

# **WREN Summit: Women in the Workforce**

## **Summary of Proceedings**

**April 2017**

On April 3, 2017, WREN convened a “Women in the Workforce” Summit to review the current status of women’s role in the workforce in South Carolina, to consider the benefits of increasing women’s participation in the workforce, and to highlight promising strategies to realize those benefits. The speakers and audience represented diverse industries and businesses, educational institutions, research and policy institutions, non-profit organizations, and advocates. This report summarizes the discussions and emerging recommendations, primarily those that emerged from the presentation and plenary panel discussions.<sup>1</sup>

### **I. Executive Summary**

Women in South Carolina work, and they work hard – on the job, in their homes, and in their communities. However, a variety of barriers still impede women from thriving in diverse industries and occupations, which has negative repercussions for the economic well-being of individuals and families and for South Carolina’s economic prosperity. There is tremendous potential for women to advance within South Carolina’s economy. A new study shows that if women increased their workforce participation from the current level of 48.3% to 54% by 2025, particularly within occupations that are facing a worker shortage, this could generate \$5.2 billion in new annual economic activity for the state.<sup>2</sup>

Fulfilling this potential requires doing more than business as usual. Employers, educators, public institutions, and individuals all have a role to play to prepare and equip women of all backgrounds to thrive in the state’s workforce. Employers can take innovative measures to recruit a more diverse workforce and board, promote a culture and corporate practices that will retain and advance diverse employees, and ensure fair treatment and compensation for all employees. Educators can prepare girls and young women for occupations that are growing in our state, including healthcare, educational services, and mathematical and computer services. Women can pursue more training and opportunities for leadership, including running for office and serving on corporate boards. Public policies can help in a variety of ways, by funding educational and training programs, incentivizing employers to diversify the workforce, improving access to paid sick leave, and helping to fill market gaps, such as affordable, accessible and high-quality childcare. Innovative public/private partnerships can leverage diverse funding and interests toward a common goal.

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<sup>1</sup> The views and opinions expressed in this report do not necessarily reflect the official policies or positions of the summit speakers or their employers.

<sup>2</sup> “Solving the South Carolina Labor Shortage: The Economic Impact of Increasing Women’s Participation in the Workforce,” Division of Research, Darla Moore School of Business at the University of South Carolina, April 2017.

Equipping women to thrive in South Carolina’s workforce requires a holistic and intergenerational approach. Women in our state have diverse backgrounds, circumstances, qualifications, and preferences for work, so there is no “one size fits all” solution. In South Carolina, about 20% of women live in poverty, and women are more than 70% of the low-wage workforce (203,900 women), so it is crucial to consider the range of needs and skills that women in different circumstances have. Health care was a particular emphasis of discussion. A healthy population is a healthy workforce, and women often bear the burden of keeping others healthy as well. In order to ensure economic development leads to economic mobility, special efforts should be made to reach underserved populations in both urban and rural areas and move women into higher-skilled and higher-wage work. A two-generation approach that reaches both children and their parents with developmental and workforce support will help promote broad-based and sustainable economic development.

## **II. Key Findings and Observations from Panel Discussions**

***Solving the SC Labor Shortage: The Economic Impact of Increasing Women’s Participation in the Workforce***, Presentation by Dr. Joseph Von Nessen, Darla Moore School of Business, University of South Carolina

See Executive Summary [here](#).

See Full Report [here](#).

- Women are more likely than men to be out of the labor force in South Carolina at any age.
- Gender differences vary significantly by occupation and by industry. Most occupations that are traditionally male-dominated still remain male-dominated (with the notable exception of the military).
- The gender wage gap, while significant, has decreased since 2005 to 2015: from 67% in 2005 to 73% in 2015.
- Race compounds gender wage disparities. For example, although white women working full-time earned approximately 74% of white men working full-time in 2015, black women working full-time earned just 53% of white men working full-time during the same year.
- SC women are more highly educated than SC men; however, a 22% pay gap persists even within occupations with the highest educational requirements in the state.
- After controlling for race, occupation, nativity, moving status and age, women working full-time still earn lower annual salaries than men – an estimated \$15,861 per year less.
- SC’s labor market has tightened, generating a worker shortage. Women could fill this gap. If women increased workforce participation from 48.3% to 54%, \$5.2 billion in new annual economic activity could be generated. This amounts to 61,000 jobs and \$2.9 billion in labor income.

