

womenAccelerate

Powering Ideas. Propelling Leaders.



This is just the beginning

As part of EdelGive Foundation's continued commitment to advancing women's leadership, **Stree-Leads' womenAccelerate** has been launched to support and accelerate the advancement of women into leadership roles within the private sector. This initiative tackles critical barriers to gender equity in the workplace, aiming to provide women with the resources and opportunities needed to rise to the top.

Despite gender diversity being a recognized driver of organizational and societal progress, women remain underrepresented in leadership roles across India.

womenAccelerate is here to bridge this gap, empowering women professionals with mentorship, resources, and a platform for visibility and ownership.

As found in the EdelGive report, advancing gender equality in leadership could unlock untapped potential, boosting India's GDP and driving progress.

The next phase will see shortlisted participants engaging in a tailored virtual mentorship program, connecting with senior leaders who will guide them in scaling and refining their ideas. The goal is clear: to move from insight to real-world impact, creating measurable shifts in how women ascend to leadership roles.

womenAccelerate is more than an initiative—it's a movement aimed at redefining leadership with women at the center. Through this platform, we've invited women across sectors to submit innovative ideas for dismantling barriers to leadership, particularly in industries like finance and economics, where gender representation remains heavily skewed.

An expert jury panel has reviewed these submissions based on innovation, relevance, and impact potential. The most compelling ideas have been selected for inclusion in this compendium, offering a vision of women's leadership shaped by women themselves.



How *womenAccelerate* took shape ◆◆◆◆



The *womenAccelerate* compendium is an initiative born from a national call to action. We invited India Inc. to demonstrate how they are making inclusion real—through measurable outcomes and cultural shifts.

A rigorous evaluation process ensured that each submission was authentic, innovative, and impactful, laying the foundation for an initiative that drives meaningful change in women's leadership.

THE PROCESS

Open Call for Entries

Over 100 aspiring women changemakers submitted bold ideas to shape the future of leadership.



01

Initial Screening

From all entries, 45 ideas were carefully filtered and evaluated by our expert Jury.



02

Final Selection

The top 5 transformative ideas were selected for their potential to drive real systemic change.



03

The Winning Entries

Chosen by our Jury, these entries highlight some of the strongest voices driving gender inclusion in the workplace.



**Amrita Singh
Shrivastava**

PlanetSpark

A public speaking educator and certified content writer, Amrita helps young learners find confidence through storytelling and stagecraft. She believes every voice matters, and every girl deserves to use hers.



**Pallavi Sobti
Rajpal**

Utthan

Joint CEO of Utthan, Pallavi drives gender justice and inclusive community empowerment across Gujarat. Since 1981, Utthan's brave initiatives have reshaped local leadership and social equity, giving many young girls the opportunity to grow. She stands firm in the belief that equality starts with bold conversations.



**Sanjana
Adinarayan**

Edelweiss Asset

Management Limited

With a foundation in Economics and Commerce, Sanjana excels at transforming data into actionable strategies. Her work in research, pricing for small-scale businesses, and SOP development sharpens profitability and growth. Her belief in gender-balanced leadership drives her to create spaces where women can thrive.



Saumya Chaudhary

Yes Bank Ltd.

As a Product Manager at YES BANK, Saumya bridges innovation with user-centric design. An entrepreneur at heart, she grew Backyardblender into a 100k+ strong community, collaborating with brands like Amazon and Flipkart. She leads with the conviction that women belong at the forefront of change.



Shreya Kaushal

Yes Bank Ltd.

An XLRI alumna, Shreya brings over seven years of experience in credit risk and rural banking. At YES BANK, she develops financial solutions for underserved communities. Her work reflects her belief: empowering women uplifts entire economies.

Amrita Singh Shrivastava

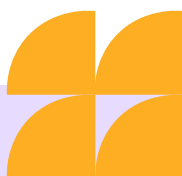
→ PlanetSpark

Key Challenges

Women who take extended career breaks, particularly homemakers, often face significant barriers when re-entering the workforce. These challenges include outdated skills, diminished confidence, lack of professional networks, and limited access to leadership roles. Many organisations do not have structured pathways for reintegrating experienced women professionals, leading to an underutilization of talent and a gender gap in leadership.

Featured Idea

A Tailored Career Reintegration Program designed to support women returning to the workforce after a career break. The initiative would focus on skill development, confidence-building, mentorship, networking, and flexible work arrangements to facilitate a smooth transition back into leadership roles.



