailed program results and description), and Ascend STL, a program implemented at Girls Inc. of St. Louis. Both program models resulted in 99% completion rates for participating first-year college students. In St. Louis, the program had 107 young women in college, 80% pursuing STEM majors, and several continuing with advanced degrees. In New York City, a survey of participating alumnae showed that the majority of respondents were first generation college students attending four-year institutions in the local area who had attended Girls Inc. for more than three years and participated in College Readiness programming. Both models build on the Girls Inc. Experience and College and Career Readiness programming that young women participate in during their junior and senior years of high school to continue providing support to young women through college.

In the Project Accelerate model, Girls Inc. affiliates will form average cohorts of 20 young women in their final two years of high school. Many of these young women will have experienced Girls Inc. for several years at this point. They will participate in Girls Inc. College Readiness programming that moves them, and their families, through the college application process and equips them with the SEL skills needed to support a successful transition to college life. (Affiliates already working with young women in college will continue or expand their program to reflect the Project Accelerate model.) Each senior in Project Accelerate will be periodically assessed via a College Persistence Scale (see Appendix A1) a schema that tiers their needs to identify which young women are dealing with factors that significantly affect their chances of success and require case specific support. Previous program models have shown that about ten percent of a cohort requires this level of engagement.

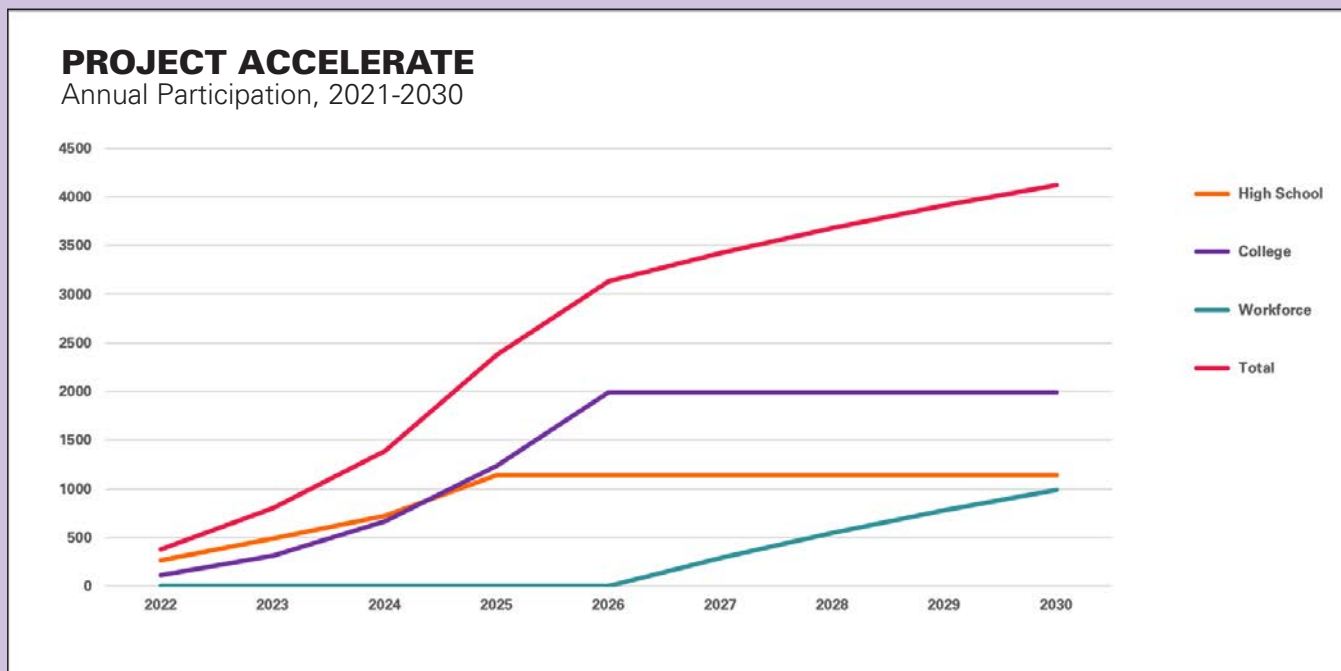
Building on close relationships established with Girls Inc. staff, connections will continue into college. While working directly with the colleges and universities in their local communities that a majority of their young women attend, Girls Inc. staff will also extend their systems of support to encompass remote and virtual engagement. Girls Inc. will recruit mentors, coaches and possibility models to engage with and support young women in Project Accelerate. At all stages of the project, in high school and at an even greater level in college, young women will have the opportunity to participate in paid internships. In many affiliates, particularly those offering the Girls Inc. Eureka! Program, internship programs have been a critical component of programming for several years, providing a broad and stable base to expand upon. Girls Inc. partners who provide pre-internship programming to young women in highschool, like Lockheed Martin, are enthusiastic about the opportunity to include young women from Girls Inc. in their college level internships as well, viewing that as a first step in their talent acquisition process.



As young women advance, the network of longstanding relationships within their cohort will enrich and sustain them. Communication with each other, staff and mentors will be largely virtual. When possible, the cohort will meet together to celebrate milestones. The Girls Inc. alumnae network will also be growing, and through a digital platform, connecting young women attending the same school or in geographic proximity when they express interest.

