LEAN IN NETWORK | Canada

2026 CALLS TO ACTION

Key Takeaways

1 Women are not asking for more confidence, they are asking for better systems

Support must show up during transition, complexity, and change — not only after success.

2 Leadership journeys are non-linear, but support structures are not

Current models fail to evolve with women's careers, identities, and responsibilities.

3 Belonging, continuity, and influence matter more than access alone

Participation without pathways and intersectionality leads to disengagement and burnout.

Calls to Action

1 Create spaces for career transitions, not only advancement

Support women through moments of change, uncertainty, and re-entry.

2 Build leadership communities that grow with women over time

Design spaces that evolve across early, mid, and later career stages.

3 Make identity and intersectionality the anchor, not an add-on

Design leadership and community spaces around lived experience from the start.

4 Build clear pathways to community before, during, and after participation

Ensure women can enter, stay connected, step back, and re-engage without friction.

5 Recognize invisible labour as leadership work

Name, value, and resource the invisible work that sustains teams and communities.

What Are Women Asking For

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CALLS TO ACTION: IN DETAIL

Lean In Canada surveyed women across Canada to understand what they really need and want to create more inclusive workplaces and enable them to realize their career potential.

450+ women responded to Lean In Canada's 2025 Canadian survey, forming the foundation for these 2026 Calls To Action:

Key Takeaways

1 Create spaces for career transitions, not only advancement

2 Build leadership communities that grow with women over time

3 Make identity and intersectionality the anchor — not an add-on

Survey Findings

Career transitions repeatedly emerged as moments of reduced support and belonging, particularly for women aged 30–44, a stage associated with overlapping career, caregiving, and identity shifts

What Women Can Do

- Seek out peer spaces that acknowledge transition as a leadership phase, not a setback
- Share non-linear career stories to normalize change, pause, and re-entry
- Advocate for support during periods of uncertainty, not only after stability is restored

What Organizations Can Do

- Design leadership and community spaces specifically for transition points
- Normalize non-linear career paths as a leadership reality
- Create structured re-entry and transition supports that reduce isolation

Survey Findings

- 67% of respondents had been connected to a women-focused leadership initiative for more than two years
- Despite this, perceived relevance of leadership programming declined with age and career stage, particularly for mid-career and senior women

What Women Can Do

- Name when programming no longer reflects the complexity of your role
- Seek spaces focused on judgment, influence, and decision-making — not only confidence
- Contribute in ways that align with capacity, without pressure to overextend

What Organizations Can Do

- Design leadership communities that evolve across early, mid, and later career stages
- Shift programming toward influence, complexity, and real decision-making
- Ensure senior women have spaces that support them, and not only expectations to mentor

Survey Findings

- Nearly 60% of respondents identified identity-rooted leadership and community spaces as a priority
- Women reported that inclusion language often existed without corresponding changes to structure, facilitation, or accountability — particularly for racialized, Indigenous, disabled, newcomer, and 2SLGBTQIA+ women

What Women Can Do

- Choose spaces that demonstrate psychological safety, not just representation
- Name when inclusion feels symbolic rather than structural
- Support and participate in communities designed around lived experience

What Organizations Can Do

- Co-design leadership spaces with women whose identities shape how power is experienced
- Treat intersectionality as a design requirement, not a program layer
- Invest in facilitators skilled in navigating power and difference in real time
- Measure inclusion through continuity, safety, and influence — not attendance alone

Key Takeaways

4 Build clear pathways to community before, during, and after participation

Survey Findings

- 48% of respondents had participated in at least one women-focused leadership or community initiative
- Disengagement was more often linked to unclear pathways than to a lack of interest

What Women Can Do

- Ask what comes next after programs or events, and name when pathways are unclear
- Re-engage at your own pace without assuming you've "missed your window"
- Support peers returning after pauses due to caregiving, burnout, or workload

What Organizations Can Do

- Design initiatives with clear entry, continuation, and re-entry pathways
- Reduce reliance on individual persistence to sustain connection
- Invest in coordination, communication, and follow-up as essential infrastructure

5 Recognize invisible labour as leadership work

Survey Findings

- Women consistently described carrying essential relational and coordinating labour that was rarely named or valued (for example, organizing staff events or leading committees)
- Burnout and disengagement were linked to absorbing this invisible labour alongside formal roles, without recognition or support

What Women Can Do

- Name relational, coordinating, and care labour as leadership work
- Set boundaries around unpaid or invisible labour
- Share responsibility for sustaining relationships and momentum

What Organizations Can Do

- Explicitly recognize relational labour in role expectations and workload planning
- Resource this work rather than relying on goodwill
- Design leadership structures that distribute and sustain this labour over time

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About Lean In Canada

Lean In helps women achieve their ambitions and companies create equal and inclusive workplaces.

Lean In was launched in 2013, inspired by the groundbreaking best-seller by former Facebook COO Sheryl Sandberg. Today, more than 100,000 community members in 183 countries have started a Lean In Circle, and new ones are starting every day. Lean In Circles provide a space for women to come together to learn new skills, support each other, and be unapologetically ambitious. We provide members with the resources they need to create connection, grow as leaders, and actively pursue their goals.

Lean In Canada is a volunteer-led community of more than 8500 professional women empowering each other to build purposeful and fulfilling careers. Lean In Canada collaborates with Lean In City Networks in Toronto, Vancouver, Calgary, Edmonton and Ottawa to offer free Circle community groups and resources to women and organizations nationwide. Lean in Canada is grateful for the generous support of Women and Gender Equality Canada (WAGE) enabling us to expand our reach and services to empower more Canadian women.

Women and Gender Equality Canada | Femmes et Égalité des genres Canada | Canada

Visit leanincanada.com for more information or email info@leanincanada.com.