RISE

WINDSOR-ESSEX

SUPPORTING WOMEN IN STEM & ENTREPRENEURSHIP

NEEDS ASSESSMENT REPORT

2020

workforce
WindsorEssex

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ABOUT WOMEN'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP STRATEGY

With the goal of increasing the number of women working in Science, Technology, Engineering and Math (STEM) and starting businesses in the Windsor-Essex region, the Women's Entrepreneurship Strategy funded a local program, RISE Windsor-Essex. Founding partners include Workforce WindsorEssex, WindsorEssex Economic Development Corporation's Small Business Centre (WEEDC SBC), WEtech Alliance, University of Windsor's EPICentre, Build a Dream, and Windsor Essex Capital Angel Network (WECAN).

The purpose of RISE is to create a suite of services available to women in the Windsor-Essex region, by amalgamating and supporting resources with the goal of increasing the number of women in emerging technology fields. These fields include: advanced manufacturing, agri-tech, digital media and Information and Communications Technology, clean tech and renewable energy, and STEM.

RISE Goals:

- Encourage young women to enter emerging technologies
- Provide leadership and entrepreneurial education and development activities for young and diverse women
- Co-ordinate a women-led startup program for emerging technology companies
- Establish mentorship activities
- Provide a welcoming space for women entrepreneurs
- Enhance access to capital opportunities
- Encourage new companies to develop/adopt diversity plans Build and strengthen cross-border connections and a wider entrepreneurship ecosystem
- Increase the available local data on women working in and owning companies in emerging technologies
- Increase diversity of new entrepreneurs in our region

ABOUT THE GUIDE

To better understand the current support system for women working in and starting businesses in emerging technology sectors, Workforce WindsorEssex conducted an environmental scan of Windsor-Essex. Assessing the amount and levels of support for entrepreneurs in the region allows us to identify gaps in service, potential redundancies, and successful initiatives that can be expanded.

Consultations were conducted with stakeholders in the community, including educators, employers, and entrepreneurship service providers. Women working in tech positions, as well as female entrepreneurs, were interviewed. Organizations outside the region providing supports to female entrepreneurs were also consulted to identify best practices that can be used in Windsor-Essex.

Goals of the Guide:

- Identify individual and community challenges for women working in and starting businesses in Windsor-Essex
- Identify individual and community successes of women working in and starting businesses
- Share best practices of female entrepreneurship initiatives from across the province
- Recommend community-based initiatives to support and expand the local entrepreneurial ecosystem of Windsor-Essex

METHODOLOGY

As a partnering organization of RISE Windsor-Essex, Workforce WindsorEssex conducted an evaluative review of supports and services available and needed for women working in technology fields and female entrepreneurs in Windsor-Essex. This review includes:

CONSULTATIONS WITH STAKEHOLDERS

Key community service providers of supports for female entrepreneurs in the region were consulted to identify programming offerings. Educators of technology-related programs were also interviewed on the recruitment and retention of female students in their programs. Employers of technology-based companies were consulted regarding their challenges and successes with recruitment of female staff in technology positions and community services that support their recruitment.

CONSULTATIONS WITH WOMEN IN TECHNOLOGY AND FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

Interviews with women working in technology positions within technology-based companies were conducted to identify barriers they have faced in their careers, challenges they may have faced during their education and career, and what supports and services have been most useful to them in their careers. Interviews with female entrepreneurs were conducted to identify barriers they can identify for women starting and operating their own businesses, the community's capacity for entrepreneurship, and successes for female entrepreneurs in Windsor-Essex.

CONSULTATIONS WITH PROVINCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

Consultations were held with entrepreneurship service providers, industry associations, and researchers across Ontario to identify best practices for supporting women working and owning companies in technology fields.

A FULL REPORT DETAILING:

- Strengths and capacity of the existing entrepreneurship programming;
- Gaps and challenges of existing programming, systemic barriers, and training opportunities;
- Opportunities and recommendations for strengthening and enhancing the community's capacity to support females working and operating businesses in technology fields.

TIMELINE

The data collection, including in-person and phone consultations, took place between January and March of 2020. A report was completed in March 2020.

CONSULTATIONS WITH COMPANIES

Consultations were held with 11 local companies in technology-related fields. These companies include: CenterLine (Windsor), Brave Control Solutions, Cavalier Tool & Manufacturing Ltd., Reko International Group Inc., AIS Technologies Group, Quicken Loans, Enwin Utilities, Kelcom, Erie Shores HealthCare, Libro Credit Union, and Hôtel-Dieu Grace Hospital. Consultations were conducted to identify, from an employer perspective, the challenges and successes in recruiting and retaining female staff in technology positions. Employers were asked about their recruitment methods for female staff, their recognized challenges of female staff, and their internal and external strategies for supporting and promoting women working in technology positions.

QUESTIONS ASKED INCLUDED:
- What roles do women fill in your company?
- What internal and external professional development is offered for female staff?
- What strategies do you have for recruiting female staff?
- What are the main challenges that you identify for your female staff? Are these specific to women in tech?
- What do you consider success in making Windsor-Essex a supportive and strategic location for women in tech?
- How do you consider Windsor-Essex's current support level?
- What goals do you have regarding female staff in your company over the next 5 years?

CONSULTATIONS WITH SERVICE PROVIDERS

A total of eleven local service providers were consulted about what programs they provide for entrepreneurs and what services they offer for female entrepreneurs specifically. Service providers consulted include: WEEDC SBC, WEtech Alliance, WECAN, EPICentre, Business Resource Centre, Reseau Femmes, Women's Enterprise Skills Training of Windsor Inc. (WEST), Women of Windsor Mentorship Collaboration, Downtown Accelerator, Ontario Society of Professional Engineers (OSPE), Canada Learning Code - Windsor, and Libro Credit Union. Service providers were asked about what supports they offer, their methods for sharing information, strategies for best serving female clients, and what goals they have for improving services for female entrepreneurs over the next five years.