Following a pilot year implementing with the seven affiliates on the Steering Committee to fully codify the Project Accelerate model, the program will be scaled to additional affiliates through an equitable system of grant making. Appendix C details the criteria preliminarily identified to determine which affiliates will join each year, receiving a yearly grant to build their program, and providing an equal match from their own organization or community. Furthermore, a Project Accelerate training pathway will ensure high quality, consistent implementation of the project model. Building on several approaches to staff learning including face-to-face training, courses on the Girls Inc. Learning Management System (Learning Central), peer support systems, and technical assistance from national staff, educational opportunities will range from orientations for board members to detailed support for Girls Inc. facilitators.

The scaling and grant making process ensures that participation is open to all affiliates, regardless of size, type of community, and geographic location, with the capacity and commitment to implement Project Accelerate with young women. Grant amounts will be calibrated to the number of young women an affiliate can commit to serve, allowing for the participation of smaller and rural affiliates, with affiliates on average adding cohorts of 20 new young women each year. A similar approach was used for Girls Inc.'s recent Growth Capital Campaign, with affiliates of all sizes and types showing strong results.



*Based on simplified and conservative assumptions, the above chart shows Project Accelerate participation by year at the high school, college, and workforce levels. These figures show the impact of the initial \$25M investment on young women directly as sustained by participating affiliates through 2030, without further scaling of the program.*

*Girls Inc. will begin with seven affiliates in 2022, scaling to 30 in 2025. Each year, each affiliate will add a new cohort of rising juniors (the vast majority of whom have been with Girls Inc. for years prior) with cohorts averaging 20 in size. The project starts with rising juniors because this is the first year that most can participate in paid internships. It is assumed that 90% of participants will be retained each year.*

*In total, Project Accelerate will reach 5,400 participants, with over 4,100 still part of the program in 2030. This is over 23,000 participant years, with an average cost per participant estimated to be less than \$2,000 per year. In this model, high school participation plateaus at 1,140 girls per year beginning in 2025 and college participation at 1,990 per year in 2026. With the success of the program and further investment, however, participation would continue to grow as the program scales to more than 30 affiliates and as individual affiliates grow their programs by bringing in larger cohorts. The impact then would be far greater than what is depicted above.*

## YEAR ONE

- Convene the Steering Committee to create a detailed plan for year one implementation, including job descriptions for staff, consultants, the committee, and councils.
- Hire staff and consultants, encouraging applications from Girls Inc. alumnae.
- Codify existing program models for use at multiple affiliates. (Pilot the model at seven affiliates serving a variety of geographic locations and communities with initial cohorts of 20 girls, forming connections with postsecondary educational institutions and potential providers of paid internships. Refine the model as warranted.)
- Provide a structure for supporting affiliates with identifying and acquiring paid internship opportunities for young women.
- Finalize affiliate grant application process, including eligibility criteria, timing, award process, and scaling expectations.

## YEAR TWO AND BEYOND

- Train new affiliates to implement the model each year as needed, including support staff who will help girls develop transformational SEL skills.
- Affiliates recruit and deploy mentors, coaches, and possibility models.
- Continue grant award process annually to achieve scaling targets.
- Work closely with Girls Inc. Alumnae Association Director and Alumnae Council to integrate work with the national alumnae network development strategy and provide significant ongoing input from young women and the Girls Inc. Alumnae Council.
- Conduct regular meetings of the Steering Committee, project affiliates, and staff to ensure the program and processes are refined as necessary.

**Interim milestones include program model codification, finalization of the grant application process, awarding of grants annually to affiliates to achieve scale, affiliate staff trained in model implementation, first cohort young women complete their first year of college and each cohort thereafter, and the initial Project Accelerate cohort graduates.**

Additional elements critical to effective implementation and sustainability include project integration with the newly developing Girls Inc. alumnae network, including regular connections with the Alumnae Council, and working with a wide variety of partners at the local and national level to expand learning and access to resources.

Scaling Project Accelerate within the Girls Inc. network will not just ensure sustainability, but also position the program to be widely implemented, by as many as 78 Girls Inc. affiliates. Funding for the project is matched from the outset, creating a much more secure financial foundation for the work. The simultaneous creation of a Girls Inc. alumnae network will strengthen young women's connection to Girls Inc., and will provide the young women in Project Accelerate the support of generations of alumnae.

*Data feminism begins by analyzing how power operates in the world.*

**Catherine D'Ignazio and Lauren Klein**

Authors

## DATA, LEARNING, AND EVALUATION

Girls Inc. is a data-driven organization. A 2020 impact study from the American Institutes for Research proves that girls who participate in Girls Inc. outpace their peers in multiple impact areas, including commitment to and preparation for college and careers. Transformational SEL undergirds this work, as research demonstrates that teaching young people these skills early in life is connected to both academic and career success. Girls Inc. girls leave programming ready to use their skills to address inequities in ways that promote social change in the workplace.

The Girls Inc. Strong, Smart, and Bold Outcomes Measurement Strategy (SSBOMS) is central to the continuous improvement of the network. Data informs all work, so that Girls Inc. affiliates can align planning, make improvements to services and programming, support operational decisions, and communicate impact.

