

Seven strategies to advance women in science

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Credit: National Cancer Institute

Despite the progress made by women in science, engineering, and medicine, a glance at most university directories or pharmaceutical executive committees tells the more complex story. Women in science can succeed, but they are succeeding in fields that may not even be conscious of the gender imbalances. These imbalances manifest themselves in the number of women that are invited to speak at conferences, the percentage of grants awarded to women scientists, and the higher rates of attrition of women at every stage of the career ladder

compared to those of men.

In the March 5 issue of the journal *Cell Stem Cell*, the Initiative on Women in Science and Engineering Working Group, a collection of more than 30 academic and business leaders organized by the New York Stem Cell Foundation, present seven strategies to advance [women in science](#), engineering, and medicine in this modern landscape.

"We wanted to think about broad ways to elevate the entire field, because when we looked at diversity programs across our organizations we thought that the results were okay, but they really could be better," said Susan L. Solomon, co-founder and CEO of the New York Stem Cell Foundation and a member of the working group. "We've identified some very straightforward things to do that are inexpensive and could be implemented pretty much immediately."

The working group's seven strategies are broken into three categories: the first two are direct financial support strategies, the next three are psychological and cultural strategies, and the final two are major collaborative and international initiatives.

1. Implement flexible family care spending

Make grants gender neutral by permitting grantees to use a certain percentage of grant award funds to pay for childcare, eldercare, or family-related expenses. This provides more freedom for grantees to focus on professional development and participate in the scientific community.

2. Provide "extra hands" awards

Dedicate funds for newly independent young investigators who are also

primary caregivers to hire technicians, administrative assistants, or postdoctoral fellows.

3. Recruit gender-balanced review and speaker selection committees

Adopt policies that ensure that peer review committees are conscious of gender and are made up of a sufficient number of women.

4. Incorporate implicit bias statements

For any initiative that undergoes external peer review, include a statement that describes the concept of implicit bias to reviewers and reiterates the organization's commitment to equality and diversity.

5. Focus on education as a tool

Academic institutions and grant makers must educate their constituents and grantees on the issues [women](#) face in science and medicine. For example, gender awareness training should be a standard component of orientation programs.

6. Create an institutional report card for gender equality

Define quantifiable criteria that can be used to evaluate gender equality in institutions on an annual basis. For instance, these report cards may ask for updates about the male to female ratio of an academic department or the organization's policy regarding female representation on academic or corporate committees.

7. Partner to expand upon existing searchable databases of women in science, medicine, and engineering

Create or contribute to databases that identify [women scientists](#) for positions and activities that are critical components for career advancement.

"The issues in science, technology, engineering, and [medicine](#) are the kinds of challenges that we as a society face, and we need to have 100 percent of the population—both genders—to be having an opportunity to participate," Solomon said. "We need people who care because they're thinking about their daughters or granddaughters or nieces, sisters or wives, or larger issues like finding cures for disease or climate change and they want to make sure that we've got enough horsepower behind us."

More information: *Cell Stem Cell*, Smith et al.: "Seven Actionable Strategies for Advancing Women in Science, Engineering, and Medicine"

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