QUESTIONS ASKED INCLUDED:
- What supports do you offer for female entrepreneurs locally? Online or in-person services?
- Do you use specific recruitment methods for female clients?
- What are the most successful programs or activities you offer?
- What strategies have you found to be less successful?
- What are the main challenges that you identify for your female clients? Are these specific to women in tech?
- What supports are needed in the community that don't currently exist?
- What do you consider success in making Windsor-Essex a supportive and strategic location for female tech entrepreneurs?
- How do you consider Windsor-Essex's current support level?

CONSULTATIONS WITH EDUCATORS

Educators of technology-related programs at the secondary and post-secondary levels were interviewed regarding the recruitment and retention strategies they use for female students. Educators were asked about what the challenges their female students face and the initiatives their institutions have put in place to best support their students to complete their education and learn about a variety of career opportunities available to them.

QUESTIONS ASKED INCLUDED:
- What strategies do you use to recruit and retain female students in STEM programs/courses?
- What successes and challenges do female students face?
- How can the community better support female students?
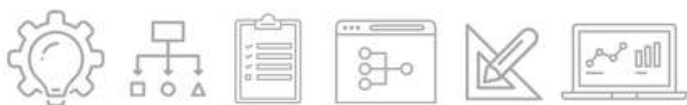
CONSULTATIONS WITH WOMEN IN STEM AND FEMALE ENTREPRENEURS

Consultations were held with 29 local women working in technology-related positions and/or operating their own business. The women consulted were at varying stages in their careers and in varying positions. The purpose of these consultations was to identify challenges the women had faced in earning their education, finding employment in their field, and finding supports for their business. Women were asked to identify what successes they have recognized in the community regarding promotion of females in male-dominated fields and goals they have for the community's capacity to support females working in and owning businesses in technology-related fields.

QUESTIONS ASKED INCLUDED:

- Who/what influenced you to get into tech and entrepreneurship?
- What supports have you used in the community or online to start and grow your business?
- What organizations have supported you the most/least? How?
- What are the most beneficial ways to network in Windsor-Essex?
- Do you like attending networking events?
  - Do you feel knowledgeable about the events in Windsor-Essex?
- What new supports are needed in our community to help female entrepreneurs?
- What are your main challenges as a female entrepreneur/ tech worker?
- What are your current goals as an entrepreneur/tech worker?
  - What successes have you earned in your career?
- What successes have you noticed in Windsor-Essex that promote female entrepreneurship?
- What goals should Windsor-Essex have for improving female entrepreneurship over the next five years?

CONSULTATIONS WITH PROVINCIAL SERVICE PROVIDERS

Service providers and researchers in prominent entrepreneurial regions, including Ottawa, Waterloo, and Halton region were consulted. Phone conversations were conducted to learn about successful programming across the province that supports female entrepreneurs, specifically those operating technology-related companies. Strategies for how to best develop community-based initiatives that support female founders to start, grow, and earn capital for their companies were discussed.

QUESTIONS ASKED INCLUDED:
- What programs does your organization run for female entrepreneurs?
- What successes and challenges have you faced while operating your services?
- What challenges do you believe female entrepreneurs face in their field?
- How has your local community supported and/or contributed to your initiatives?

WHY WINDSOR-ESSEX?

Windsor-Essex has been known as an unappealing location to start a business, and an unsupportive region for women overall.[1] The data below will tell the story of why Windsor-Essex is the ideal location to host the RISE Windsor-Essex project, and helps to explain the needs of the local community.

Between 2012 and 2017, the number of tax filers with employment income decreased for those in Leamington CA (Leamington and Kingsville), yet increased for those in Windsor CMA (Windsor, Tecumseh, LaSalle, Amherstburg, and Lakeshore).[2] The decrease in Leamington CA was even higher for women (-8.6%) than for men (-1.5%). However, the number of tax filers with self-employment income in Leamington CA decreased less for women (-8.3%) than for men (-18.7%). Within Windsor CMA, females also fared better than men, increasing 7% compared to 1.7%.

1.7%   7%

While the participation of women in self-employment is increasing more than men, the total net income of women with self-employment in Leamington CA is $21,280,000 and $121,130,000 in Windsor CMA in 2017. However, for males in Leamington CA total net income is $42,240,000 and $240,385,000 in Windsor CMA. The income of males is approximately twice that of women in both regions. Additionally, the income of those in the rural region of Leamington CA is 20% of that for those living in the urban region of Windsor CMA.

1 Katherine Scott, The Best and Worst Places to be a Women in Canada 2019, (2019).
2 Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0031-01 Labour income profile of tax filers by sex.

Windsor CMA Incorporations[3]

Other services (except public administration)
Accommodation and food services
Arts, entertainment and recreation
Health care and social assistance
Educational services
Administrative support, waste management, remediation services
Professional, scientific and technical services
Real estate and rental and leasing
Finance and insurance
Information and cultural industries
Transportation and warehousing
Retail trade
Wholesale trade
Manufacturing
Construction
Agriculture, forestry, fishing and hunting

0   100   200   300   400   500   600

■ Male-led   ■ Female-led

Fig. 1 While women own 19% of incorporations in Windsor-Essex, they are most commonly in sectors that align with the sectors that women are most commonly employed in, including: health care and social assistance; retail trade; professional, scientific and technical services; and other services. Women's representation is highest in Other Services (31%), and lowest in Information and Cultural Industries (0%).[3]

Women own 34% of all incorporated and unincorporated businesses in Windsor CMA.[3]

34%

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In Windsor CMA, women were off for 71% more days than men due to personal or family responsibility in 2018. In Ontario, women were off for 35% more days than men. [4]