The network's tools to measure behavioral outcomes for young women include the Strong, Smart, and Bold outcomes survey for girls ages 9 to 18. Specific to Project Accelerate, the College Persistence Scale will identify young women who may need tailored support during their college transition and program pre/post surveys will ensure that young women are reaching program benchmarks. The annual Affiliate Survey collects organizational health and capacity data for all Girls Inc. affiliates.

Historically, the Girls Inc. SSBOMS has centered the measurement of girl outcomes. Entering the 2021-2025 Strategic Plan, Girls Inc. recognizes the need to develop and utilize measurement tools that demystify and uplift the processes that fortify girls to become strong, smart, and bold women. To do this, it is critical to center how power and influence show up in processes for women through a data feminism approach.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Project Accelerate will position Girls Inc. to go beyond its current approach to measuring outcomes:

- to document and measure strong, smart, and bold processes that are central to preparing women with historically-marginalized, intersecting identities to become change agents and to occupy positions of power and influence; and
- to engage work environments with Project Accelerate's evaluation and learning strategy.

### A DATA FEMINISM APPROACH INCLUDES THESE SEVEN PRINCIPLES:

- 1** examine power
- 2** challenge power
- 3** elevate emotion and embodiment
- 4** rethink binaries and hierarchies
- 5** embrace pluralism
- 6** consider context
- 7** make labor visible



Girls Inc. will build further evidence to demonstrate the effectiveness of Project Accelerate on power and influence indicators for women who possess historically-marginalized identities. Girls Inc. will also work to understand how an intersectional approach to leadership development can bring value to partners. A key element of Project Accelerate is having young women share their expertise in transformational SEL skills, which will result in their ability to understand their roles and power in contributing to systems change work, resulting in new insights and perspectives at postsecondary institutions and progressive changes in corporate environments. Not only will this learning inform internal Girls Inc. work, but it also stands to generate knowledge for the field more broadly.

**Project Accelerate seeks to measure outcomes and outputs not only for young women, but also for participating organizations, in order to evaluate impact on the establishment of a more equitable workforce.** Girls Inc. will work with an external evaluator to develop a gender-responsive evaluation approach.<sup>35</sup> This feminist approach to evaluation will determine the effectiveness of Project Accelerate strategies—partnering with organizations in supporting young women, convening the Leadership Council, and implementing innovative solutions—to motivate and incentivize employers to shift the cultural context towards equity. Cultural shifts come with resistance, and Project Accelerate will leverage partnership with the Leadership Council in order to strategize against pushback within organizations.

Corporate and Social Impact Organization Outputs and Outcomes	Measurement tools
<p><b>Outputs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Number of organizations participating in Project Accelerate Leadership Council</li> <li>• Number of women on Leadership Council, particularly women of color in positions of power and influence</li> <li>• Number of organizations obtaining Project Accelerate certification</li> <li>• Tenure of women, particularly women of color, in those organizations</li> <li>• Increase in the number of young women that enter the talent acquisition pipeline</li> <li>• Number of corporate advocates (coaches and mentors) paired with young women</li> </ul>	<p>The Gender Equity Culture Survey (Appendix A1) and data reporting tools developed with the external evaluator.</p>
<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transformative shifts in the organization’s culture, including how women, particularly women of color, feel about their power and influence within the organization</li> <li>• The creation of equitable policies (employee mentors, paid leave and pay transparency, manager training, women’s affinity groups, etc.)</li> <li>• Actions taken to shift the organizational culture</li> <li>• Organizations’ recognition as Project Accelerate sites and elevation of their brands as easily identifiable as committed and equitable places of work</li> <li>• Organizational leaders prioritizing the acquisition of Project Accelerate certification</li> <li>• Cultivation of positive mentoring relationships within the organization, determination of the resources necessary to facilitate change, and the level of engagement of corporate leaders in the project</li> </ul>	<p>Measured through an action-oriented case study research design.</p>
Young Women’s Outputs and Outcomes	Measurement tools
<p><b>Outputs</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Young women’s completion of the first year of college</li> <li>• Participation in paid internships</li> <li>• Graduation from college</li> <li>• Participation in tailored job search support</li> <li>• Young women’s ability to find a job in corporations, particularly those that are Project Accelerate certified and on a management trajectory</li> <li>• Young women’s participation in or creation of affinity groups</li> <li>• Number of young women joining the Girls Inc. alumnae network</li> <li>• Regular contact with Girls Inc. staff</li> <li>• Utilization of resources at postsecondary institutions</li> <li>• Successful connection with a corporate advocate</li> <li>• Achievement of financial and personal independence</li> </ul>	<p>Measured by Strong, Smart and Bold Outcomes Survey, College Persistence Scale, and Annual Affiliate Survey.</p>
<p><b>Outcomes</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to impact a corporate environment</li> <li>• Transformative leadership skill building</li> <li>• Feelings and attitudes of peer support</li> <li>• Quality of participation in positive mentoring relationships</li> <li>• Increases in social capital</li> <li>• Developing expertise in navigating organizational cultures</li> </ul>	<p>Measured by a mixed method design including pre/post surveys, focus groups, interviews and action-oriented case study.</p>

# RISK

At the highest level, the greatest risk to the success of Project Accelerate is an economic downturn that forces scale-backs by corporate and non-profit social impact organizations, including Girls Inc. affiliates, while creating further financial stress on individuals and families in under-resourced communities. Having more women in positions of power and influence will mitigate the impact on women of an economic slide, as those leaders act with awareness. Even in stable times, Girls Inc. recognizes the potential challenges of assuming that corporate organizations will invest resources at a level necessary to truly facilitate change. Careful cultivation of a Leadership Council with significant influence, the development of truly innovative solutions, and a compelling approach to positive recognition should address those issues.

