

Supporting Women in the Workplace During and After the COVID-19 Pandemic

The American Alliance of Museums offers the following information on supporting women during and after the COVID-19 pandemic to help museum workers understand the significant impact this crisis is having on women. The information shared here is based on the best available information as of publication.

The Challenge

[Along with BIPOC, younger, and less-formally educated workers](#), one of the groups disproportionately affected by the economic damage of the COVID-19 pandemic [has been women](#). Women constitute nearly 56 percent of people leaving the workforce since spring 2020, despite making up only 48 percent of the workforce at that time.

This is in part because women make up a [high percentage of workers in the front-line, low-wage jobs](#) disproportionately disrupted by COVID, including retail, accommodations, and food service.

But it is also, in large part, because women have taken on the lion's share of responsibility for supporting childcare, facilitating online schooling, and caring for extended family during the pandemic in the wake of school and care closures. During the past year, one-third of women not currently employed attributed their withdrawal from the workforce to the [demands of childcare](#) (compared to 12.1 percent of men in the same age group). Eighty percent of all mothers identify as having [primary responsibility for homeschooling](#) and distance learning during coronavirus lockdowns. Overall, according to the [2020 Women in the Workplace](#) study, one in four women are considering leaving the workplace or slowing down their careers due to impacts of the pandemic.

This will have long-term repercussions on the gender gap in employment, earnings, and wealth. Recent [projections from McKinsey](#) suggest that employment recovery for women is likely to lag behind men well into 2024. The wages of women reentering the post-pandemic workforce may be depressed by a glutted labor market, and some women, particular older workers, may find it difficult to find jobs at their previous levels of status and pay.

What Employers Can Do

Here are some widely recommended strategies for retaining women in the workforce and mitigating gender-based economic disparities when they do return to work. Note that, as with all forms of accessible policy and design, these actions can create a better work environment for all.

Retention

- » **Create clarity and reliability around employment conditions.** Lack of information regarding an employer's plans for managing the workforce during the pandemic (for example, furloughs, layoffs, cutbacks to hours or pay), and/or frequent shifts in direction, add to stress and anxiety and make it more difficult for parents, particularly women, to plan for how they will manage both work and family care. Be specific about performance expectations, policies around work, and timeframes for decisions that will be made about employment.
- » **Be flexible and responsive.** This may include setting broad parameters within which employees can set their own hours and integrate telework into their routine. It may include offering additional personal time or allowing employees to bank and share sick time. If the pre-pandemic norm mandated consistency in the working environment, during this disrupted time your employees may need accommodations tailored to their individual circumstances.
- » **Be proactive.** Many women have been taught not to speak up in the workplace regarding their needs. By checking in regularly, asking how people are doing and what they need to be comfortable in their work, managers can encourage staff to identify their challenges and propose workable solutions.
- » **Acknowledge the fallacy of the personal/professional divide.** It is unrealistic to expect people to firewall their work from their family responsibilities during the pandemic. Accept that children, pets, and other household members may intrude in online meetings. Start virtual meetings by providing time for staff to share and reflect on what they are dealing with right now, letting employees take the lead in terms of what—or how much—they choose to disclose. Leaders and managers can help establish a culture of compassion and empathy by sharing their own challenges and imperfections.
- » **Offer paid parental/family/adoptive leave for all employees,** and actively encourage all parents to use it.

Reentry

- » **Revisit the minimum wage.** Women in low-income jobs are suffering particularly deep economic damage from the pandemic. As museums rebuild their workforce, they can revisit their entry level and minimum wages, and adjust them to reflect [a living wage](#) for their community.
- » **Reduce hiring bias.** One strategy that has proven to be effective is including women on the team conducting applicant interviews and making hiring decisions. Consider providing training on implicit bias for staff involved in hiring. Another proven strategy is to mandate that a diverse group of finalists be interviewed for any given position. Research shows that a woman's chances of getting hired are seventy-nine times higher if there are [at least two women candidates](#) in the final pool.
- » **Revise job postings and the application review process.** Do not ask for salary histories (which have been shown to [perpetuate gender inequities](#) in compensation), and do not [penalize applicants for gaps](#) in their work history.
- » **Institute [“returnship” programs](#) to attract and mentor individuals who have been away from the workforce for some time.** This is also an effective way to combat age bias in hiring.

- » **Review compensation across the board.** As the museum prepares to rebuild its workforce, this is a good time to conduct a thorough compensation review and identify existing practices that may unintentionally reinforce gender disparities in pay. For example, consider removing negotiations from the hiring and promotions process, as negotiation has been consistently found to [advantage men over women](#) in the compensation process. Other steps that can reduce unintentional gender bias in pay include limiting the authority of individual managers to make compensation decisions, and standardizing bonuses and pay increases.
- » **Increase transparency.** Give staff access to the salary ranges by position and level and explain the factors that set salaries within those ranges.

Resources

The following articles include information and advice on promoting gender equity in retention, rehiring, and compensation.

- » California Commission on the Status of Women - [What Can I do to Promote a Culture of Pay Equity](#)
- » Harvard Business Review - [3 Ways Companies Can Retain Working Moms Right Now](#) and [5 Ways to Bring Women Back into the Post-pandemic Workforce](#)
- » Benefit News – [The Top Tool for Retaining Your Female Workforce During COVID-19](#)
- » Center for Creative Leadership – offers [numerous articles, tools, and recordings](#) on fostering women leaders in organizations.

Resources specific to women of color:

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a disproportionate impact on BIPOC communities, and therefore on BIPOC women. Latinas have faced the impact particularly hard, with their [unemployment rate](#) jumping from 5.5 percent to 20.5 percent between February and April 2020. The resources listed below encompass several categories, including mental health resources, emergency aid funds, and resources for small business owners. If you're looking for more information about how to support women of color, the [Culture Amp blog](#) provides several helpful tips and resources.

- » [League of United Latin American Citizens](#) COVID-19 Resources (including [emergency aid fund](#))
- » [Black Women for Wellness Guide](#)
- » [Mental Health Services for DACA Clients under COVID-19 Pandemic](#)
- » [Latinx Therapists Action Network](#)
- » [Brown Girl Self-Care Podcast](#)
- » Shea Moisture [Minority Business Fund](#) and [\\$1Million Fund](#)

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