

# #ITSHErFutureCA

#### Moving women forward into leadership roles



2017

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#### Pacific sunsets. Towering redwoods. Rolling wine country. Sparkling cities. Vibrant people.

It is easy to believe the Golden State has it all. Yet, when you take a closer look inside state and local government, something is missing—female leaders.

At KPMG, we believe diverse workforces are best equipped to handle the everyday disruptions and challenges that come with serving 40 million people spread over 160,000<sup>1</sup> square miles. So, we set out to study the current state of women's leadership in California state and local government.

Our survey of 445 female employees—conducted in partnership with the Governing Institute—sheds light on the challenges women face in attaining high-level public sector roles in California and unveils a golden opportunity for the state to do better at empowering female leaders' careers.

Moving women forward into leadership roles is not just the moral thing to do; it is a smart approach for California as its government workforce ages and it seeks out the next generation of talent. We hope you find this research informative and inspiring as you seek new ways to create a supportive work environment that helps more women in government rise to the top.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> http://clerk.assembly.ca.gov/content/vital-statistics

## A golden opportunity

**Let's be clear:** Women have made significant gains in public sector workplaces. According to the Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University, the percentage of women in U.S. Congress has almost quadrupled since 30 years ago.<sup>2</sup> There are now three female justices serving the Supreme Court.<sup>3</sup> And Hillary Rodham Clinton made history in 2016 by becoming the first female presidential nominee of a major U.S. political party.<sup>4</sup>

But despite signs of progress, many women still encounter barriers when they start to rise through the ranks of government. Women currently hold fewer than 20 percent of seats in Congress and only 20 percent of the 100 largest U.S. cities have female mayors. There are only six female governors in all of the United States.<sup>5</sup>

Of course, the glass ceiling problem is not new, and it is not unique to California. But the imminent "brain drain" in government, due to an aging workforce, is pushing the issue to the forefront within the state's various offices, departments, and agencies. As of 2015, nearly 41 percent of state employees are 50 or older.<sup>6</sup> With mass retirements likely in the near future, California government department heads are facing workforce and succession planning challenges as they seek to prevent the loss of critical institutional knowledge while also replenishing the ranks with the next generation of employees.

One area that could make a real difference? Helping more women attain executive level positions in state and local government. When you look at the numbers, female leaders are still by and large an untapped resource in California agencies. We believe the best solution to the "brain drain" problem is to expand the role of women at the top of the public sector.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University (data pulled on August 21, 2017)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> https://www.supremecourt.gov/

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Democrats Make Hillary Clinton a Historic Nominee (The New York Times, July 26, 2016)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Center for American Women and Politics at Rutgers University (data pulled on August 21, 2017)

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Audit: California government not planning for retirements (The Sacramento Bee, May 5, 2015)

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# Key findings and recommendations

Now, more than ever, it is clearly critical for California to get women interested in and prepared to take on public sector leadership roles. But if they are so vital to the future success of California government agencies, what is holding women back?



The findings of our survey of female California state and local government employees about working in the public sector reveal critical insights into the challenges shared among the group. The research also reveals actionable opportunities for government employers to develop clearer paths for talented female leaders to rise to the top.

Let's take a look at some of the key survey findings, as well as recommendations for empowering female leaders in government—directly from the pens of our respondents.



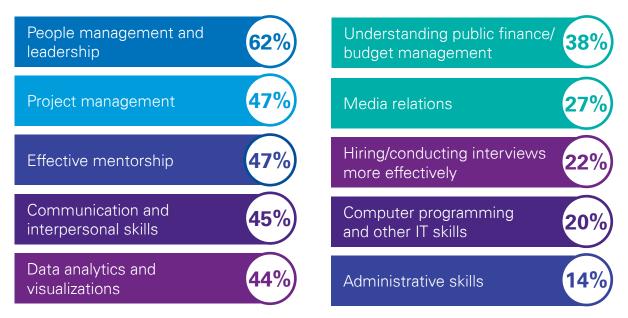


# Encourage and train female leaders

It is common sense—and a basic tenet of the workforce development field—that all employees, male or female, need both skills and support to improve performance and grow professionally. However, our survey results indicate that California government agencies may not be doing enough to help women take the next step in their careers.

The relative shortage of women in government leadership is not for lack of interest; women do aspire to high-level roles. In fact, people management and leadership is the top job skill the women we surveyed would like to develop (62 percent).

### Which of the following job skills would you most like to develop? (Please select all that apply.)

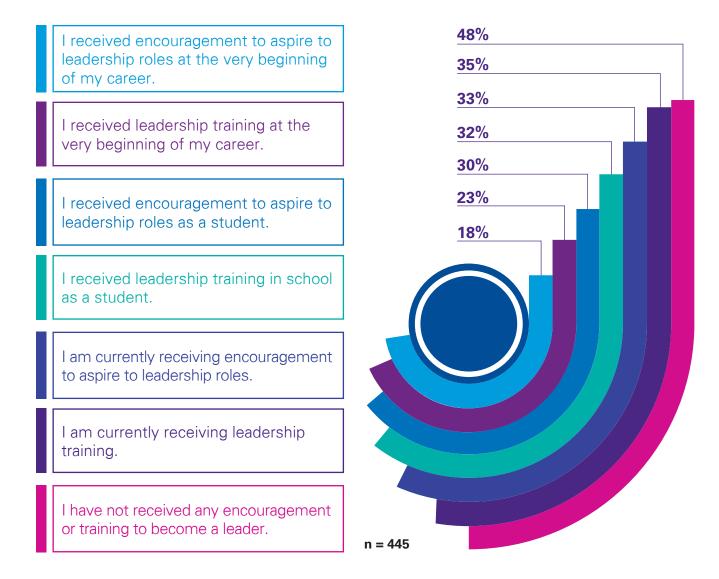


n = 445



However, while most respondents have received encouragement or training to become a leader at some point in their careers, **only 23 percent** are receiving it at their current government positions.