1.4 🧍 **2.4** 🧍

DAYS LOST PER WORKER IN 2018

Female Participation Rate (2017)[5]
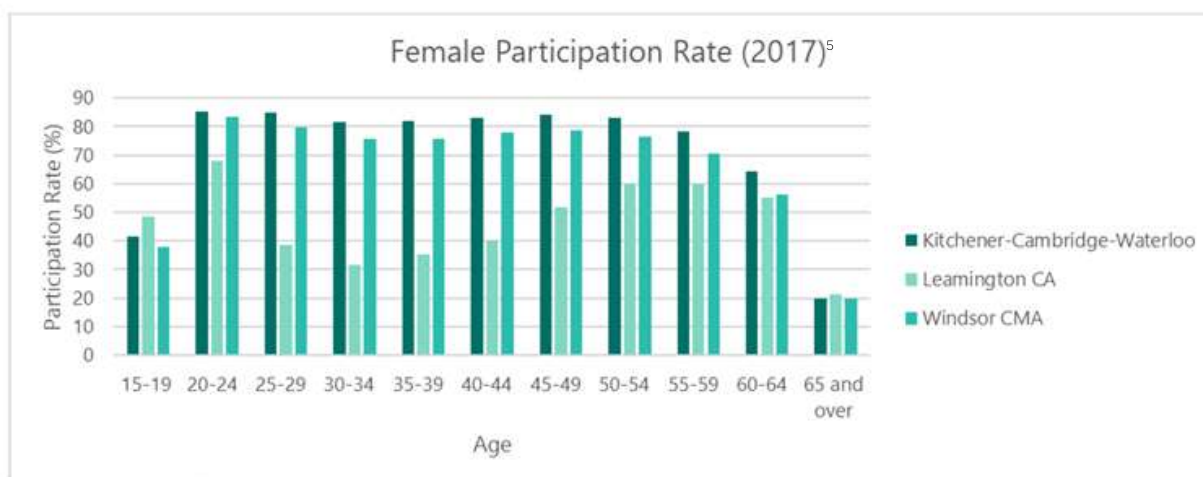
Fig. 2 The 2017 participation rates of women in Kitchener-Cambridge-Waterloo and Windsor CMA are very similar, however the participation rate of Leamington CA is much lower than both regions. The participation rate is especially lower for those aged 25-49. This difference may be due to Leamington CA being a rural region, as well as 25-44 being common child raising years which decrease women's participation in the labour force.[5]

Photo Credit: Emma Davidson

4 Statistics Canada, Table 14-10-0190-01 Work absence of full-time employees by geography, annual.
5 Statistics Canada, Table 11-10-0023-01 Tax filers and dependants 15 years of age and over with labour income by sex and age.

2016/17 Enrollment in Ontario[6]
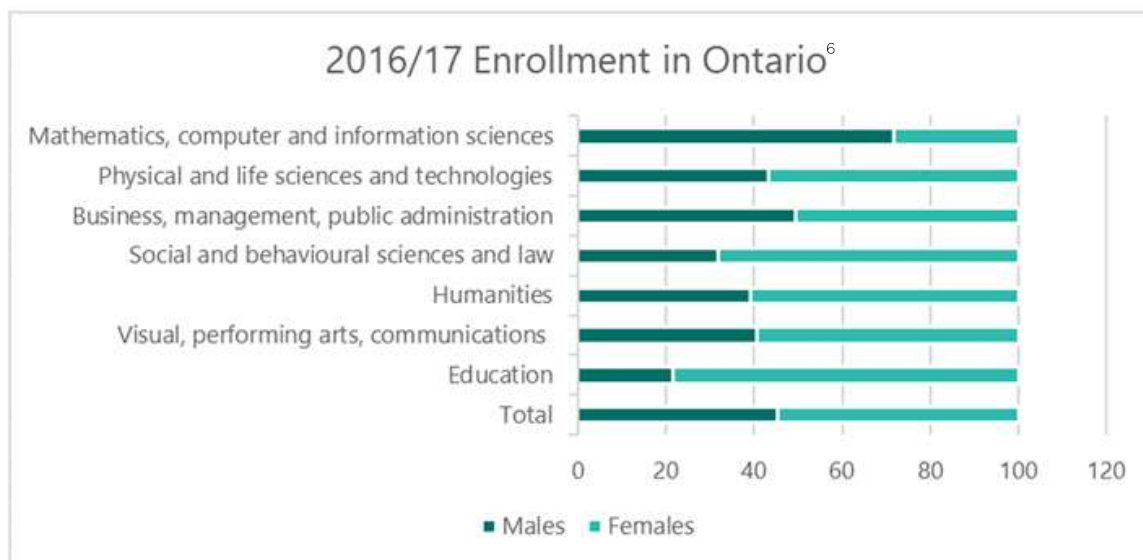
Fig. 3 Women represent 47% of enrollment in post-secondary education, however they are under-represented in Mathematics, computer and information sciences, with 27% female enrollment. The lower enrollment of women in this field is proportional to the number of women employed in the field locally, as 17% of women in Windsor CMA are employed in 'Natural and applied sciences and related occupations'.[7]