Detailed Outline of the Idea

Skill Development and Reskilling

- Personalised assessments to evaluate existing skills and knowledge gaps.
- Targeted courses in digital literacy, leadership, project management, and industry-specific skills to align with market needs.
- Practical training sessions to ensure women are equipped with up-to-date competencies for modern workplaces.

Confidence Building and Leadership Training

- Workshops and coaching sessions on self-esteem, public speaking, and leadership development.
- Activities focused on self-awareness, communication, and leadership styles.
- Exposure to role models and success stories to inspire women to pursue leadership positions.

Mentorship and Networking

- A structured mentorship program connecting participants with industry professionals for career guidance.
- Networking events to introduce participants to potential employers and expand professional connections.
- Access to peer support groups to foster collaboration and shared learning.

Flexible Return-to-Work Opportunities

Promote part-time roles, remote work, and job-sharing to ease re-entry for women balancing personal responsibilities. Partner with flexible employers to support a smooth transition back to work.

Collaboration with Employers

Work with companies to create returnships and mid-career internships, while advocating inclusive hiring and showcasing the value of diverse life experiences.

Smart Implementation

Leverage strategic partnerships for funding and job placements, offer sector-specific upskilling, and track progress via assessments and mentorship. Share success stories to inspire participation and employer buy-in.

This holistic approach empowers women to rejoin the workforce with renewed confidence, equipping them with the tools, support, and flexibility needed to thrive. At the same time, it enables organizations to tap into a highly skilled, motivated, and often overlooked talent pool — driving both inclusivity and business performance.

Pallavi Sobti Rajpal

↳ Utthan

Key Challenges

Limited resources for smaller organisations:

While intent and policies exist in small organisations, particularly in the development sector, the lack of readily available funds hampers efforts for providing additional flexibility.

Operational Challenges During Maternity Leave:

When an employee takes extended leave, managing project deadlines and deliverables becomes difficult. Given that a single team member may be responsible for up to 10 villages, their absence creates a significant gap, particularly in the social sector, where personal relationships with communities are essential.

Balancing Flexibility in Field-Based Roles:

In organizations like Utthan, where much of the work is field-based, hybrid work is not always a feasible option. Striking a balance between fieldwork and flexibility remains a pressing concern.

Lack of Donor Support for Policy Implementation:

Donor reluctance to fund specific policies. Instead, donors expect all operational costs, including flexibility policies, to be absorbed within the organisation's existing budget. This constraint further limits the ability to enhance support structures for employees.

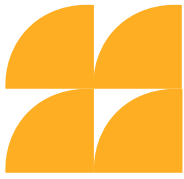
Featured Idea

As the CEO of a social sector organisation dedicated to equity and creating democratic spaces, I feel it is important to empower new mothers to return to work so as to provide them a smooth journey towards leadership. To support their transition, I envision the **"Empower Her Return"** initiative—a program that would respect the unique challenges of social sector work, offering flexible structures and a supportive communities that recognizes the invaluable contributions of working mothers. This would directly address the guilt, lack of flexibility, and limited support

that new mothers face. By offering flexibility, mentorship, and donor-backed policies, we would help mothers re-enter the workplace with confidence, redefining motherhood as an asset that enriches an individual and thus the organization. This initiative is about more than just supporting individual women—it's about building a resilient, inclusive workplace that upholds values of equity, collaboration, and sustainability.

When we invest in new mothers, we invest in future leaders who bring strength, perspective, and commitment to our work. Through "Empower Her Return," we can create a thriving workplace where all employees feel seen, supported, and inspired to grow.

- **Flexibility and Transition Plans:** The demanding schedules in the social sector can make returning to work challenging for new mothers. A key part of the programme would be providing flexible re-entry plans. This approach would allow mothers to return gradually, perhaps starting with reduced hours or hybrid roles, with the freedom to adjust their schedules as they grow more comfortable. By prioritizing flexibility, we send a clear message that their well-being, growth, and contributions are deeply valued.
- **Community Support and Mentorship:** In the social sector, collaboration is our strength. Through mentorship programs, "Empower Her Return" would offer new mothers a robust support network where they can connect with women who've balanced work and motherhood in this field. These mentors would provide practical guidance and emotional support, helping returning mothers feel understood and valued. Additionally, peer circles would foster solidarity among new mothers, allowing them to share experiences and strategies, building a genuine community of support.



