

WHEN WOMEN SUCCEED, AMERICA SUCCEEDS

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT 2020

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In May 2014, Ascend at the Aspen Institute launched a series of roundtables exploring solutions and innovations that foster women's economic empowerment in the 21st century. As the national hub for breakthrough ideas and collaborations that move children and their parents toward educational success and economic security, Ascend is committed to identifying and elevating solutions that improve the lives of low-income women and their families.

At the heart of Ascend's work is a drive for two-generation outcomes. Our goal is to create opportunities for and address the needs of low-income children and their parents together. Two-generation components include education, economic supports, social capital, and health and well-being to create a legacy of economic security that passes from one generation to the next. With the generous support of the Ford Foundation, Ascend at the Aspen Institute is designing a series of roundtables and a leadership initiative to advance ideas and push forward a new paradigm for women's economic empowerment. The first roundtable explored five

critical themes: the perspectives and aspirations of women; two-generation innovations; the power of new networks; policy levers at the local, state, and national levels; and design elements of a 21st century economic agenda for women.

Below are highlights from this first conversation. We invite your feedback.

WOMEN'S ECONOMIC EMPOWERMENT 2020

As we look forward to the 20th anniversary of the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing next year and the 100th anniversary of women's right to vote in 2020, we are reminded of the progress we have made but also of how far we still need to go. Ascend's vision, in partnership with leading economists, researchers, practitioners, policymakers, and philanthropists, is to accelerate the field. While finishing the work necessary to move women toward stability, we want to seize on bold new ideas that can also ensure women's economic security.

We believe solutions for low-income families have to be cross-issue and cross-sector. There is no silver bullet. Government, community-based organizations, and the private sector must work together. We need to go beyond the unfinished agendas of previous decades to solutions that resonate with the lives of women today.

STABILITY, SECURITY, OPPORTUNITY: ASPIRATIONS OF AMERICAN WOMEN

Stability. Independence. Optimism. These are the three watchwords for women in today's economy, based on 2013 research commissioned by Ascend and presented by Celinda Lake. Women seek stability in a still-uncertain economic era; they aspire to economic security but believe opportunity is out of their grasp. They value their independence, and believe in the importance and the rewards of succeeding on their own. Despite obstacles, women remain fiercely optimistic.

With 58 percent of all women over the age of 16

“Low-income women in this country today are extremely resilient, but security and opportunity feel out of reach. They just want stability.”

– Celinda Lake, Lake Research Partners

participating in the workforce, the gender wage gap, lack of affordable high-quality child care, and low minimum wage in many states present significant barriers to working women and men. Changing demographics – one of the fastest-growing populations in the United States is single mothers – signify that no institution is prepared to address the impact of these profound shifts and how families are able to thrive. The \$1 trillion of college debt is a weight on society; it is a worry not just for mothers but for their children as well. A new set of solutions that account for shifts in family structure, workforce needs, and the costs of quality child care and education is necessary to advance women economically.

TWO-GENERATION INNOVATIONS

Ascend Fellow and CFED President Andrea Levere led a discussion with three Aspen Institute Ascend Network partners,¹ each of whom is developing a two-generation initiative with potential for scale at the national level.



Levere noted **the power of child savings accounts (CSAs) to build a tradition of saving and financial literacy within families.**

¹ The goal of the Aspen Institute Ascend Network is to mobilize empowered two-generation organizations and leaders to influence policy and practice changes that increase economic security, educational success, social capital, and health and well-being for children, parents, and their families.

ROUNDTABLE PARTICIPANTS

Participants included policy experts, practitioners, philanthropic representatives, researchers, and public and private sector leaders. Partners from the Aspen Institute Ascend Network brought their expertise on two-generation approaches and new solutions to move women toward economic security to the discussion.