% of Female Enrollment in 'Math, Computer, and Information Sciences' in Ontario[8]
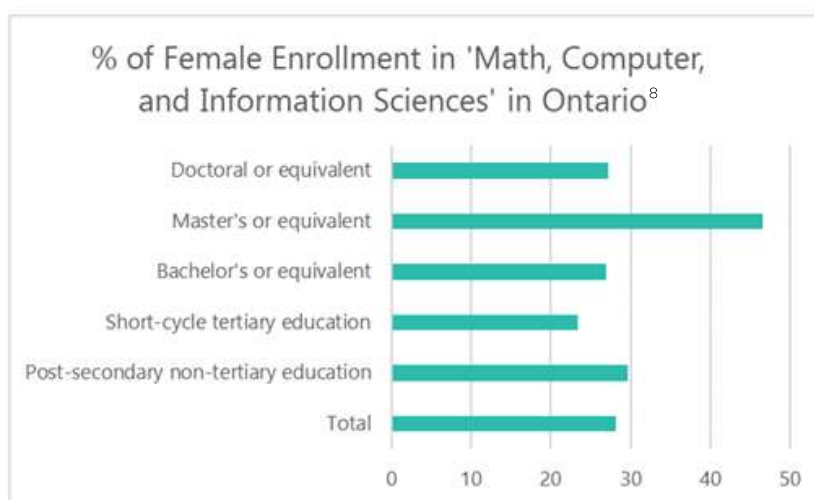
Fig. 4 While women are under-represented in Mathematics, computer and information sciences, their representation is increased at the Master's level, increasing to 47% female enrollment.[8] The improved enrollment at a higher education level may be a success for increasing female representation in a STEM field, however it may suggest that women continue in their education more than males because of a perceived need for women to be more knowledgeable before entering the labour force.

6 Statistics Canada, Table 37-10-0112-01 Postsecondary enrolments, by field of study, International Standard Classification of Education, age groups and sex.
7 Statistics Canada, 2016 Census of Population, Statistics Canada Catalogue Number 98-400-X2016298.
8 Statistics Canada, Table 37-10-0112-01 Postsecondary enrolments.

PROFILE OF AN ENTREPRENEUR

LEADER

FIRST-TIMER

LOW-INCOME

CONFIDENT

SUCCESSFUL

WEALTHY

STUDENT

MENTOR

MOTHER

YOUTH

EMPLOYEE

FOLLOWER

FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR

MENTEE

NERVOUS

EXPERIENCED

INDEPENDENT
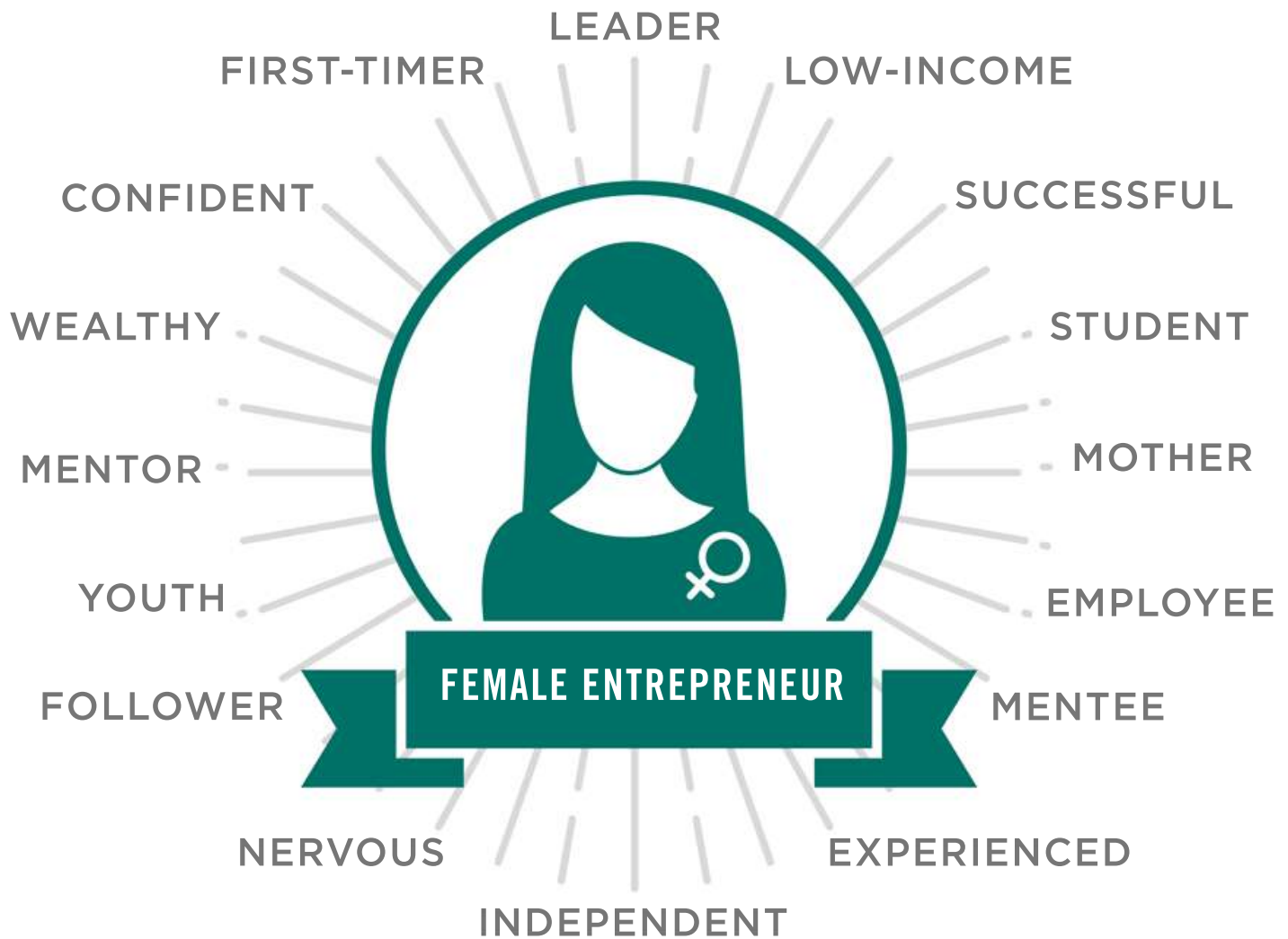
CHALLENGES

There are many challenges facing female entrepreneurs, especially those in the tech sector. One of the main challenges for female tech entrepreneurs is getting experience in the tech sector.

