



GIRLS INC. PROJECT ACCELERATE:  
**REIMAGINING WORKPLACE EQUALITY**  
Executive Summary

*We cannot simply outperform inequality.*

**Megan Rapinoe**

Captain of OL Reign, National Women's Soccer League and the U.S. Women's soccer team

In 2021, women are almost half of the workforce in the United States, but they still only earn an average of 82% of what men earn, and the wage gap widens for women of color. A visionary solution is needed to address this unacceptable reality. Girls Inc. Project Accelerate is a groundbreaking venture that partners and invests with Equality Can't Wait to ensure that workplace equality is achieved not in 208 years, but now.<sup>1</sup>

**Girls Inc. Project Accelerate will speed the entry of young women into positions of leadership with a dual strategy: by driving cultural change towards equity in the workplace, and by ensuring young women's educational attainment and skill development to facilitate compelling career trajectories.**

With these two interventions, Project Accelerate addresses inequality in the workplace, particularly the absence of women of color in positions of influence and leadership in the corporate and social impact sectors where pay inequity and gender disparities, including occupational segregation, are far too prevalent.<sup>2</sup> Equality Can't Wait and Girls Inc. together catalyze women's advancement to positions of power and influence, from which they have the means and the opportunity to elevate their status—and their families, neighborhoods, organizations, and communities.

**A DUAL STRATEGY**

**The five-year impact goal of Project Accelerate** 1) transform workplace culture to prioritize equity and foster the advancement of women to positions of influence, and 2) ensure young women's educational attainment and skill development to position them for professional leadership roles in this transformed working environment. Project Accelerate transforms the workplace culture and creates the initial pipeline. With that initial investment, the transformation is sustained, and as these cohorts of women and future Project Accelerate participants move into leadership roles, so too will other women find opportunities for advancement.

The **anticipated changes to workplace systems** in those sectors will be: 1) the prioritization of equity and the transformation of practice and policies, 2) the realignment of power dynamics and of the value placed on intersectionality, and 3) the emergence of a critical mass of engaged leaders, mentors, and possibility models. (Hear from [Lonnitria](#), Girls Inc. of Central Alabama alumna, about the importance of mentors/possibility models.) Systems within the Girls Inc. network will benefit from lessons learned through project implementation and assessment. The Girls Inc. alumnae network, currently being established, will be a critical force in achieving Project Accelerate outcomes with young women, and a structural component supporting long-term project sustainability.



1. <https://www.equalitycantwait.com/>  
2. Hrabik, L. (2015). The Nonprofit Gender Gap Still Exists—What We Can Do About It. The Nonprofit Hub.

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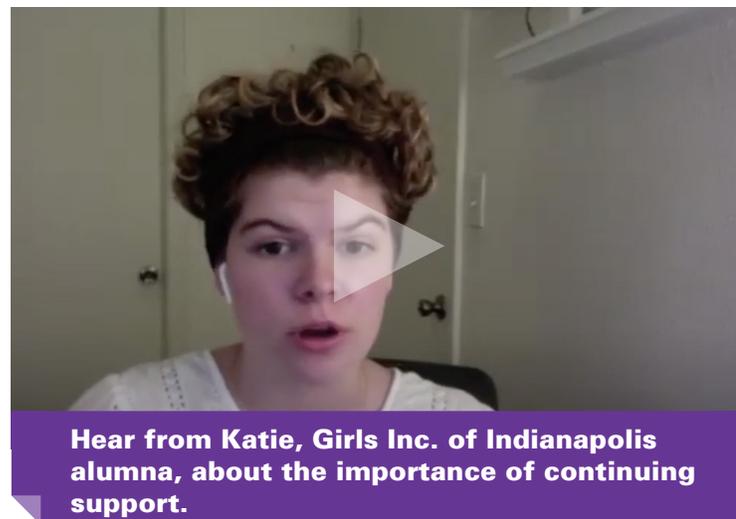
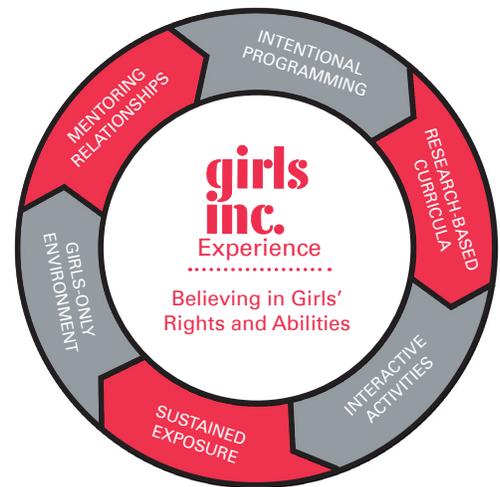
Project Accelerate partners with leaders in the corporate and social impact space to reimagine hiring, development, promotion, and retention practices in order to dramatically increase the leadership trajectory of women. The confluence of conscious, intersectional professional development and equitable employment opportunities alters the status quo; it propels workplace advancement for women who in turn reach back and lift others to join them in newly defining equality. Organizations meeting defined standards of equitable practices and policies will be certified through Project Accelerate, and this achievement will serve as a beacon to thousands of young women leaders who are prepared to excel, exert influence, and exercise their power.