Though economic indicators are positive, this is a critical juncture for women in the workforce. The pandemic has resulted in an exodus, undermining recent progress and warranting radical action to keep women in their rightful positions in the workplace.

Thorough consideration must also be given to fully understanding affiliates' inclination and capacity to follow girls beyond high school; a nationally sponsored alumnae network should provide needed support. As noted previously, young women face particularly stressful challenges at the moment, over and above pandemic-related traumas, including financing school, managing course loads while working, and limited course availability.

*You don't make progress  
by standing on the sidelines,  
whimpering and complaining.*

*You make progress by  
implementing ideas.*

**Shirley Chisholm**  
Politician, educator, and author



*No son nuestras diferencias las que nos dividen. Es nuestra incapacidad de reconocer, aceptar y celebrar esas diferencias.*

**Audre Lorde**

Negra, lesbiana, madre, guerrera,  
poeta (auto descripción)

—  
Black, lesbian, mother, warrior,  
poet (self-described)

*It is not our differences that divide us. It is our inability to recognize, accept and celebrate those differences.*

“

**Throughout my experience at Girls Inc., we were all considered leaders and our voices were heard. I always felt free to be myself and express my thoughts in Girls Inc. The girls are supportive of each other which makes us feel like a family. I was empowered during our Girls Inc. sessions and that inspired me to empower others. When people see me for the first time, they usually say ‘Why do you walk like that?’ Yet, Girls Inc. welcomed me and allowed me to be comfortable in my skin despite my walking disability. They didn’t separate me from others and always included me as part of the team. That is something that I will forever hold close to my heart.”**

**Katshyna**



# DIVERSITY, EQUITY, INCLUSION AND ACCESSIBILITY

**The prime directive of Girls Inc. Project Accelerate is to support diversity, equity, access, and inclusion for young women with historically-marginalized, intersecting identities by providing them with the resources and skills needed to achieve positions of power and influence; closing the wage gap; and strengthening the social fabric.**

Katshyna, Girls Inc. of Long Island alumna, was born prematurely in Haiti. She attends Hunter College Business School and says her goals are to “graduate college with at least a 4.0 GPA, to have a dream job in Business Administration, publish my own book, make donations to nonprofit organizations, and help others in my community who face prejudice due to disabilities, color, or immigration status to overcome these obstacles and push forward. I hope that through my Business Administration degree I can develop community outreach programs to help young adults find their career pathways.”

When not studying or with family, Katshyna “loves to participate in Girls Inc.” where last summer she joined in a virtual Racial Justice & Allyship Bootcamp and Level Up: Bringing Girls Stories to Life, as well as a panel with Long Island Advocacy Center entitled “Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools.”

Katshyna’s words get to the heart of the Girls Inc. approach to DEI which recognizes that a sense of belonging in any organization is a direct outcome of an effective inclusionary environment. Girls Inc. affiliates embrace a supportive community that exhibits a caring and welcoming culture in which girls and young women feel valued and respected for their individual talents and skills; the resulting sense of belonging bolsters them as they live up to their fullest potential with confidence, dignity, and pride. A sense of belonging fosters these principles among staff and volunteer leaders as well.

When, in the 1970s, the social psychologist Abraham Maslow, coined the term “belonging” as a critical element for self-actualization and key to ensuring that individuals live up to their fullest potential and consider themselves worthy and valuable contributors to society, [Transformative SEL](#) didn’t yet exist.<sup>36</sup> Yet, half a century later, a focus on creating belonging and engagement for all individuals is a core feature of that process which is designed as a lever for equity and social justice.

DEI is a pillar of the Girls Inc. Strategic Plan, building on collectivity to strengthen all that we do. “Inclusivity means not just ‘we are allowed to be there’ but ‘we are valued.’ I’ve always said smart teams will do amazing things, but truly diverse teams will do impossible things,” says Claudia Brind-Woody, VP & Managing Director of IBM and LGBTQ+ Business Leader. Since the plan was adopted by the whole Girls Inc. community, the work of building a culture of DEI for young women, staff, volunteer leaders, partners and consultants, began with the COO leading a broad initiative that encompasses network-wide mutual learning and growth.

First, a [matrix or roadmap](#) laid out all the stakeholders and the necessary elements to create pathways to learning and accountability measures for everyone involved. This matrix was affirmed by the National Board: the DEI Peer Community (comprising about 20 affiliate leaders) reviewed and added to the matrix, and it now serves as an initial blueprint for the implementation plan. Second, a [DEI Vision](#) was conceived, drafted, and then edited by the DEI Peer Community. Still a working draft, subject to change based on growth and learning, the concept is a springboard for this work.