CHALLENGES TO ENTERING THE TECH SECTOR AS A FEMALE

Educational programs face more of a challenge with recruitment than with retention of female students at the post-secondary level. While, there are many programs in place to encourage female students to take tech-related courses at both the secondary and post-secondary levels, there are systemic barriers in place that deter female students from choosing tech as a career path. The main barrier is **imposter syndrome**, where female students feel as though they are unequipped to succeed in the field. The feeling that they need to be fully knowledgeable before they can enter the program limits female representation in educational programs, specifically physics and computer science programs. As female students are underrepresented in education, they are proportionately underrepresented in the workplace.

However, female tech workers are even more underrepresented in the workplace than in education due to imposter syndrome affecting them during their job search. This deterrent is evident as employers identify having higher female applicants for co-op positions than for **full-time positions**. They also note that female students show more interest in their companies at in-person campus job fairs than is represented in the applications they receive. This occurrence suggests that female students are more confident to apply to positions where the application process is more supported by the educational institution and the employers recognize their current knowledge-level.

While these challenges may suggest the need for a female-only tech job fair to increase female job seekers' chances at earning employment, employer participation is much lower at these events. Having to participate in multiple hiring events to increase female representation in their company is highly time and resource consuming, resulting in many employers only attending events that have the most potential candidates. Rather than split the available talent pool, lessening females' interactions with employers, employers need to be deliberate in their hiring of female candidates to improve their companies' representation at general hiring events. Additionally, those that attend **female-only job fairs** are limiting their opportunities to meet with employers as employers are then required to attend multiple job fairs to reach the full available talent pool for the area.

CHALLENGES OF RETAINING FEMALE TECH WORKERS

Many of the challenges facing female tech workers are related to the lack of role models and mentors they are exposed to. If they can't see someone like them in their goal position, they may be deterred from continuing their career in the sector. While interacting with female employees within their own company would be beneficial, it is also important that **female role models** are present in sector-based learning and networking events. Through consultations with both females working in tech and females leading tech companies, it was identified that the need for female-only tech events is not necessary. Those in the tech sector do not want to be further segregated in their education or in their networking, they would rather be viewed and treated as equals in their field. While the tech sector is still widely male-dominated, education and sector events can be deliberately and intentionally gender-balanced.

While Windsor-Essex has prominent and successful women working in and leading tech companies, there is a need to expand and diversify those that are given a platform to share their experiences as speakers and panelists at local events. Being able to hear from more women will not only lead to awareness of **varied experiences** and career paths, but it will place less pressure on those consistently asked to represent their sectors. The limited pool of 'go-to' women presents to the local tech community that these are the only women thriving in tech in Windsor-Essex, and mistakenly showcasing the lack of successful women in the local tech sector.

The limited pool of 'women in tech speakers' is reflective of the limited pool of mentors in our region. Those that are well-known in the community are **bombarded with requests** to be mentors to women beginning their careers in tech, however, they can only support so much while continuing to thrive in their own careers. Additionally, those that have considered the opportunity to be a mentor face challenges of their own, often relating to their limited time outside of the office being filled with family responsibilities, further learning periods, and necessary free time. It was also noted by some of those consulted that they are interested in mentoring but they simply didn't know how.

CHALLENGES TO BECOMING A FEMALE ENTREPRENEUR

Challenges facing female entrepreneurs are similar to that of women working in tech, including imposter syndrome and a lack of confidence. However, the lack of confidence is more prevalent in being able to pitch themselves as an entrepreneur and promote the value of their service/product. The feeling of needing to have an expertise in both business and tech hinders them from choosing to proceed with their idea. This is contrary to how many male entrepreneurs and tech workers are viewed, having the confidence to proceed in their career while knowing that they may not yet be the most knowledgeable in their fields. This finding is evident in the **low representation of women** in ideation and incubation programs for start ups, especially in the tech sector. While most male entrepreneurs begin their business with the motivation of high profit, women often start a business with the goal of making their own income source. On the ther hand, working as an employee is a more stable and appealing choice for many that fear the uncertainty of an income when operating your own business.

An additional challenge, for both male and female entrepreneurs in the region is the lack of awareness of resources and supports available in the community This results in entrepreneurs facing more struggles and barriers as they attempt to begin their companies without support from service providers in the community.

CHALLENGES TO SUCCEEDING AS A FEMALE TECH ENTREPRENEUR

Like women working in tech, female tech entrepreneurs face the same challenge of a lack of diverse female mentors in the community. This barrier is especially prevalent for those looking to grow their companies into high profit corporations as the majority of entrepreneurs in high-money industries are male. As the majority of **investors,** locally and nationally, are male, there is a need to diversify investment networks to in turn diversify investment portfolios. Additionally, there is a need to clarify the seed funding process to new entrepreneurs in our area, identifying the process and supports available in the community.

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CHALLENGES TO BECOMING A FEMALE ENTREPENEUR IN WINDSOR-ESSEX

There is a stigma within and outside of Windsor-Essex that it is not a risk-taking community. Those working in service providing organizations and investment networks recognize the fear of starting their own business in both male and female clients, although it is more prevalent among females. For those looking to start a business in the tech sector, there is the barrier of Windsor-Essex regarding itself as a 'blue-collar' community with many companies disregarding the need for technology to be incorporated into their business. The fear that Windsor-Essex is a **slow business community** with limited customer opportunities is also present amongst entrepreneurs. The stigma related to WIndosr-Essex' tech sector has a wider impact on entrepreneurs as the available talent, including recent graduates, are in high-demand and hard to come by with many leaving the region for more tech-centric areas of the country. Without strong examples of our tech ecosystem, the brain drain will continue to affect not only currently operating companies but future startups as well.