***Supporting Women in the Workplace: Panel Discussion***

Moderator: Ann Marie Stieritz, Chief Impact Officer, Liberty Fellowship

Panelists:

- Dr. Christine Crawford, Owner/Operator, D&G Management
- Lou Kennedy, Owner, Nephron Pharmaceuticals
- Laura Varn, former Vice President of Human Resources for Santee Cooper
- Mary Beth Westmoreland, Chief Technology Officer, Blackbaud

Representatives from multiple industries discussed the benefits of diversifying their workforce. Some of the companies in the first panel have taken bold measures to increase the representation of women at various levels in their workforce. High-level commitment from the top echelons of leadership for advancing and giving women opportunities within the company is one ingredient for success. Concerted efforts to diversify a traditionally male-dominated workforce have required using different channels to recruit (e.g. [southcarolinadiversity.com](http://southcarolinadiversity.com)), putting together more diverse hiring teams, and offering mentoring and leadership programs for women and minorities who work within the company.

Workplace benefits are an important factor in recruiting and retaining women (as well as men). One of the company representatives described a recent update to company benefits, including a 12-week paid parental leave program and a generous paid time off program that gives parents and caregivers more flexibility to work and care for their families and is highly valued as an incentive for employees to stay with the company. A small food service business offers flexible scheduling options for women, which helps them accommodate school and family obligations at different stages of their careers.

Panelists also acknowledged the challenges that exist for women in their businesses. For at least two of the companies at the table, female representation and influence thin at higher ranks of the corporation. Women are not always encouraged to take on higher-level positions, or they do not feel that they can adequately fulfill both familial and professional responsibilities at higher levels. There also is gender segregation within the companies: while overall female participation is improving, women are less well-represented in technical or engineering positions. Gender gaps are also stark at the board level: among 43 publicly-traded companies in SC, [20 do not have any women on boards](#). Thirty percent female participation/leadership on boards seems to be a “tipping point” for achieving the positive benefits of diverse or integrated leadership.

Panelists and audience members discussed the roles of business, government, and culture/societal norms in lowering the barriers to women’s workforce participation. Speakers acknowledged that there are times when women do not advocate for themselves as much as they could. For example, women are more likely to wait to be asked to take leadership positions or join boards, when in fact those invitations are likely to come within networks where women are not well-represented. Training can make a difference for both employers and employees, such as leadership training for high-potential talent within companies, and training for employers on recognizing and overcoming unconscious bias.

While some panelists and audience members expressed skepticism about government regulation, others acknowledged that regulation may level the playing field for employers. Regulation can compel businesses to be able to support more generous compensation and benefits. For example: if a restaurant voluntarily pays its employees more than minimum wage, this doesn't mean customers are willing to pay that difference, and all other things being equal, they will buy food from the restaurant that offers better prices. The incentives just aren't there. Similarly, a small-to-medium size firm may not have the economies of scale to provide generous benefits to its workers. It will only be able to do so if regulations force it to do so, and the costs are passed to the customer. If customers (and the general public) change their expectations about what is fair and what they are willing to pay for services, incentives to change such practices may shift.

Panelists recommended that women seeking professional advancement be confident, bold, passionate, and unafraid to take a chance and use their voice. They should make sure that they make their value proposition clear to their employer. Panelists recommended that employers who want to help women thrive in the workforce should mentor and/or sponsor female employees, and not be afraid to ask employees directly, "what can I do to help you achieve your goals?" Companies should survey their employees about the factors that contribute to their retention or advancement in the workplace, and be willing to fix problems. This benefits individual employees and the entire business.

### ***Educating and Training Women for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Workforce: Panel Discussion***

Moderator: Ann Warner, WREN

Panelists:

- Elizabeth Colbert-Busch, Executive Director of Corporate Business Development, Clemson University Restoration Institute
- Moryah Jackson, Assistant Director of Diversity, Inclusion and Community Engagement, University of South Carolina
- Eddie Massey, Executive Director, Massey Global Foundation (formerly Artificial Intelligence in Action)
- Susan Pretulak, Vice President of Economic Development and Workforce Competitiveness, SC Technical College System

Women are more highly educated than men in South Carolina. Yet, they are not necessarily prepared or educated for jobs with the most opportunity for growth and compensation. And differences in education *do not* explain the gender wage gap.

Panelists, representing higher educational institutions, apprenticeship/training programs, and grassroots STEM programs, discussed the opportunities to educate women and girls for a 21<sup>st</sup> century workforce. All of the panelists discussed the importance of reaching students at all levels with information about the opportunities within South Carolina's workforce and how they could receive training and education that will prepare them for fields with the most growth. Students to some extent still fall back on training and opportunities that are more "traditional" for their gender,

and their horizons can be expanded through targeted training and apprenticeship programs. Public-private partnerships are offering new opportunities for students to gain marketable and valuable skills and for companies to cultivate talent. South Carolina's apprenticeship programs have had success in reaching and training women. An emerging area is for women to gain multiple marketable skills through "stacked certificates" -- certificates, certifications, licenses, badges, apprenticeships and more that reflect an array of knowledge, skills and abilities.