These documents will guide the network in establishing a plan that encompasses an audit of various practices and perceptions, a proposed path forward toward creating opportunities for historically-marginalized populations, and a clear sense of all the resources this will require. While the plan takes shape, Girls Inc. is already making significant changes:

- Staff are considering reflexivity (statements specific to Project Accelerate are in Appendix A1) and sharing how it impacts their work;
- SMART goals are now SMARTIE goals, ensuring that work is set forth as Inclusive (brings traditionally marginalized people—particularly those most impacted—into processes, activities, and decision/policy-making in a way that shares power) and Equitable (includes an element of fairness or justice that seeks to address systemic injustice, inequity, or oppression);
- A DEI budget allocation is being developed, allocated per FTE in every budget request, for education, training, and support.

Girls Inc. welcomes the opportunity to take an intentional and thoughtful approach to changing its organizational culture to move beyond accessibility for individuals with differing abilities to actively seek and support their engagement. As part of the overall Girls Inc. DEI assessment, the Project Accelerate budget includes funds for an accessibility consultant to conduct a complementary audit of organizational practices to build on legal requirements and basic accommodations to facilitate proactive inclusion of young women, staff, and volunteers with disabilities. With support from experts, Girls Inc. will employ strategies such as training and education that will ensure young women with differing abilities are sought out, valued, and embraced.

Recommendations from the consultant will be incorporated into the national DEI plan, and will also be woven through the Girls Inc. Affiliate Model Assessment Tool, a self-assessment process for affiliates to weigh their practices against legal requirements and network standards for accommodations across multiple areas like human resources, technology, and programming. Girls Inc. will maintain a Project Accelerate Accessibility Fund to fund enacting the consultant's recommendations with a significant portion of funding allocated for improvement at the affiliate level to ensure good practices are in place or underway as an application condition for a Girls Inc. Project Accelerate grant.



*I tell my students, 'When you get these jobs that you have been so brilliantly trained for, just remember that your real job is that if you are free, you need to free somebody else. If you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game.'*

**Toni Morrison**  
Author and Nobel laureate

## COMMUNITY/STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

The Girls Inc. network is an engine of social change fueled by internal and external stakeholders. To ensure that these stakeholders are aligned with the Project Accelerate concept, the project team conducted formal and informal interviews, as well as multiple focus groups. Brief feedback from each of these groups is outlined here with significantly more detail included in Appendix B.

**Young women, many of color and with historically-marginalized, intersecting identities and most ages 16-24, are the key stakeholders for the project; they set the direction of and drive Project Accelerate.** Their voices guide Girls Inc.'s priorities, their growth defines its successes, and their challenges define the services it provides.

Project Accelerate relies on a continuous cycle of learning from young women and Girls Inc. alumnae. Standard Girls Inc. practice is to incorporate formal and informal systems for collecting feedback from participants, e.g., the pre/post surveys in Project Accelerate and regular check-ins with Girls Inc. facilitators. Simultaneous to the implementation of Project Accelerate, Girls Inc. is creating a formal alumnae network that will use data to connect women and girls who have the Girls Inc. Experience in common. An Alumnae Association Director position is being added to national staff (the Project Accelerate budget includes an allocation), and the Girls Inc. Alumnae Council is being formalized. These steps will allow for simple, digital processes for requesting and receiving feedback from alumnae.



**Hear from Laura, Girls Inc. of Orange County alumna, about the importance of an alumnae network.**

**Girls Inc. affiliates provide the impetus for young women to effect change.** A network-wide focus group of affiliate leaders demonstrated great support for the opportunity to continue to serve Girls Inc. girls beyond high school and for the Project Accelerate approach. Affiliates on the project team have shared the concept with their boards and received positive feedback (see Appendix B). Updates on the project will occur at regular Girls Inc. events (the annual Executive Leadership Roundtable, Girls Inc. Annual Conference) and through project reporting processes.

**Girls Inc. community stakeholders are a microcosm of American society.** As community leaders and key opinion leaders get to know and commit to Girls Inc. and the mission, they become true believers in and invaluable supporters of women's equality and diversity. They become part of the solution.

**Colleges and Universities:** Girls Inc. affiliates have extensive relationships with postsecondary educational institutions, including several historically Black colleges and universities, many built on years of partnering to implement the Girls Inc. Eureka! Program. A Project Accelerate focus group of university leaders, including the President of Texas A&M University, found real alignment with their goals for students. They talked about the importance of multiple points of contact for students and finding ways to address student's unique needs. To ensure success in the job market after college, it is important for them to connect with working professionals, gain experience, and create networks in their career field. Project Accelerate staff will connect with university representatives twice annually for feedback, over the summer and early in the calendar year.





**Program Partners:** Girls Inc. has the experience, capacity, and propensity to secure and sustain partnerships that support girls and young women. As an example, the Imagine Science Collaboration of four youth development organizations at the national level (Girls Inc., National 4-H, the YMCA of the USA, and Boys and Girls Clubs of America) brings STEM education to unserved, marginalized youth through community level partnerships among their affiliates (including the project team affiliates in Philadelphia, St. Louis, and Orange County). Girls Inc.'s participation has resulted in extending reach with impact: in each year of implementation, girls' STEM interest and proficiency has exceeded boys'. Project Accelerate takes an opportunistic approach to partnership development that signifies the importance of this kind of reciprocity; Project Accelerate needs to be further along to identify and secure the best matches.