Specific barriers that are present in Windsor-Essex include: the lack of non-English entrepreneurial services, needed to support the large **immigrant and newcomer** population looking to start their own businesses; the lack of start up programs for non-students, especially those in need of 'beginner' supports; and the lack of local chapters for tech-related associations, including women's networks and occupation-specific associations, creating an isolation factor for women working in and leading their own tech companies.

SUCCESSES

Those consulted identified successes in the community, including new role models, improved retention, new programming, and funding supports for our region.

SUCCESSES FOR FEMALES WORKING IN AND OWNING BUSINESSES IN TECH

The growing percentage of women entering tech-related education programs and careers was the most consistently identified success for the Windsor-Essex region. While there is still a need for female-focused recruitment, our local institutions have been successful in retaining female students in their programs better than they have at retaining male students. There is also an increasing representation of females in **co-operative education** programs. As co-op is becoming the most useful hiring method for local employers, it is also becoming the best form of exposure for female students looking to begin their career in the tech sector and gain work experience in their field. While developing a network is the most important step in searching for a job, co-op can be an effective step to gaining experience with multiple local companies and meeting contacts that can support them in their career. Co-op can be a beneficial for students looking to start their own businesses as they can gain experience in the sector they are looking to start their business in, such as automotive manufacturing, agriculture, or automation. During a co-op experience, students can identify the needs of local companies that students could address through their future entrepreneurial work.

The need for a network to support someone's career is also present for entrepreneurs.

Those that participate in entrepreneurship programs, including 'start up' or 'scale up' support, are able to develop a network amongst the other entrepreneurs in the program. However, females are more successful at networking with their peers in this setting than their male counterparts. Specific successes identified for women in tech include: Nerd Olympics promotes male allyship and provides informal networking opportunities; Build a Dream events improved parental support for female children to enter tech fields and entrepreneurship as careers; and Windsor Essex County Catholic District School Board's all-female grade nine technology class exposes young girls to technology subjects and improves their confidence to enroll in more tech-related courses in the future.

An overall success in the community is that males early in their careers, in both tech and entrepreneurship, are acting as **allies** for their female counterparts and are supportive in developing inclusive workplaces for everyone.

SUCCESSES FOR THE COMMUNITY

There are many positive characteristics of the local tech and entrepreneurial ecosystem in Windsor-Essex. Our location allows for potential cross-border collaboration, for both entrepreneurs and service providers to support our wider tech and entrepreneurship ecosystem. While Windsor-Essex has a reputation of being non-risk takers, there is less of a risk for starting a business in our region because of **lower overhead costs** than other 'entrepreneurial' cities such as Waterloo or Toronto. Essex County, as a rural region, is a beneficial for entrepreneurs to operate a business due to lower rent and operating costs, shorter business hours, and short commute times for those looking to live and operate their business in the same area.

With multiple service providers in the region, entrepreneurs with varying needs can be supported, including with workshops, investment support, financial incentives, and one-on-one counselling. Changes in government funding may have a lessened impact on entrepreneurs as they are able to find support from multiple organizations in the community. The most important service provided was consistently identified as advisory services and **one-on-one counselling**, helping entrepreneurs in receiving support specific to their business stage and sector.

Specific successes identified for the community include: EPICentre services and their contributions to the entrepreneurship ecosystem locally; Manufacturing Day exposes young students to careers in local technology-related companies and what needs they serve in the community; WEST's support for employers looking to hire qualified staff; local First Robotics programs and their encouragement of female students to actively participate in STEM; and the multiple Google Developer outlets, including the Women Techmakers, supporting those entering careers in tech.

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BEST PRACTICES

There are many community-based initiatives to support entrepreneurship across the province. Much of what can be learned from other organizations focuses on how to further develop an entrepreneurial ecosystem led by community leadership and incorporating both men and women in events to better integrate women in their fields.

For service providers, it should be encouraged for clients to participate in multiple programs concurrently through business ideation stage to capital investment stage. Supporting them throughout their early entrepreneurship will act as continuous encouragement and advisement. This not only benefits clients, but also supports service providers with having consistent clientele for their programs. Additionally, encouraging clients to share their experiences with their networks will increase their clientele and streamline recruitment efforts. For those looking to provide female founder initiatives, they should ensure content is relatively identical for their program to that of programs with wider eligibility. It was found that marketing and running programs for **women only** resulted in more application interest, and in turn more female founder clients within their organization. Those serving female entrepreneurs should provide flexibility in their 'cohort-style' programs' timelines, allowing founders to determine their own start and end dates, as well as removing restrictions for founders to work full-time out of their client work space. This flexibility will better support female entrepreneurs more than males due to family and employment responsibilities.

For those supporting women working in emerging technology fields, it may be more beneficial to organize and conduct networking and speaker events as 'gender-neutral', while ensuring that diverse women are equally represented in attendees, panelists, speakers, and facilitators. It was found that events or sessions named 'Women in Tech' were very underattended by males, with much of the discussion focused on how their gender has affected their education and careers. To improve both male and female attendance, activities should be marketed and conducted in a **gender-balanced** manner, emphasizing women's equitable expertise and contribution to their fields of work.

For communities looking to improve their local entrepreneurship ecosystem it is important to have **community leadership** play a role in the needs assessment, development, implementation, and sustainability of the initiatives. Collaboration and advocacy are necessary to have a sustainable approach and to create a long-standing support system for entrepreneurs in the community. It is also important to have mentors actively participating in the ecosystem, acting as role models, advisors, and advocates for expansion and diversification of local entrepreneurship.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Those consulted shared their suggestions and feedback for proposed opportunities to better serve women in tech and female entrepreneurs. Many of their suggestions related to the idea of incorporating community leadership into all initiatives and removing isolation and increasing confidence of women working in and leading tech companies.