Employers and policymakers are also increasingly recognizing the importance of upstream approaches, investing in people when they are still very young children to prepare them for a healthy and productive life (e.g. "Cradle to Career" programs). Early childhood development and early education are strong indicators of overall community well-being and economic growth. Grassroots educational programs can help students gain exposure to STEM skills and career opportunities. In order to maximize the potential of future generations, it is also important to use a holistic approach, investing in children's teachers and their parents and other family members.

Panelists also echoed some of the themes from the previous panel, including the importance of helping employees balance work and family obligations by providing family and sick leave, as well as access to affordable childcare. This is also not only an issue of policy, but also workplace culture. Many female employees who start out interested in STEM fields may find themselves alienated by a male-dominated culture. Panelists discussed that potential employees need to be better prepared for this cultural shift, but also companies need to make accommodations to be welcoming and inclusive.

Examples of good/promising programming include:

- [StartSMART](#), a program that assists parents in preparing their children for kindergarten, and
- [Women LEAD](#), a six-week educational leadership-training program at the University of South Carolina where a diverse community of undergraduate women learn about their capabilities as leaders.
- [Massey Global Innovation Foundation's](#) efforts to teach STEM and coding skills to underserved youth.
- [Apprenticeship Carolina](#), a program of the SC Technical College System, works to ensure all employers in South Carolina have access to the information and technical assistance they need to create demand-driven registered apprenticeship programs.

### ***Panel III: Breaking Barriers to Workforce Participation***

Moderator: Anita Garrett, Director of Financial Stability, United Way of the Midlands

Panelists:

- Dr. Deborah Billings, Director, Choose Well Initiative
- Malissa Burnette, Attorney and Partner, Callison Tighe & Robinson
- Dr. Stephanie Cooper-Lewter, Vice President of Initiatives & Public Policy, Sisters of Charity Foundation

- Dr. Amy Crockett, Attending Physician in Maternal Fetal Medicine, Greenville Health Systems
- Tamara King, Community Relations Director, Richland Library

This panel addressed the range of social and economic determinants of workforce participation and economic empowerment, including access to health and contraceptive care services, socioeconomic conditions, and legal issues.

A healthy workforce is essential for productivity and well-being. Health issues affect people’s ability to show up for and stay at work. Because women tend to be caretakers for children, elderly, and other family members, they often bear the burden of health care for the entire family. Health insurance, quality health care, and sick leave help women stay healthy and productive, but these are not always available or accessible. Two South Carolina initiatives are improving women’s access to contraceptive care and maternal health care. The [ChooseWell](#) initiative is a statewide initiative to decrease unintended pregnancies. Having control over the timing and spacing of pregnancy relates directly to ability to work and to general well-being of women and families. Maintaining a healthy pregnancy is also crucial to health and economic well-being. The [CenteringPregnancy](#) model is group-based prenatal care that has shown to be effective in improving clinical outcomes for mothers and babies. The model allows women to take their own health information and understand the importance of it; build relationships and increase social support with these groups; decrease isolation; participate in facilitated discussion within these groups to share fears and excitement; and provide patients with support from their community and not just medical care. While these initiatives operate within the health sector, they have important economic outcomes: when women are equipped with information, services, resources, and social support to maintain their health and the health of their families, they are better equipped to thrive in the workforce.

Poverty and economic mobility are important considerations in South Carolina, and it is important to ensure that economic growth is inclusive and broad-based. [In South Carolina, about 20% of women live in poverty, and women are more than 70% of the low-wage workforce \(203,900 women\)](#). Women’s concentration in the low-wage workforce contributes to the gender pay gap and economic insecurity. Lack of access to quality education, childcare, health care, and transportation are some of the many challenges that affect low-income women, in particular.

Women (and men) are also often lacking education on legal, fair, unfair, and illegal reasons for being fired or released from a job. South Carolina is a “right to work” state, and many of the laws that protect employees apply only to companies with 15 or more employees. Other federal laws only cover employees with 50 or more employees and for employees who have worked more than 1,000 hours, such as the Family Medical Leave Act (FMLA), which provides unpaid leave. South Carolina’s Human Affairs Commission and the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission are two agencies that can accept complaints from people who meet those qualifications. More advocacy and legislative change would be needed to increase protections for workers.

Panelists and audience members offered their perspectives on potential “game changers” to break these barriers:

- Value and promote diversity, inclusion, and equity within businesses and institutions.