Girls Inc. is socializing the concept of Project Accelerate with potential partners. For example, College Promise is a national, non-partisan, non-profit initiative that builds broad public support for funding the first two or more years of postsecondary education for hardworking students, and ensuring those students have access to quality educational opportunities and supports. Other possible partnership connections include the Disability EmpowHer Network, INROADS, and JFF, and the expansion of an existing relationship with the Links. (See Appendix B for a detailed list of the multitude of community-based organizations connected to the affiliates on the project team.) As Project Accelerate is launched, the Project Director will work with the Steering Committee to strategically select and recruit additional partners that would complement the approach and contribute to results.

**Corporate Partners and Social Impact Organizations:** Interviews were conducted with several executives and key opinion leaders from the corporate sector as well as the social impact sector (defined here as for-profit or non-profit organizations that measure impact in terms of social goals they intend to achieve, such as community improvement). Companies and organizations selected include primarily those that have received designations from Fortune, Working Mothers, Human Rights Campaign, etc., as workplaces favorable to women and diversity. Several agreed to serve on the Leadership Council to develop criteria which will raise the bar for workplace equality and inclusion for young women, differentiating the Project Accelerate digital badge from others.

One executive from a Fortune 500 company captured the sentiment of those interviewed, saying, "Yes, we do all the right things; the right policies and procedures are all in place. But as a matter of practice, if you go on maternity leave and come back, things are far from business as usual. In fact, you're persona non grata. It's like you're invisible; you missed a lot and nobody is very anxious to help you reintegrate. We need programs that address that." The interviewees were also unanimous in their views that equality and diversity begin with C-suite representation and commitment; employee resource groups are key; and more equitable workplace policies should bubble up as well as come from the top down, making it clear that real change must be cultural and systemic.



**Travelers is proud to champion Girls Inc.'s Project Accelerate initiative, which aims to provide more young women with opportunities in college and beyond. By creating a lifelong support system, and through partnerships with companies and educational institutions, Project Accelerate offers a comprehensive platform that will help ensure that upcoming generations of women have access to the resources they need to thrive.**

**Mark C. Lear**

Midwest Regional Vice President  
Bond and Specialty Insurance, Travelers Insurance Companies  
(See the full statement from Travelers in Appendix B.)

**An extensive visibility campaign will generate broad-based excitement and enthusiasm for Project Accelerate.** The Girls Inc. Marketing and Communications Department, the Project Accelerate Director, and the Steering Committee will work with an expert media consultant to develop key messages and launch an ongoing visibility campaign to promote the project and related causes, e.g. publicizing best workplaces for women or recognizing a social impact organization's progressive diversity practices. The campaign will promote diversity and equity to brand new audiences and create a demand for more equitable environments.

As pieces of the project are realized, mini-campaigns will focus on real young women's success stories and highlight the importance of using asset-based strategies at all points along the education-to-career trajectory. Overarching messages will include key elements of gender equity, including its significance to stakeholders. For example, along with evidence that a more diverse C-suite is connected to higher margins, bigger profits, and better total return to shareholders, the campaign would feature a partner with a female CEO, and a young woman aspiring to the C-suite.

The stakeholder messaging strategy will make use of existing national strategies including social media, regular outreach to donors, and placed features and articles. At the community level, affiliates will employ similar strategies within their local networks and through their channels. The Project Accelerate Director will develop a formal communications and messaging strategy as one of her first tasks.

Girls Inc. is part of a larger ecosystem providing support to girls and young women within communities. Engaging with schools, families and other community organizations creates a strong framework of supports for young women that are embedded in each community's cultural context, social characteristics, and institutional elements.

In many areas, Girls Inc. has been integral to communities for decades and Girls Inc. affiliates have established stakeholder networks within their communities. The possibility of engagement with Project Accelerate is creating significant buzz and a high level of excitement locally, and young women, alumnae and a multitude of partners stand ready to contribute to its success. Appendix B provides further evidence of stakeholder engagement.

Girls Inc. embodies the premise that young women are full of inherent strengths, even as they are marginalized by the outside forces of institutional racism and sexism. The Girls Inc. Experience is the evidence-based solution that engages and embraces the community in its application; a thoughtful model that responds specifically to the problems created by institutional racism and sexism:

- Staff reflect their communities and possess a deep understanding of the challenges faced by girls with historically-marginalized, intersecting identities;
- All girl, pro-girl safe spaces give girls a chance to unlock their strengths and thrive; and
- Evidence-based programming is developed and iterated by or with affiliates in the context of their communities.