Girls Inc. currently serves young women, most of color and with historically-marginalized intersecting identities,\* through high school graduation. As early as age five, girls benefit from the Girls Inc. Experience, a **potent, evidence-based, and intersectional** approach to building the transformational social emotional learning (SEL) and leadership skills necessary for success. The Girls Inc. Experience offers a proven combination:

- **people**  
(mentors, trained staff, and possibility models),<sup>3</sup>
- **programming**  
(evidence-based, skill-building, and developmentally and culturally appropriate), and
- **places**  
(girl-only, convenient, and safe spaces).

The Girls Inc. Experience works.<sup>4</sup> An external validation study has proven its efficacy. Young women's voices are inherent to this success; Girls Inc.'s greatest strength is a reciprocal bond and connection with girls and young women. Girls Inc., an expert in this field, is hearing **these young women say they need "more Girls Inc." after high school** as they navigate some of life's most challenging transitions.

Project Accelerate is a targeted extension of the Girls Inc. Experience, designed to support young women through their next critical transitions—from high school through college and from college to career. Building on evidence-based models at Girls Inc. affiliates, Project Accelerate will scale throughout the Girls Inc. network of nearly 80 local organizations. The project will prepare thousands of young women leaders not merely to succeed in workplace environments, but also to affect cultural change from within.



**\*Historically-marginalized intersecting identities: Intersectionality<sup>5</sup> is a feminist framework for conceptualizing a person, group of people, or social problem as affected by a number of discriminations and disadvantages. It takes into account people's overlapping identities and experiences in order to understand the complexity of prejudices they face (e.g., race, ethnicity, gender, ability, sexual orientation, age, disability, religious minority, socioeconomic status, ESL). Consider the ways that the intersection of ethnic and gender identities affect indigenous women<sup>6</sup> who often face multiple discriminations in the workplace, or how a Black woman with a disability does not experience her engineering workplace only as a woman, Black person, or person with a disability but instead through her own unique perspective as someone who has all of these identities.**

3. <https://pointfoundation.org/find-possibility-model/>  
 4. American Institutes for Research (AIR). (2020). The Impact of Girls Inc. on Academic and Behavioral Outcomes.  
 5. Crenshaw, K. (2018). Demarginalizing the intersection of race and sex: A Black feminist critique of antidiscrimination doctrine, feminist theory, and antiracist politics [1989](pp. 57-80). Routledge.  
 6. Fredlund, J. (2007). Indigenous women overcome multiple obstacles. World of Work, 59, 8-11.

# WHY US?

**Girls Inc. brings the collective power of the network, a lengthy history and deep experience, and the proven capacity to apply evidence-based strategies to solving the problems stemming from inequality.** Girls Inc. is the right organization to undertake this innovative approach to transforming the workplace for women. Project Accelerate leverages the two core Girls Inc. strategies, working directly with young women and advocating with them for change.