Lee Roper Batker, President, Women's Foundation of Minnesota
Melissa Boteach, Vice President, Half in Ten, Center for American Progress
Ruby Bright, President, Women's Fund for a Greater Memphis
Andrea Camp, Consultant
Leslie Campbell, Manager, FACES; Parent and Policy Advisory Member, College & Community Fellowship
Dr. Charles Carter, Senior Vice President and Chief Operating Officer, Crittenton Women's Union
Wendy Chun-Hoon, Director, Family Values @ Work
Erin Currier, Director, Pew Charitable Trusts
Sally D'Amato, Vice President, Deloitte Touche
Rep. Rosa DeLauro, State of Connecticut
Kerrie Denniston, Director, Walmart Foundation
Oleta Fitzgerald, Southern Regional Director, Children's Defense Fund
Laura Fortman, Principal Deputy Administrator, Wage and Hour Division, U.S. Department of Labor
Alicia Garza, Special Projects Director, Domestic Workers Alliance
Heidi Goldberg, Program Director, Early Childhood and Family Economic Success, National League of Cities
Pamelya Herndon, Executive Director, Southwest Women's Law Center
Jeanne Jackson, President/CEO, The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham
Beth Kanter, Senior Vice President, Spitfire Strategies
Celinda Lake, President, Lake Research Partners
Daniella Gibbs Leger, Vice President, Center for American Progress
Andrea Levere, President, CFED
Jennifer Lockwood-Shabat, President, Washington Area Women's Foundation
Dr. C. Nicole Mason, Executive Director, Center for Research and Policy in the Public Interest
Terri McCullough, Executive Director, No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project, Clinton Foundation
Shawn McMahan, Acting President, Wider Opportunities for Women
Rev. Vivian Nixon, Executive Director, College & Community Fellowship

She identified CSAs as not only a way to invest in children, but also to help their parents embrace financial capability and open up asset-building opportunities.

Ascend Fellow and College & Community Fellowship (CCF) Executive Director Rev. Vivian Nixon presented a solution to one of the country's greatest challenges: the significant increase in people being incarcerated and the lack of real solutions for re-entry for women and men. **CCF moves justice-involved women through postsecondary education and into living-wage jobs.** CCF uses case



managers and support networks to eliminate individual, social, and systemic barriers for the women and identifies early childhood education options for their children. CCF has seen powerful results: more than 30 women each year earn degrees with the support of CCF, for a total of 228 degrees to date. Two-thirds of CCF alumnae report that their income grew after completing their degree.

Ascend Network partners Crittenton Women's Union (CWU) and Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham (WFGB) are testing different two-generation approaches to entrenched poverty. Jeanne Jackson is President of WFGB in Alabama, where nearly 19 percent of women are low-income. She shared the development of **Collaboration Institute, a year-long program that offers incentives for community organizations**



to partner for two-generation results with technical assistance, financial support, and messaging strategies. From that came a bold initiative, **Prescription for Success, which connects 25 women to sector-based pharmaceutical training and their children to high-quality early childhood education.** The initiative will be evaluated and packaged as a case study for other organizations in Alabama.

Dr. Charles Carter, COO of CWU, encouraged participants to shift their service model to a human development framework and align resources around those objectives. By example, Dr. Carter shared CWU's **Hot Jobs report, a**

"I don't think we claim enough of our power. In Albuquerque, women are majority voters. You can't win a presidential or gubernatorial election without women. Why is child care still a sideline issue?"

– Anne Mosle, Vice President, the Aspen Institute



(above) Jeanne Jackson, The Women's Fund of Greater Birmingham, and Dr. Charles Carter, Crittenton Women's Union

PARTICIPANTS CONT.

Ana Oliveira, President, New York Women's Foundation
Jeannette Pai-Espinosa, President, The National Crittenton Foundation
Carol Penick, Executive Director, Women's Foundation of Mississippi
Sylvia Puentes, President, Latino Policy Forums
Robin Runge, Senior Advisor, U.S. Department of Labor
Sheri Steisel, Senior Federal Affairs Council, National Conference of State Legislatures
Kiersten Stewart, Director of Public Policy and Advocacy, Futures Without Violence
Neera Tanden, President, Center for American Progress
Eliza Townsend, Executive Director, Maine Women's Lobby
Lori Weinstein, President, Jewish Women International

Ascend at the Aspen Institute Staff:

Anne Mosle, Vice President & Executive Director
Lori Severens, Senior Program Manager
Sarah Haight, Program Manager

(below) Anne Mosle, Vice President, the Aspen Institute





Jeanette Pai-Espinosa, The National Crittenton Foundation, and Leslie Campbell, FACES

"We believe solutions for justice-involved women have to focus on removing the barriers in their lives. We do that holistically – lifting individual barriers, social barriers, and systemic barriers."