Policy Adjustments and Childcare Solutions:

Recognizing the financial constraints, “Empower Her Return” advocates for donor-supported, family-friendly policies such as childcare subsidies and flexible work hours. Partnering with donors would allow us to offer resources that ease the logistical burdens on new mothers, so they can focus fully on their roles. For example, subsidies or partnerships with local childcare providers could make a substantial difference. This level of support would not only benefit mothers but also strengthen organisations by enhancing productivity and retention.

Donor Engagement and Advocacy: To make this vision a reality, we need our donors as partners. We would need to engage donors, showing them that supporting mothers is essential for our team’s morale and effectiveness. By illustrating how family-friendly policies drive mission success, we can encourage donors to see these as strategic investments.

Additional Insights on Implementation:

- **Strengthening Gender Equity Policies:** Organisations should develop clear gender equity policies that align with their mission and objectives. It is essential to build a strong case for these policies by demonstrating their benefits, such as enabling employees to continue contributing effectively even when on leave.
- **Clear Communication and Role Adjustments:** Effective communication, supported by well-defined guidelines, can help ensure that all team members understand the value of these policies. This approach prevents additional workload burdens and promotes a structural shift in responsibilities.

- **Budget Integration for Team Well-Being:**

To ensure long-term sustainability, organisations should integrate these policies into their regular budget planning. While funds are already allocated for team engagement activities, there should be a more intentional focus on budgeting for team well-being and fundamental commitments to employees.

- **Showcasing Impact Through Case Studies:**

Developing case studies that highlight the experiences of returning mothers and their contributions in the workplace can be a valuable tool for advocacy. Aligning these stories with SDG 5 can also make them more compelling for donors and stakeholders.

- **Regional Peer Support Circles:** Creating geographically based peer circles can foster stronger connections among employees. Since cultural contexts vary, these localized support networks can be more relatable and beneficial than broader, city-based networks.

- **Embedding a Peer-Driven Buddy System:**

A buddy system can serve as a natural support network within the organisation. Unlike traditional mentorship programs, this model is built on peer-to-peer support, where employees with similar experiences help each other organically. This structure does not require enforcement but can be seamlessly integrated into the organisation’s culture.

Sanjana Adinarayan

→ Edelweiss Asset Management Limited

Key Challenges

Inherent biases:

Unconscious and inherent biases still exist towards women, especially in male-dominated sectors.

Inconsistent engagement:

Many initiatives are sometimes driven more by the need to tick off a box than by genuine intention to create change. For example, you often see one-off sessions happening around women's days, led by women for women, but these are seasonal or rather opportunistic.

Resistance to Change:

Threat to men in leadership roles when more women enter these spaces.

Workload and Time Constraints:

People come to work to complete their tasks, and allocating time and energy to such initiatives isn't always feasible given the existing workload.

Featured Idea

As a young woman in finance, a field traditionally dominated by men, I encounter subtle gender biases and stereotypes in my everyday work. Below are a few innovative ideas that can work together. One of the best ways to understand and empathize with challenges that are unique to every individual is through shared stories and creating a sense of community. In my view, a community can be fostered through the following approaches:

- **Pairing with Leaders and Women's Leadership Circles:** Connect aspiring women leaders with mentors from diverse backgrounds in senior management and create small groups for women to share experiences, challenges, and strategies for overcoming biases.
- **Reverse Mentorship:** Encourage male leaders to learn from their female counterparts about gender biases and challenges, fostering empathy and support.

In addition, I believe that the key to create an environment that is conducive to employees across gender, age, backgrounds, etc. is to have open, equal and objective guidelines such that there is a mitigated scope for discrimination. Some ways it can be achieved are:

Leadership Pathways: Create transparent pathways for advancement that outline the skills and experiences needed for leadership roles.

Bias Training: Implement mandatory training for all employees on unconscious bias, emphasizing its impact on decision-making and leadership.

I believe women do not require any other special training or added skills relative to their male counterparts. All it takes is an opportunity and an environment which is conducive to providing such opportunities. In today's day and age, there are many men who champion women's rights just as dedicatedly as women. However, a lot of well-intentioned men who want to be inclusive may not be fully aware of the intricacies of the struggles faced by women. That is why reverse mentorship would be a very good practice where experiences can be shared with male leaders so they would also be incorporating some of the practices in their daily life. Secondly, an open pathway would enable men and women to do better in enhancing their skills and having a healthy competition to do what is required of their role without gender being an incriminating factor or roadblock to prove leadership qualities.