- Expand access to high-quality education for all.
- Promote “soft skills,” such as communications and relationship-building, as a means to advancing in the workforce.
- Develop and implement two-generation or whole-family approaches that equip both parents and children with resources, information, and opportunities.
- Create conditions for women and men to choose health services and contraceptive methods that are right for them at particular life stages.
- Update laws and policies to protect women in the workforce from discrimination and harassment.
- Donate to organizations that are providing services to underserved populations and advocating for change.

### **III. Recommendations and Opportunities**

The following recommendations and opportunities emerged from discussions and from written contributions by participants during the Summit. They are organized into five different categories: individual-level opportunities, workplace practices and corporate policies, educational programs and policies, public policies and representation, and grassroots organizing and community services.

#### **Individuals**

- Network and get involved within the community you are interested in, including going outside of your comfort zone.
- Join professional organizations.
- Show employers that you are a problem-solver.
- Pursue new skills through strategies such as “stackable certificates” and leadership programs.
- Do your homework and negotiate: compare salaries with performance and experience in mind, and propose a salary.
- Pursue opportunities to sit on boards.
- Run for office or support candidates that you believe in.

#### **Workplace Practices and Corporate Policies**

- Adopt workplace policies that allow flexible scheduling, reasonable accommodations for temporary circumstances (e.g. pregnancy), and paid leave.
- Health insurance should cover access to a wide range of health services, including reproductive health care.
- Diversify the workforce using different strategies. Employers can challenge themselves to not hire only people who are “like” them by going beyond usual channels, and making sure hiring teams are diverse and include representation and active participation by women or minorities.

- Provide salary ranges in job postings and not require salary history from applicants, which helps to level the playing field.
- Diversifying boards has a proven business value. This may require going beyond usual channels for recruitment.
- Offer mentoring programs that pair women at different career stages to gain skills and opportunities.
- Keep educating employees to grow your business.

### **Educational Programs and Policies**

- Align educational training programs with job opportunities in South Carolina’s economy, including training in “non-traditional” occupations.
- Increase opportunities for girls and minorities to get access to STEM training.
- Offer apprenticeships, certificate programs that increase and diversify skills.
- Ensure that young people get information and support they need to prevent unintended pregnancies.

### **Public Policies and Political Representation**

- Increase access to resources, especially health care and transportation.
- Provide incentives to make childcare more available and affordable.
- Update laws and policies to protect women in the workforce from discrimination and harassment.
- Equalize school funding statewide.
- Promote more representation by women in elected office, particularly in the General Assembly.
- Increase accessibility, availability, and affordability of contraception. The [12-Month Contraceptive Supply bill](#) would help reduce unintended pregnancies.
- The [Pregnancy Accommodations Act](#) would help pregnant women work and maintain their health.
- The [Healthy Youth Act](#) would update South Carolina’s Comprehensive Health Education Act (CHEA) to ensure young people get access to evidence-based information to protect their health.

### **Grassroots Organizing and Community Services**

- Work with girls, boys, and their parents and teachers to expand what they think is possible for their lives, such as a career in aerospace or coding.
- Encourage and offer opportunities for women to support each other.
- Create networks for women to discuss challenges and develop solutions.
- Use individual and collective voice to advocate with elected officials to improve policies.
- Ensure that the voices of lower-income women are represented and heard.

**Additional Resources:** The following people and institutions facilitated skill-building or issue education sessions at the Summit and can be contacted for more information and resources:

- [MAC Approach](#): a female-owned career development company with over 12 years of specialized workshop leadership, coaching, and training.
- [The Jane Group](#): a female-owned professional development firm focused on leadership, inclusion, and women’s issues as business issues through leadership development programs, consulting, writing, and speaking.
- [NP Strategies](#): a veteran group of professionals from media, public policy, public relations and business backgrounds who offer strategic guidance and direction.
- [Thetyka Robinson](#), Community Engagement Consultant.
- [Center for Women](#): a non-profit organization that serves to help educate and advocate so that women in South Carolina have economic success and are leaders in their professional, community and personal lives.
- [Re-Source Solutions](#): a female-owned consulting company whose focus is on personal and professional growth and development.
- [South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy](#): The South Carolina Campaign to Prevent Teen Pregnancy (SC Campaign) was founded in 1994 to combat increasingly high rates of teen pregnancy in our state.
- [National Women’s Law Center](#): The Center has worked for more than 40 years to protect and promote equality and opportunity for women and families. We champion policies and laws that help women and girls achieve their potential at every stage of their lives — at school, at work, at home, and in retirement. Our staff are committed advocates who take on the toughest challenges, especially for the most vulnerable women.