Although Minnesota is a leader in women’s workforce participation, this achievement does not translate into economic security and stability for all working women. For example, Native women and Latina women on average earn only $0.54 for every dollar earned by a white man. Additionally, women of color face the compounding challenges of racism and sexism on the job. In this session, we listened to women, with a concentrated focus on Latina women and immigrant women, who are navigating work while raising families and heard their solutions for transforming the economic status of Minnesota’s workers and communities.
LISTENING TO
Minnesota’s Women & Girls

At the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota (WFMN), we know that to improve the lives of all Minnesotans, we need strong grantmaking and policy agendas that are grounded in both qualitative and quantitative data. WFMN conducts research to listen, learn, and drive action with communities to create a state of gender and racial equity. We believe that women and girls in communities across Minnesota are the experts our state needs to shape real, lasting solutions.

Through nine Listening Sessions in WFMN’s Road to Transformation Listening Series in March 2021, we deepened our understanding of the real, lived experiences of Minnesota women and girls so that we can continue to strategically eliminate the challenges and barriers they and their families face because of injustice in our systems.

As a statewide community foundation, we convene and listen to center the vision and solutions of communities pushed to the margins and then activate our collective power to drive lasting change. The themes and solutions that surfaced across the Listening Series will inform the Women’s Foundation’s statewide agenda for gender and racial equity, using our levers for grantmaking, policy, strategic partnerships, narrative change, and research for years to come.
What the data show

Gender & Racial Wage Gaps Reduce Lifetime Earnings:
The gender wage gap in Minnesota has not narrowed over the past five years – particularly for women of color. White women on average fare best, making $0.78 for every dollar earned by a white male, on average. Black women, on average, make $0.61, Native American women and Latina women make $0.54, and Somali women earn an average of just $0.45 for every dollar earned by a white man.

Minnesota Cents on the Dollar
Average Wage and Salary Income Relative to White Men

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Race</th>
<th>Average Wage ($/Year)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>White</td>
<td>$1.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asian American</td>
<td>$0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Black</td>
<td>$0.61</td>
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<tr>
<td>Latina(o)</td>
<td>$0.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Native American</td>
<td>$0.54</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Quality child care is often out of reach, particularly for women of color and Native American women who are concentrated in service occupations:
Child care options are limited – both in the number of spots available and in terms of affordability – for many Minnesota families, especially those headed by women. While one in five of Minnesota’s white women work in service jobs, more than one in three Latina, African American, and Native American women work in service fields where benefits are scarce, and schedules don’t align with child care hours of operation.¹

Female-dominated professions — like healthcare — incur specific health risks, including sexual harassment and workplace violence²:
This can lead to increased illness and risk of disability later in life. Those in the healthcare and social assistance industry, where four out of five workers are women, have rates of intentional injury by another person almost four times higher than those in private industry, overall.³

¹ CWGPP analysis of ACS 2013-17 (five-year estimates), American Community Survey.
LISTENING TO
Minnesota’s Working Women

This listening session took place in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, which disproportionately affected the economic lives of women of color.

Women of color make up the highest concentration of essential workers with a high risk of exposure to the virus and also the group most likely to face layoffs. These economic and workplace struggles were not new at the time of the pandemic. Immigration status, race and ethnicity, gender, and education level all affected the participants’ employment experiences and trajectories over the course of their lives. Most notably, balancing care work and raising children with working outside the home often present difficult decisions for women and families.

The experiences, challenges, and solutions of immigrant mothers, mothers of color, and workers emerged in this discussion with working women in Minnesota.

Facilitator: Angelica Klebsch | Senior Director of Policy & Community Development, CLUES
Research Fellow: Amy Dorman, MPP
Grantee-partners:
Comunidades Latinas Unidas en Servicio (CLUES)
African Career, Education, Resource (ACER)
Intercultural Mutual Assistance Association (IMAA)
Pillsbury United Communities
Limited child care options add to family stress.

Participants spoke of the challenges to improve their economic and personal situations through education and work while also being responsible for raising their children. Throughout the session, participants noted inaccessible and unaffordable child care options. A lack of child care often resulted in great personal sacrifices by mothers. Some participants chose to end schooling in order to care for family members or their own children. Others noted how many women must work the “second shift”: after working full shifts outside the home, they come home to care for their children. Work shifts often happen late at night and are followed by caring for their children during the day with limited rest for themselves. Child care was either too far away, no open spots were available, or the cost was more than a mortgage payment and simply not affordable. Several participants relayed having to choose between rent and other necessities or child care.