HOW TO SUPPORT WOMEN IN TECH

To better support women working in tech, exposure to potential **role models and mentors** needs to be improved. While those working in tech identified they are uninterested in female-only training programs and events, it is important that women are equally and meaningfully present at these events and training programs. Women need to be equitably present as instructors, presenters, panelists, and keynote speakers. Those in tech-related positions felt that seeing diverse women represented on a panel equally with men at events was more beneficial then separating women from 'non-gendered' presentations. This allows for women working in tech to identify both male and female role models, removing the feeling of **isolation** that may be felt by some. Additionally, when presentations are named as 'Women in Tech', there tends to be very few male attendees. To **promote male allies and gender equality** in the tech sector it is important that women are not separated from those they work with and have more opportunities to interact with their colleagues in both formal and informal settings.

Encouraging all post-secondary students, especially those in business-related programs, to participate in **co-op experiences** throughout their education. Those in co-operative education programs often focus their experiential learning opportunities in business departments of companies, however it may also be beneficial for students to gain hands-on experience in other positions within an industry they would like to start a business in.

To promote entrepreneurship further at post-secondary institutions, **incorporation** of entrepreneurship courses needs to be done more wide-spread throughout post-secondary programs, including computer science, physics, engineering, and life sciences. There is also a need for more **accessibility** for entrepreneurship networking and speaker events, including livestream options for those unable to attend due to family obligations, employment schedules, physical disabilities, or transportation limitations. While those working in the tech industry saw no need for events, programs, or spaces **specifically for women**, early female entrepreneurs saw them as beneficial to developing a network, removing the feeling of isolation, and for finding supportive colleagues, especially in a smaller community like Windsor-Essex.

Women's only cohorts through entrepreneurship programming, such as Venture Women through the EPICentre, are also useful to remove intimidation factors for first time entrepreneurs, especially those facing imposter syndrome. Women's only cohorts allow for organic networking with others that may have a similar perspective and experience as theirs, as well as the potential for comradery and **peer bonding** that can support all entrepreneurs.

Women are also more successful at using their cohorts as a network than males. Women only cohorts can also be developed through service providers that don't provide 'cohort-style' programming by bringing their female clients together on a regular basis, such as organizing speaker and networking events or workshops for their female clients.

However, there was a benefit to have both female and male **external advisors** for various business and technology support.

Increasing opportunities to obtain investments for female-run companies is needed in our region where there is presently a lack of capital investment available. Bringing in **outside investors** for opportunities, including pitch competitions, will increase the amount of capital investment to local entrepreneurs. It will also increase the opportunities for female entrepreneurs to meet and work with **female investors** from other communities.

HOW TO SUPPORT THE COMMUNITY'S ENTREPRENEURSHIP ECOSYSTEM

Improving community supports for entrepreneurship

Service providers need to have an intentional hiring initiative to employ female advisors and board members to ensure that women are well represented within their staff. Not only will it improve female representation within the entrepreneurship ecosystem, it will provide a female perspective to starting and operating a business within Windsor-Essex for their clients.

To create a physical presence for the local entrepreneurship ecosystem, many of those consulted suggested the benefit of an **open work space** in both the city and the county that is equally available to the public, including non-students and all genders. The open work space, while providing 'hot desk' services, should also have other services needed by those running their businesses with few or no employees, such as printing, photography studio access, workshop and event access, and a work space equipped with tools, including a 3D printer. These services may be provided through a membership plan, with tiered plans varying in cost to members based on services used. Workshops and courses should be made available on a regular basis at varying times of day and on weekends, with topics including: business-related subjects (legal, accounting, taxes, marketing, sales, and branding); professional development (negotiation, leadership and management); and career development (pitching yourself, communication, confidence and self-promotion of your work).

With open work space, including meeting rooms and co-working space, there is increased potential for organic collisions between members, supporting potential networking, collaboration, and problem solving. An open workspace provides a place of work for those that typically work from home or in public settings like coffee shops. It would provide those in public who are curious about entrepreneurship as a career to see what services are available in the community and meet current entrepreneurs. The space should also house service provider offices, whether as a satellite office or main location, so their clients, or future clients, can access their programs and resources. It will boost the effectiveness of referrals by improving service provider understanding of available services in the community, while limiting the effort of clients to visit different providers without the need to travel to multiple office locations across the region. Providing both start up and scale up services to entrepreneurs fills a gap in the community for programs with wider eligibility. There should also be rental space available for entrepreneurs looking to open a physical location for their business, as well as a pop-up location for short term rent that will provide businesses with the opportunity to test a physical location of their business. The facility can act as a 'one stop shop' for those interested in becoming an entrepreneur but are not sure where to start. It will showcase the variety of supports in the community, giving insight and direction to

For the space to be a neutral support for the community, it is important that leaders and decision-makers in the community are financially invested in the facility, as well as play a leadership and advocacy role in its sustainability. With community leadership, including prominent entrepreneurs, community advocates, educators, and municipal representatives, having decision-making capacity to create tangible outcomes that will improve the local entrepreneurial ecosystem.

A community steering committee for our local entrepreneurial ecosystem will also help to drive our region forward. With a unified effort, there will be less 'working in silos' and more collaborative efforts to remove redundancy and improve referrals between providers to best serve the community. A steering committee will support the improvement of current services, while removing the need to create new supports. Those consulted, including service providers, employers, employees, and entrepreneurs, felt there was no need for additional service providers or programs in the region, but rather improvements and expansions needed to serve a wider scope of clients locally. Like our community presence at the Detroit Auto Show, our community ambassadors need to work together to grow our local ecosystem through the creation of tangible actions, not just promotion of our community's strengths.

