

# Creating a Company Culture that Affirms and Supports Women of Color in Tech

## SUMMARY

The tech sector has long faced criticism for its lack of diversity but few would probably guess that Black women comprise less than 1% of all tech employees, representing a 13% decrease over the last decade. Other Women of Color (WOC) are also underrepresented in tech despite industry initiatives to attract and retain a more racially and ethnically inclusive workforce. Research has repeatedly shown bias and discrimination to be significant factors in the lack of progress WOC face in both entering and advancing in the tech sector. A new collaborative project by Leaderspring Center, Forefront, and Latino Futures extends this research by examining the tech workplace experiences of 40 WOC across four U.S. cities. The project team centered its inquiry around four foundational equity-building pillars and learned that WOC experience gendered and racial/ethnic partiality across all four pillars that restricts their success and advancement in the tech sector. These findings led the study team to create a roadmap of specific recommendations addressing each pillar to advance and promote WOC in tech for industry leaders and organizations that seek to achieve success for their company and all who work there.

## Four Foundational Pillars

- 1) Personal Agency
- 2) Mentorship & Sponsorship
- 3) Managing Bias
- 4) Feedback & Communication Loop

## COLLECTIVE EXPERIENCES OF WOC IN TECH

### **Personal Agency:**

- Dismissiveness
- Opinions matter less than those of male colleagues
- *Constant urgency to prove themselves*, despite experience
- *Disregarding and devaluing of contributions*
- Inadequate project budgets and organizational support

### **Mentorship & Sponsorship:**

- Sponsorship more valuable than mentorship
- WOC need to have executives in their network of support
- *Affinity groups* are key
- *Value of diversity* must be taught & infused throughout the workplace

### **Managing Bias:**

- *Challenging ideas* can lead to being cast as difficult, angry, or aggressive
- Limited understanding of *privilege, racism, & discrimination* perpetuate unacceptable workplace behaviors & practices
- *Pipeline shortage* provides excuse for tech leaders to not seek WOC hires

### **Feedback & Communication Loop:**

- Priorities & expectations are often unclear
- Feedback centered on *personality rather than performance*
- Made to feel a need to *document discussions & justify actions*

## SELECTED RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CREATING INCLUSIVE CULTURE

### **Personal Agency:**

- *Give equal weight to everyone's ideas*
- Listen without interruption
- *Incorporate equity as a guiding company principle*
- Ensure WOC have appropriate resources in place to successfully do their jobs

### **Mentorship & Sponsorship:**

- Ensure WOC have access to *mentors & sponsors* within the company
- Create venues for WOC to *network & build relationships* with executives
- Ensure mentors & sponsors understand their roles

### **Managing Bias:**

- Acknowledge that *racism, bias, and discrimination* exist & provide training to eliminate these ills in the workplace
- Ensure trainings use real-life examples to illustrate issues
- Examine company's hiring pipelines and ensure strategies are in place to *pursue the equitable hiring of WOC*

### **Feedback & Communication Loop:**

- Ensure managers have proper training to effectively *communicate goals, priorities, and expectations* with employees
- Ensure managers have proper training to provide *non-biased, fact-based, ongoing, and actionable feedback* to employees