“I had my daughter when I was young. The biggest challenge was where to leave my daughter. I didn’t have the option for daycare: either I pay rent, or I pay daycare. It was very difficult because I wanted to go to school and finish studying high school, but I had to go back to my family home and then started working again with the support of my family.”

“I have to use support from neighbors, but you can’t just rely on other people like that always. I wish I was able to pay those people, but I can’t. Even though I’m working two jobs, still I can’t afford daycare because daycare is very expensive.”

“When you have to work nights and weekends that doesn’t always work. There is no daycare that does that. You can have a good foundation of care, but that’s not going to take everything. I don’t know any daycare that takes kids on the weekends, so you’re at mercy of relatives to be successful.”

“Child care is not an option because I have four kids and it’s very expensive. I have to stay home and take care of the baby. I like to go to work and be out and interacting with people and making money, but that’s what’s holding me down right now. Not being able to come up with ends to meet: it’s either rent and things we need or child care.”

Listening to a Latina mother’s experience balancing care for her family while working to achieve her goals.

This session began with a woman who shared her life experiences navigating the difficult balance between motherhood and career. The storyteller shared that she married very young, and never finished high school. She considers her lack of education to be the biggest barrier to improving her situation and financial well-being. Regardless of her circumstances, she worked hard and persevered, completing her GED while taking care of her five children. She worked night shifts so she could care for her children during the day. To improve her financial security, she started going to college, which then put her into debt. The storyteller expressed the challenge of seeking to improve her economic prospects while taking care of her family and facing difficult choices along the way.

“When you have to work nights and weekends that doesn’t always work. There is no daycare that does that. You can have a good foundation of care, but that’s not going to take everything. I don’t know any daycare that takes kids on the weekends, so you’re at mercy of relatives to be successful.”

“I’m going to get my associate’s and I’m starting into my bachelor’s. That meant a lot to me. I’ve always put my life on hold for my family. But I was raised that we’re a circle and it cannot be broken because the people coming after us are going to learn from us.”
While some participants shared stories of supportive spouses and men in their families who were willing to adjust their schedules and work opportunities to help share the child care burden, others don’t have partners who are willing to support mothers in child care work or costs. This creates additional barriers for women:

“Spouses are not very supportive when it comes to child care. [A woman I knew] was ready to start working, but she had two small kids and child care was a big barrier. Her husband was adamant: ‘You can work, but you have to figure out child care costs; that’s dependent on you. Since you want to start working, I won’t help you cover costs.’”

One participant shared her sadness at how the cost of child care drove her decision to have only one child:

“There’s a reason why I have one child: the economic situation. I never wanted to struggle as a parent with the unknowns, and I didn’t want her to lack what I never had. [With the cost of] daycare, health insurance … how was I going to support her if we lost our jobs?”

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**Working women experience sexual harassment and gender discrimination at work.**

Beyond the severe lack of available and affordable child care, women also faced significant barriers to safety and well-being in their workplaces. Several participants shared stories of sexual harassment and expressed how this treatment by men coworkers affected their physical, mental, and economic health and well-being.

“[When I reported my harasser], he told me, ‘Bitch, you’re going to pay for this.’ It’s not something you forget. It stays with you forever. For a while it started giving me anxiety attacks. I didn’t even want to go to that job anymore.”

“[My manager] had offered me a position as supervisor. He was saying he likes working with women better because they are more responsible, authentic, hard workers. But I noticed it wasn’t that; he was mostly about this sexual thing. I was getting the opportunity to have a higher position, but the cost was about something else in exchange.”

Whether working in a small, family-owned business or for a large corporation, participants didn’t receive support and often experienced victim-blaming after reporting harassment. Several participants explained that their conversations with supervisors were shared with their co-workers. This lack of confidentiality created hostile environments for the participants, especially for those women who worked at male-dominated work sites. Participants described facing a dire choice: deal with the daily harassment or lose their job and their ability to provide for their families.

“It’s hard for women to report something like that because supervisors aren’t going to do anything about it: he’s not only a harasser, but a good worker. [The harasser] ended up being fired from that job, but he stayed there for years before finally he got fired for harassing women.”