To ensure that community supports are accessible to more aspiring and thriving female entrepreneurs, service providers may need to **expand their services** to be more customer-friendly. For service providers that require their program participants to work out of their office may consider changing their time requirements to better serve clients with children, lessening their need for childcare to participate in the program. Additionally, providing service hours in the evening may better serve those with full-time employment during the day.

Many entrepreneurs noted the need for increased **one-on-one support**, allowing for more individualized support for clients, specific to the sector they want to enter and the development stage their business is at. There is a need for entrepreneurial **services available to newcomers**, with resources for starting a business in Canada, referrals to additional support services, and services provided in languages other than English, including French and Arabic.

The final recommendation for the community is to begin and/or expand their **data collection** regarding entrepreneurs, especially those using local service providers. A lack of local data on entrepreneurs in our community hinders the abilities of local service providers to effectively serve their clients and fill gaps in service. While many providers do not currently capture information on their clients' gender, age, citizenship, or race with the intention of not wanting their clients to fill that these factors affect the services they receive, it limits the information that is known about local entrepreneurs. In order to promote the successful entrepreneurs in our community, as well as identify under-served and under-performing groups, we need to have accurate and useful data that can be shared with the public to address the wider needs of the entrepreneurship ecosystem in Windsor-Essex.

CONCLUSION

While the presence of women is slowly increasing in tech companies and startups, there is still much to be done to improve our local tech and entrepreneurship ecosystems. While many of our recent successes are related to available programming in our region, there is still the present challenge of ensuring that women feel confident and knowledgeable when entering the field of emerging technologies. Community-based initiatives, in line with the needs of both women working in and leading companies in tech, are important to increase the number of women in these positions. Focusing on increasing the participation of role models, increasing women's access to capital investment, and improving flexibility in service provider supports are integral to serving the needs, and filling gaps, in community supports for women in emerging technologies.

Photo Credit: Vicki Bartel

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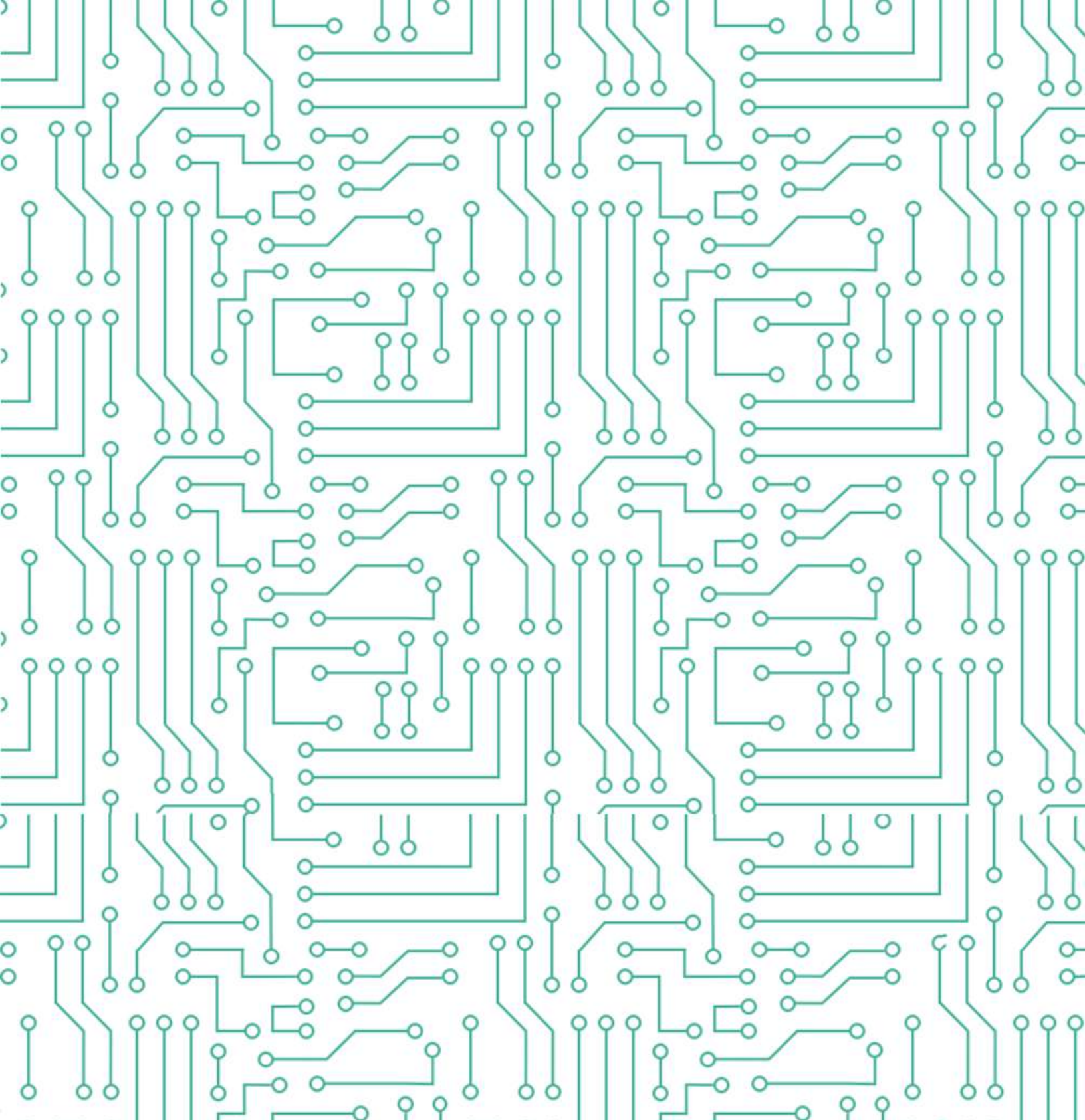WOMEN IN STEM
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