– Rev. Vivian Nixon, Executive Director, College & Community Fellowship

workforce partners who may not have access to fresh data or do not understand the skills and interests of potential employees in their region.

Ruby Bright, President, Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis (WFGM) and Carol Penick, President, The Women's Foundation of Mississippi (TWFM), also highlighted the use of data. In examining root causes of economic insecurity among Mississippi women, TWFM learned the state has the highest rate of teen pregnancy in the country. In response, TWFM commissioned a report exploring the barriers to teen pregnancy. They have also developed, **in partnership with local community colleges and mixed-income housing developers, a two-generation initiative to support young women with children in achieving postsecondary success.** One state over, the WFGM in Tennessee is using **federal housing grants such as HOPE VI to bring private sector partners to the table in creating high-quality housing developments** with a focus on the needs of mothers and their families, including access to transportation and local employers.



LOCAL AND STATE MOMENTUM FOR NATIONAL POLICY CHANGE

The presentations on forward-thinking policy efforts focused on three areas: state levers (Southwest Women's Law Center); the caring economy and

"Creating economic opportunity for all families is the defining issue of our time."

– Walter Isaacson, President and CEO, the Aspen Institute



triennial survey of the Massachusetts labor market to identify career paths that lead to economic self-sufficiency.

Hot Jobs are careers that require two years or less of postsecondary education or training, meet the Massachusetts Economic Independence Index income level for a single-parent family with two children, and currently post high-vacancy rates. To deliberately connect the women and families CWU serves to this research, Hot Jobs 2013 identifies 15 job classifications in Massachusetts that meet the criteria and, for the first time, identifies 50 "Smart Start Jobs," which position individuals not yet qualified for a "Hot Job" with the experience for future career advancement.

With more than \$450 million in working assets worldwide, women's funds present a significant opportunity to leverage resources for women's economic empowerment – and to move thousands of donors toward action. Six women's fund leaders participated in the roundtable, sharing ideas on how their organizations have tackled community challenges with philanthropic partnerships.

Ascend Fellow Dr. C. Nicole Mason and Ana Oliveira, President of the New York Women's Foundation (NYWF), presented the findings of their **2013 Economic Security and Well-being Index for New York City, which analyzed critical issues affecting girls and women using data in seven key categories: employment, earnings, poverty, education, health, crime, and violence.**

By examining the economic security and well-being of women and girls in 59 community districts, NYWF identified trends in workforce participation, social connectedness, and financial literacy, among others. Oliveira encouraged participants to use research as a tool to facilitate new conversations with



“The states are laboratories – that’s good because we need to hit a critical mass on these issues. I happen to believe the federal government does have the moral imperative to engage.”

– Rep. Rosa DeLauro

domestic workers (Domestic Workers Alliance); and wage and labor opportunities (Wage and Hour Division, U.S. Department of Labor). Four key strategies emerged. These efforts are growing state to state, creating new horizontal ways of working with the momentum to influence a national agenda.

- **Using the long arm of the law:** Law firms have the human and political capital to impact legislation for struggling women and their families. In New Mexico, the Southwest Women’s Law Center issued a call to action for law firms around the state to create an internal mandate for pro bono work: one year, one woman, one case.
- **Creating a state ‘Bill of Rights’:** As Alicia Garza pointed out, domestic workers keep states’ economies going. Nannies, caregivers, and housekeepers throughout the country ensure the health and prosperity of families and free others to participate in the workforce. Yet with few state and federal guidelines and no industry standards, domestic workers are extremely vulnerable to exploitation and abuse. A state-by-state “Bill of Rights” for domestic workers – already adopted by six states – can ensure important protections and quality of work for women and their families.
- **Raising the minimum wage:** A raise to \$10.10 an hour is a key economic security step for women. Nearly 60 percent of those who would benefit are women.
- **Building a state legislative framework:** A state-wide Women’s Economic Security Act is important legislation that brings the public, nonprofit, and private sectors together for increased accountability for women’s economic empowerment (see sidebar). Other states can lead legislative or policy innovations, which, as seen with momentum around Family Medical Leave, have the potential to influence action at the national level.