Additional Insights on Implementation:

- **Clear Goals:** The management committee along with the Human Resources department must establish long-term goals with a five-year vision and track yearly progress to stay on course. A well-defined program framework can be developed to guide these efforts.
- **Program Champions:** Corporates can identify individuals who embody and advocate for the program's vision, driving momentum and inspiring others.

Saumya Chaudhary

→ Yes Bank Ltd.

Key Challenges

Unconscious and inherent biases still exist towards women, especially in male-dominated sectors.

Featured Idea

An innovative idea to promote women's leadership in the private sector is the creation of a "**WINGS - Women in Growth and Success**" program.

Program Structure:

The WINGS program would be built around three pillars: personalized growth tracks, a 360-degree mentorship model, and a leadership sandbox for experiential learning. The objective is to equip women with the tools to overcome systemic barriers while fostering leadership development within the corporate environment.

1. Personalized Growth Tracks: Recognizing that women in different career stages have distinct needs, WINGS would offer three specific tracks:

- **Emerging Leaders (0-5 years of experience):** This track focuses on foundational leadership skills such as decision-making, negotiation, and public speaking, helping women build confidence as they navigate their early career.
- **Mid-Level Leaders (5-15 years):** Aimed at accelerating career growth, this track would offer coaching on strategic thinking, team management, and networking, while providing access to senior leaders for increased visibility.
- **Senior Leaders (15+ years):** Designed for women preparing for executive roles, this track emphasizes executive coaching, leading through change, and succession planning, ensuring participants are ready for the C-suite.

2. 360-Degree Mentorship Model: One of the core features of WINGS is its 360-degree mentorship model, which includes both traditional mentorship and reverse mentorship. In reverse mentorship, younger employees provide senior leaders with insights on

modern trends such as digital transformation and innovation, while senior leaders offer career guidance. Additionally, each participant would be paired with a career sponsor from senior leadership, whose role is to actively advocate for their career advancement. Sponsors ensure that women have opportunities to take on high-visibility assignments, receive promotions, and build executive presence.

3. Leadership Sandbox: A key differentiator of WINGS is its Leadership Sandbox, a virtual, risk-free environment where participants can practice leadership through simulated business challenges. In these scenario-based exercises, women would tackle real-world issues like crisis management, strategic decision-making, and team leadership.

Additional Insights on Implementation:

- **Diversity KPIs and Accountability:** To ensure the effectiveness of the WINGS program, the organization would establish measurable diversity KPIs, tracking the promotion of women into leadership roles, retention rates, and overall gender diversity at senior levels.
- **Ensure Transparency:** Implementation of transparent processes for promotions, pay, and leadership opportunities would help towards build trust and reduce biases.
- **Conduct Interviews to Measure Impact:** Hold detailed one-on-one interviews with mentees to evaluate how mentorship has influenced their confidence and career growth.
- **Tracking success of the Programme:** Establish and assess both qualitative and quantitative metrics to track the program's impact, such as, retention rates of mentees, number of women advancing to leadership roles, and, involvement of more women in high-visibility projects.

Shreya Kaushal

→ Yes Bank Ltd.

Key Challenges

- **Lack of Awareness About Opportunities**

Many women in tier II and tier III cities have the potential and willingness to take on leadership roles but lack awareness of available opportunities and policies within their organizations. Increasing outreach and communication can bridge this gap and ensure they are well-informed.

- **Lack of Awareness About Female-Friendly Policies:**

Women in Tier 2 and Tier 3 cities often remain unaware of female-friendly workplace policies.

Featured Idea

Establishment of a **Leadership Accelerator Program** exclusively designed for women employees of an organisation. This program could empower women by providing them with resources, confidence and connections needed to advance into leadership roles. This program will aim at

- **Identification:** Preparing a cohort of women employees who have the potential to take up senior/ leadership roles basis their vintage skills, performance and other important parameters relevant to the organisation.

- **Mentorship Matching:** Pair emerging female leaders with experienced executives in their organisation for personalized mentorship, focusing on career growth and navigating challenges.

- **Skill Development Workshops:** Offer workshops on essential leadership skills, negotiation tactics, and financial acumen tailored for women, addressing specific barriers they face on regular basis.

- **Networking Events:** Create opportunities for women to connect with other leaders and potential sponsors, fostering a community that encourages collaboration and support across organisations/ industries.

- **Flexible working Options:** Implement a mix of on-site and off-site working options to accommodate diverse schedules and geographic locations.