“[In my job], so many truckers came in and made sexual comments about me. There was this particular driver who always was talking about my breasts, and one time he made me cry. I went to the upper supervisor and he told me, ‘You’re provoking them to say that because you are wearing tighter, provocative clothes. Maybe you should cover yourself up.’ I felt so humiliated and yet I was a single mom and needed to provide for my kids.”
“They make you feel like you’re so little. It’s so hard because they don’t think of you as a person but as another number: ‘We can replace you. If you want to leave, leave, and we can bring somebody else back, we can hire more people.’ Do I want to lose my job or keep my job?”

The participants also shared their experiences with gender discrimination, which kept them from earning fair wages, advancing in their workplaces, or getting interviews for certain jobs.

“[One woman I knew] had experience, had done [the job] before. She was very confident in applying for the position. The hiring manager said, ‘No, this is a man’s job. A woman can’t do this. I highly don’t encourage you to apply.’”

“I talked to the manager [about a promotion]. Then at the same time I got pregnant, and his excuse was that because I was pregnant, he didn’t know if I would come back after I had a baby.”

“When I came to this country and I started working as a cook, I was the only woman cooking there. With time I gained experience. I started in prep, then became a cook, and wanted to be a supervisor and manager. I have learned all the way through to be a supervisor and then I found out I was earning less than the men. Even the dishwasher was earning more than I was earning.”

“It has been a struggle to demonstrate that we can do the same work that men do and to be valued. But at the same time, you have to pay a high price to get to that position.”

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Immigrant women and families face additional challenges.

Participants who immigrated to Minnesota face added challenges that immigrant women and families must navigate as they work to support themselves and their loved ones. One participant reflected upon her experience:

“When you come to this country and immigrate, it’s language and culture barriers. We dress differently, English is our second language. We don’t get opportunities like most people. We always have that struggle. Rent is high, daycare isn’t affordable, so we struggle to use family members, and take two jobs to cover the costs.”

Another participant said that language and discrimination are added barriers to finding gainful employment.

“Culture and the language barrier is a big barrier for me. I have learned English, but English ‘street language’ is not perfect. It opened doors for certain things, but not enough for me to start what I want. [I heard], ‘You’re Latinos, you’re not able to navigate this [job].’ It’s a struggle, but bit by bit I know we’re going to be able to make it.”

Other participants noted the limited access to state and other essential supports like health insurance for immigrant families.

“There’s a great fear of applying for SNAP or medical assistance. Often [folks are] not eligible or not legal.”

“For the first two years I never even had health insurance. I applied but they denied me because I hadn’t been in U.S. for five years. Part-time jobs were not offering insurance.”
Participants in this session understand the challenges that women face while trying to support their families physically and financially. Their solutions call on decision-makers in all sectors to provide more support for women, their children, and their families:

1. **Make child care accessible and affordable to all**: A stronger care infrastructure will include the policies, resources, and services to help families meet caregiving needs so they can thrive. A lack of affordable child care frequently can be a great source of family stress, sacrifice, and hardships, often borne by mothers. Employers and the State of Minnesota should facilitate workers’ access to affordable child care via vouchers, stipends, or on-site childcare benefit options.

2. **Increase educational opportunities, particularly for immigrant women and families**: Education is a key lever for women to move into gainful employment with meaningful, family-supporting wages. We must invest in community-based programs supports women’s opportunities to pursue higher education and English language learning.

3. **Invest in, recruit, and retain teachers and school counselors of color**: When children and parents do not see their race, ethnicity, and background reflected among their teachers, school counselors, and/or administrators, it sends a message and often means that they do not see clear pathways to those same positions. Education is a key to breaking cycles of poverty, and representation is a crucial part of children’s education in our state.

4. **Promote the values of healthy relationships and gender equity with men and boys**: Families benefit when women and girls can pursue their educational and career goals, and experience safety at home, school, and work. When men and boys partner with women and girls to cultivate healthy relationships and share in the responsibilities of the home and caregiving, the burden of unpaid child care and domestic work shifts to a more equitable distribution of labor. Culturally relevant training to deconstruct rigid gender norms is key to developing holistic solutions that promote respect within families and benefit whole communities.

“*We need to get some help to enable [women] to advance themselves to cover the expenses they need and have some time for family.*”