NATIONAL LEVERS FOR POLICY CHANGE

Neera Tanden, president of the Center for American Progress, called for public demand

STATE POLICY INNOVATION – MINNESOTA IN ACTION

In Minnesota, a landmark “Women’s Economic Security Act” passed in May 2014, ensuring key economic rights and opportunities for women. Lee Roper Batker, President of the Women’s Foundation of Minnesota, which spearheaded the Act, discussed the impact of its key elements, including:

- Allowing mothers to stay in the workforce by expanding family leave and providing reasonable accommodations for pregnant and nursing employees;
- Decreasing the gender pay gap through the participation of women in high-wage, high-demand nontraditional work, increased enforcement of equal pay laws for state contractors, and allowing employees to discuss pay inequities; and
- Addressing the economic consequences of domestic violence, stalking, and sexual assault by allowing employees to use existing earned sick leave to deal with sexual assault, domestic violence, or stalking, and providing additional housing protections for victims of violence.

In discussing the successful legislative strategy leading to passage of the Act, Lee noted that the Women’s Foundation acted as a bipartisan advocate and messenger in moving the legislation through the state legislature, a consensus-building role other philanthropic and nonprofit organizations can play at the local and state levels.

(below) Rep. Rosa DeLauro, State of Connecticut



for policy change. To move child care, for example, from a largely private decision, women must see the value of the public policy debate. Large numbers of women have not made that connection. She acknowledged that things have shifted since the '90s. Economic resistance is dissipating. There are more leaders willing to make the case, but they need public demand. The June 2014 White House Working Families Summit is a moment to show that demand.

Terri McCullough, Executive Director of No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project at the Clinton Foundation, focused on an evidence-based case for women. No Ceilings is collecting data on the status of women and girls globally, grounded in the platform from the United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. The goal is not only to collect and distribute data and stories in a visually compelling way but also to identify best practices from Illinois to Uganda to share for an impact on women worldwide.

Representative Rosa DeLauro (D-CT) passionately reiterated her commitment to policy change for women. She noted that while the workforce and workplace have changed, public policies have not. She highlighted the leadership of women in the House and their ongoing efforts to listen to women across the country and to introduce legislation to improve women's economic security, including the Paycheck Fairness Act.

Aspen Institute vice president Anne Mosle spoke about what it takes for women and their families to thrive: education, a good job, child care, health care, and meaningful relationships and connections. "We also know what can throw any family off track - dropping out of school, a lost job, a medical crisis, or even a broken down car." Low-income women navigate a complex world of systems, despite the fact that many times these systems are stacked against them. As Celinda Lake pointed out, there is a resilience fused with optimism that drives them forward for their children, communities, and themselves.

Since Lyndon B. Johnson declared a War on Poverty 50 years ago, the world in which we live has turned inside out. Growing economic inequalities, changing demographics, increasing technology, and globalization are redefining our core assumptions and the ground rules of our economy and democracy. We need to creatively examine how our mindsets and policies can create women's economic empowerment 2.0.

PRINCIPLES FOR A 21ST CENTURY ECONOMIC AGENDA FOR WOMEN

Throughout the discussions, common themes emerged that together form a set of core principles for advancing women and their families toward economic security. These principles build on the important efforts of many leaders and organizations and lay the groundwork for a fresh blueprint for a 21st century economic agenda:

- **Engage the private sector:** living-wage jobs with opportunities for advancement are a vital component of a new economic agenda for women and their families.
- **Invest in state and community innovations:** community-based programs and state policy acts provide important lessons and outcomes for national initiatives and potential for scale.
- **Invest in data:** research and metrics help show partners how, collectively, they can move the needle on women's economic security – and what a return on that investment looks like.
- **Apply a two-generation lens:** when we focus on both children and their parents, we put whole families on a path toward educational success and economic security, ensuring a legacy of opportunity is passed from one generation to the next.
- **Promote transparency:** by encouraging clarity and requiring transparency in employment policies and beyond, we minimize inequities and create potentially more efficient, empowering workplaces.
- **Include men in our policy discussions and invite them to be part of our solutions:** in order to create a new conversation and set of policies that advance women, we need men as partners, allies, and stakeholders.

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