“

**I'm a teacher now. That's right, I spend all of my days advocating for, inspiring, and challenging young minds the way you did for me when I was younger. Some of my Girls Inc. instructors were the most influential people of my childhood. The lessons you taught me stick with me to this day. And now I am teaching my students to be strong, smart and bold because this was the best lesson anyone ever taught me.**

**Raven**

Girls Inc. of Central Alabama alumna



*Budgeting your money is the key to having enough.*

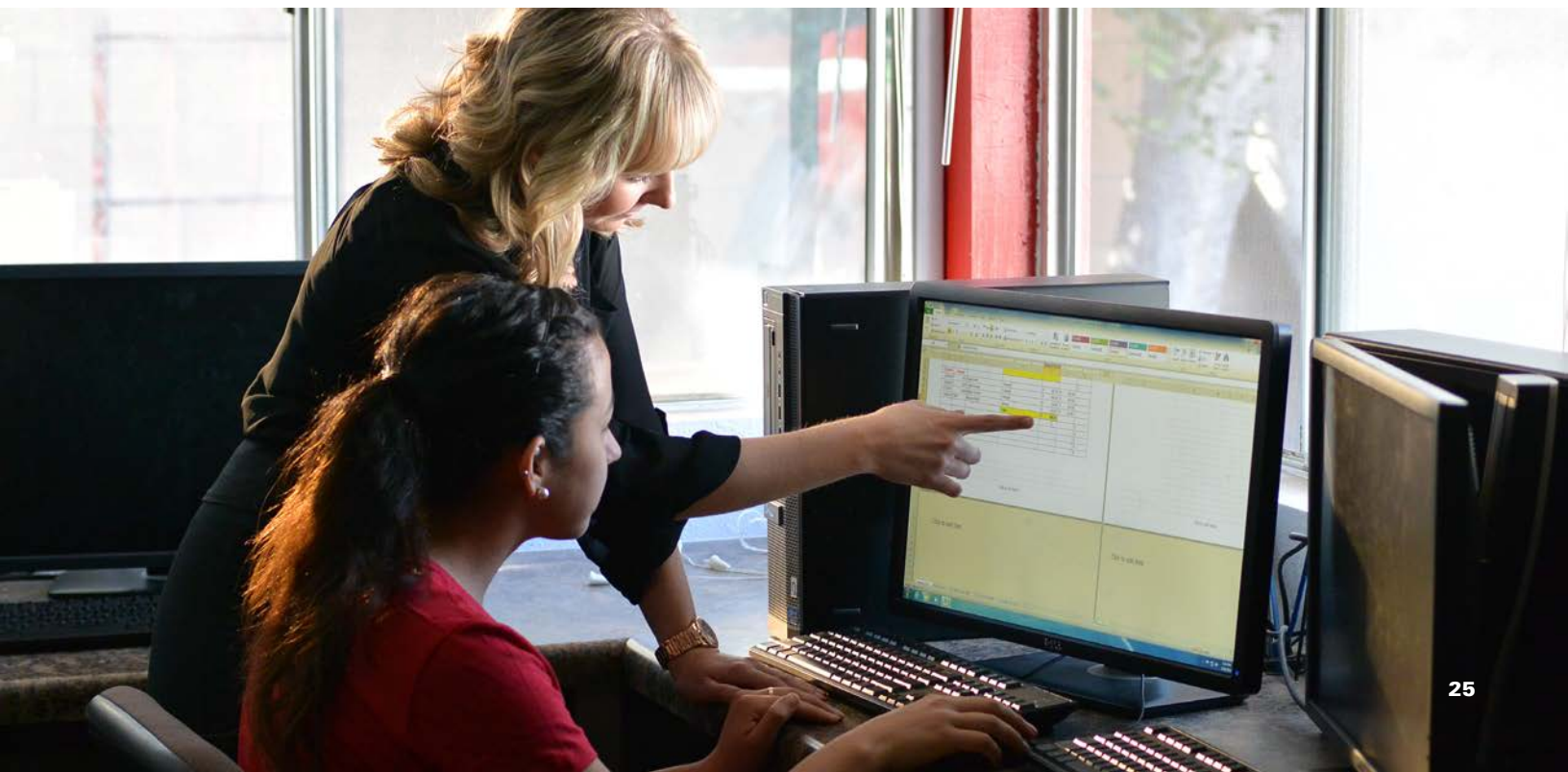
**Elizabeth Warren**  
United States senator

## RESOURCES AND BUDGET NARRATIVE

Significant resources, both financial and non-financial, will be required to achieve the transformational impact that Girls Inc. envisions for Project Accelerate. The non-financial resources needed, fortunately, are already strengths of the Girls Inc. network. These include the reputation and trust required to secure the participation of corporations and social impact organizations; the contacts to generate the initial partnerships; a track record of partnering effectively with colleges and universities; trustful and effective working relationships among affiliates and between affiliates and the national organization; and most importantly, a pipeline of engaged and talented young women ready to unlock their full potential.