Project Accelerate is a direct response to girls asking for support from a trusted source, Girls Inc., as they faced transitions and situations that challenged even the best prepared. (Hear from [Aaliyah](#), Girls Inc. of Central Alabama alumna, about facing challenges.) Beyond a grounding in the knowledge that Project Accelerate meets needs articulated by young women, Girls Inc. is confident in this approach because:

- Girls Inc. brings experience to the scaling of network-wide programming. Girls Inc.'s federated structure supports innovation by allowing new ideas to spread quickly through the network.
- Project Accelerate builds on the blended Girls Inc. approach of advocacy and direct service that brings girls' voices to the center of any issue.
- The Girls Inc. Experience, the approach that led to the level of listening and trust at the heart of Project Accelerate, is a proven, effective method for developing young women who, despite facing marginalization and intersecting barriers, are inherently strong, smart, and bold. Based on results from model programs at affiliates, the Experience builds transformational leadership skills that, when extended beyond high school graduation, will support young women through the challenges and transitions of college completion and successful preparation for careers.
- Girls Inc., at the national and local level, has deep and sustained partnerships within the corporate and non-profit social impact sectors that have persisted through changes in economic and political climates.
- The Project Accelerate certification process and visibility campaign will attract more qualified women to each organization's pipeline. Situated in an enlightened workplace, women can use their newfound influence to continue positive change. Establishing a public perception of an organization as Project Accelerate-certified will compel their continued participation.

Equality Can't Wait is a visionary response to some of the most persistent and damaging issues preventing the emergence of a fair and equitable society. Girls Inc. is grateful to the challenge funders, Lever for Change, and our technical advisors, especially Morten Group, for the structure, thought partnership, and the technical and financial support that have shaped this vision for Project Accelerate. Together, we can make a bold leap to an equitable future.



**I came to the U.S. from Mexico when I was in the first grade. The people who supported Girls Inc. were interested in all of me, not only in getting me to learn one thing or in improving a specific statistic in my low-income community. They were about supporting us girls to live up to our potential.**

**Ultimately, this all helped me pursue my educational goals of studying at Stanford University and to complete a master's program in sustainable energy systems at top universities in Europe. I have been bold enough to live in several countries and travel extensively for work, studies, research, and fun. Perhaps more importantly, my experiences at Girls Inc. helped me navigate my studies, jobs, relationships, travels, and other experiences knowing who I am and the respect I deserve."**

**Nayeli**

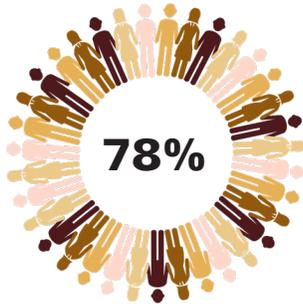
Girls Inc. of the Central Coast alumna

*For the first time in history, we can state with certainty that our next generation of leaders will be a generation of women leaders- particularly women leaders of color, many of whom will start out at a socioeconomic disadvantage. This means that more girls, and more girls of color, need to be prepared to step into leadership roles, inspired to lead healthy lives, succeed academically, and advocate for themselves and others.*

**Stephanie J. Hull, Ph.D.**  
President & CEO of Girls Inc.

**The Girls Inc. mission is to inspire all girls to be strong, smart, and bold**

and the proven, holistic approach that fulfills that mission—the Girls Inc. Experience—makes a meaningful impact daily on the lives of hundreds of thousands of girls and alumnae.



**Identify as girls of color**



At Girls Inc., girls build the knowledge, skills, and confidence to lead change in their lives and affect change in the world; they become self-sufficient, transformational leaders, ready to contribute to addressing disparities and making cultural change.

They receive academic enrichment and life skills instruction, including exposure to career opportunities, and learn to make healthy decisions about their physical and emotional wellbeing. The Girls Inc. evidenced-based holistic approach recognizes that none of these components in isolation will result in girls' dreaming big and achieving their goals.