Detailed outline for the "Leadership Accelerator Program"

Program Structure : Program Duration and Format:

- **Duration:** 12-18 month program.

- **Format:** Combination of workshops, mentorship, networking events, and online modules.

- **Eligibility Criteria:** Target mid-level female professionals aspiring to move into senior leadership roles. Application process may include a personal statement and recommendation from a current manager.

Key components are as appended below:

- **Mentorship Matching:** Initial assessment to evaluate participants' goals and challenges. Pairing each participant with a mentor based on industry, career goals, and personality fit. Schedule bi-monthly meetings to discuss progress, challenges, and strategies.

Skill Development Workshops

- **Leadership Styles:** On understanding and developing personal leadership style.

- **Negotiation Skills:** On techniques for salary negotiations and influence.

- **Financial Literacy:** On basics of corporate finance and budgeting.

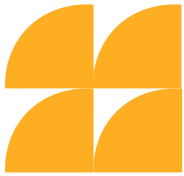
- **Public Speaking:** On building confidence in presenting ideas.

- **Guest Speakers:** Invite successful female leaders to share insights and experiences.

Networking Events:

- **Roundtable Discussions:** Facilitate smaller, focused discussions on relevant topics.

- **Alumni Network:** Create a network for past participants to maintain connections and provide ongoing support.



Flexible working Options:

- Hybrid work options to be provided to ensure better management on personal & professional front to such employees. Work from home options twice a week may be offered

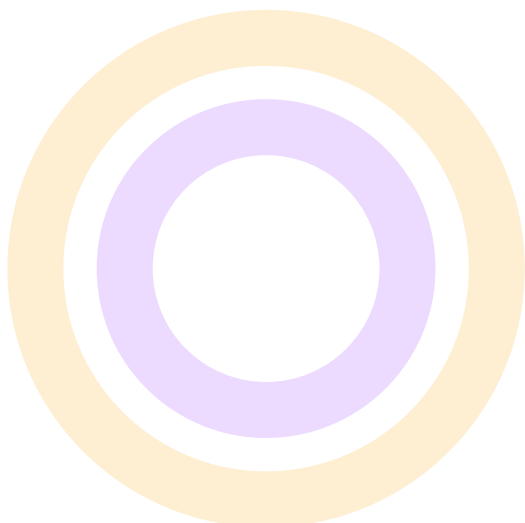
Measurement and Evaluation :

- **Pre- and Post-Program Assessments:** Evaluate participants' skills and confidence levels before and after the program.
- **Feedback Surveys:** Collect feedback after each workshop and event to improve the program continuously.
- **Success Tracking:** Monitor career progression of participants for 1-3 years post-program to assess impact.

Marketing and Recruitment :

- **Outreach Campaigns:** Use social media, professional networks, and partnerships with women's organizations to highlight testimonials and success stories from past participants
- **Long-term Goals:** Create a sustainable ecosystem which aims to establish a continuous loop of mentorship and support.

By implementing this comprehensive approach, the Leadership Accelerator Program can significantly empower women, enhance their leadership skills, and facilitate their rise in the corporate world.



Additional Insights on Implementation

Strategic Mentor Selection: Mentor selection should be aligned with the participant's goals and challenges. Rather than assigning mentors arbitrarily, participants should have the flexibility to choose from a leadership list based on their aspirations. The selection process should prioritize alignment with leadership styles and career ambitions, regardless of gender.

Voluntary Mentorship Program: The mentorship program should be voluntary in nature, ensuring that both mentors and mentees are genuinely committed to the process rather than being assigned roles forcefully.

Measuring Success Through Gender Ratio: The effectiveness of leadership programs can be measured through changes in gender ratios at leadership levels. A structured tracking mechanism should analyze how many leadership roles have been created for women, with data categorized by department and city (across Tier 1, 2, and 3 locations).

Leadership Programs as Retention Tools: Leadership development programs play a significant role in encouraging women to continue working within organisations. Structured career growth opportunities contribute to employee retention and long-term engagement.

Female-Friendly Policies and Leadership Pipeline: Proactive female-friendly policies help in strengthening the leadership pipeline. Women returning from maternity leave should be better supported, ensuring their reintegration into the workforce and leadership roles.

Leadership Quotas for Women in Male-Dominated Fields:

A structured quota for women in leadership roles—particularly in male-dominated domains like sales—can help create a more balanced and inclusive leadership landscape.