The financial resources needed for Project Accelerate total \$25M, detailed in Appendix A. The budget is a collaborative effort between Girls Inc. national and affiliates, with 77% of funds to be expended by affiliates for their direct service to young women. The remaining 23% will be used by Girls Inc. national for the following purposes:

- 1. Project development and support.** Under the oversight of the CEO and COO, the project will be led from the Affiliate Services department. The Director of Affiliate Services will be accountable for Project Accelerate, supervising the Project Accelerate Director and the Alumnae Association Director who will jointly hold day-to-day responsibility for the project at the national level. Four Affiliate Engagement Directors will support participating affiliates and provide technical and organizational support.
- 2. Training.** Girls Inc. Learning Services staff will codify and disseminate affiliate models and innovations for programmatic support of young women through college and as they enter the workforce.
- 3. Research and Evaluation.** Girls Inc. Research and Evaluation staff will work with the Steering Committee to hire an independent evaluator, with whom they will collaborate on evaluation design and on the collection and aggregation of affiliate and corporate data in support of the evaluation process.
- 4. Advocacy and Marketing.** The Girls Inc. Public Policy team will work to advocate for policies supportive of women's advancement in the workplace and support affiliates' advocacy efforts locally, while the Marketing and Communications team, with consultant support, markets the project on social media and promotes its successes.
- 5. Grants Administration.** The national organization will administer grant funds for participating affiliates, verifying their eligibility and their raising of the necessary matching funds.



During the project, affiliates will create their own grant budgets reflecting local needs and cost structures. Affiliates on the Steering Committee created a sample budget, Tab 3 in the budget document in Appendix A, which provides a general template of the costs required for affiliates to implement Project Accelerate. This will serve as a baseline to determine levels for affiliate awards, and accordingly, these initial seven project affiliates will be granted \$87,500, or half of their \$175K year one budget. Staffing and benefits constitute the largest expense: each affiliate will need to fund (and in most cases, hire) a program staff member to coordinate and facilitate their work supporting young women through college. Additional staff will provide programming to juniors and seniors in high school and provide technological support, among other functions. Technology and supplies will be purchased for young women at both the high school and college levels. Direct stipends will be provided to support high school and college participants whose internships are otherwise unpaid. Transportation costs are included for high school participants for field trips, and travel is budgeted for three staff to attend the annual project meeting at \$1,500 per staff member. Indirect expenses are calculated at 10%.

Girls Inc. has a track record of successfully capitalizing on this type of transformational opportunity: in 2017, the S.D. Bechtel, Jr. Foundation offered the network a \$10M grant in support of its strategic direction, provided that the national organization could match these funds within five years. The resulting \$20M Growth Capital Campaign brought the entire network to a new level. It allowed for the creation of a \$14M growth grant fund for affiliates, fueling growth in service numbers and capacity across the network and allowing for Girls Inc. to expand to Chicago, Seattle, and Boston. While the previous campaign transformed the network, an Equality Can't Wait award to Girls Inc. has the potential to transform the status of women in the American workforce. Girls Inc. has already generated considerable momentum and excitement for Project Accelerate and has requests in progress with several corporate and foundation funders for the national match necessary to fully fund the project.

Overall, the average annual Project Accelerate budget of \$5 million represents approximately 5% of the total network budget of just over \$100M, a figure that is significant but not daunting. As with the Growth Capital Campaign, the variance in capacity across the affiliate network will be acknowledged and leveraged for Project Accelerate, with grants and matching funds scaled to affiliates' capacity to serve girls and raise the match. All of the seven initial project affiliates were highly successful growth grantees during the Growth Capital Campaign, and they collectively developed a set of criteria for new affiliates to join the project, noted in Appendix C, which will be refined by the Steering Committee based on their year one experience. Girls Inc. will execute a signed Memorandum of Understanding with each affiliate subgrantee and require a brief annual progress report from each, which will inform reporting to project funders, including Equality Can't Wait. While it is possible that not every affiliate will succeed in serving the number of girls to which they commit or raising the needed matching funds, their recent track record as grantees demonstrates that the vast majority will, reaching the projected average numbers.

Funding from Equality Can't Wait would launch Project Accelerate on a scale that simply would not be possible to achieve without this type of visionary investment. Equality Can't Wait funds will serve as a catalyst to attract other investors, and thanks to the national prominence of the challenge, will provide the publicity and credibility to garner the involvement of major corporations.

Although Girls Inc. could execute Project Accelerate successfully at the \$10M level, the \$25M budget outlined above will make it possible for the network to take advantage of greater economies of scale to achieve the substantial change envisioned from this work. Because the match requirement will be distributed between the national organization and participating affiliates, the amounts are realistic and achievable.

The Growth Capital Campaign described above successfully utilized a similar match at both the national and the affiliate level. The Equality Can't Wait matching component will provide a base of funding sources to grow and help sustain the project. Besides the obvious and proven attraction of a matching opportunity to corporate, foundation, and individual donors, there is an additional revenue opportunity through the proposed Leadership Council, which may include an annual investment from participating corporations. Girls Inc. will use the five-year window to ramp up fundraising, reaching full sustainability for year six and beyond.



*You cannot have those things you refuse to dream of.*

**Stacey Abrams**

Author, attorney, voting rights activist

## CONCLUSION

Equality Can't Wait is a visionary response to some of the most persistent and damaging issues preventing the emergence of a fair and equitable society. Girls Inc. is honored to be among the finalists. This has been an unprecedented opportunity to think big, and Girls Inc. is grateful to the challenge funders, Lever for Change, and our technical advisors, especially Morten Group, for the structure, thought partnership, and the technical and financial support that have shaped this vision for Project Accelerate. **Together, we can make a bold leap to an equitable future.**



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# girls inc.

Inspiring all girls  
to be strong,  
smart, and bold