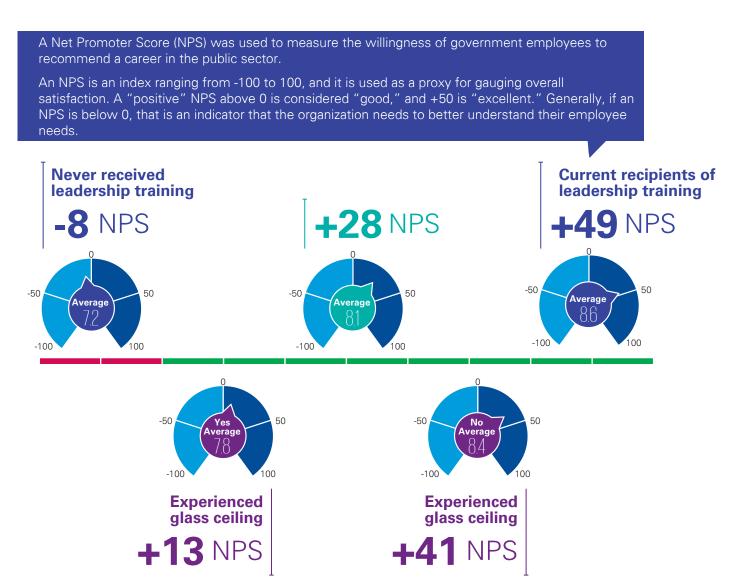
### During which stages of your career have you received encouragement or training to become a leader? (Select all that apply.)



# Encourage and train female leaders (continued)

What's more, leadership training is a critical component in how women perceive the public sector as an employer. The women surveyed who are presently receiving leadership training are more likely than those who are not to recommend careers in the public sector.

#### How likely are you to recommend employment in the public sector to others? Please rank on a 10-point scale, where 1 equals not at all, and 10 equals absolutely will recommend.



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#### **Recommendations from our respondents**

"[A major challenge] is getting adequate training while balancing time sensitive project work."

"[Offer] training focused on successful female leadership and what advantages being a woman provides. I think women make better leaders, but we have to be careful to avoid the pitfalls of following the male formula for success."

"My male supervisors have not been supportive in providing training and coaching to promote, but I see the same supervisors going out of their way to provide coaching to my male staff."

"Continue to offer training and academies or institutes for leadership, and be inclusive and diverse."

"There is little to no training internally to help grow a career in my place of employment. There are no mentor programs and little effort to grow staff from within the organization. This has caused me to seek additional education for myself outside of my employer."

"Every opportunity must be made to provide training, schooling, and nurturing to encourage development of skills and advances in confidence."

"When we get promotions, there is a perception that we know the details of the job and how to execute them. We need better [training] from managers that came before us."

"Show that women have a path towards promotion and advancement in the workplace."

"[Give] recognition for value-adds women bring—reasoning, positive emotions, negotiation, etc."

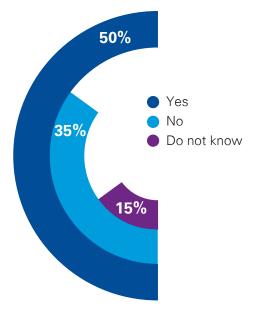
## Create an inclusive work environment

In 2017, in modern and progressive California, it may seem like inequality at work a problem of the past. But the truth is, discrimination persists—both blatant discrimination and less obvious unseen and unintentional discrimination that happens behind closed doors.

Diversity and inclusion remains a real and complex problem that government employers must immediately address. The women in our survey name a number of diversity and inclusion challenges they have faced in their careers, ranging from outright gender bias to problems related to being part of a "good ol' boy" system, such as communication barriers and lack of access to roles historically dominated by men.

Some women say male coworkers and supervisors do not always recognize their value, take them seriously, or include them in the most important discussions and decisions. Others even say they are not paid equally to male counterparts or it took them longer to advance to leadership roles compared to males in their same field.

Perhaps most strikingly, half of the women we surveyed (50 percent) say they have encountered a glass ceiling in their career.



### Q11: Have you encountered, or do you expect to encounter, a glass ceiling in your career?

#### **Recommendations from our respondents**

"In a male-dominated field, you have to prove things before you are taken seriously."

"Uphold a healthy culture including enforcement of antiharassment policies across the board."

#### "[I faced difficulty] being invited to sit at the table and to be heard."

"Create opportunities to learn and address implicit bias (not just recognize it)."

"I work in...a completely male-dominated field. I have felt alone and isolated, and I feel that my performance has been more closely analyzed than my male peers."

"[Make] more appointments [of women] in visible positions the appointments reserved for the 'good ol' boys.'"

"Over time, the greatest barrier has been sexism. Women are not only undervalued, but treated as nonexistent or, at best, unimportant."

"Treat [women] fairly, give them the same opportunities as male employees, and work with women of color to help them address stereotypes."

### Fight gender stereotypes

Women obviously have a lot to offer, but their value is not always recognized in traditional workplaces—especially at the upper levels of management. For example, when women are promoted, many find they must navigate unfortunate interpersonal issues driven by longstanding gender stereotypes.

Consider, for example, the negative perceptions and reactions the women we surveyed faced when they entered positions of power—that they are too aggressive, pushy, bossy, direct, or generally unlikable.

#### **Recommendations from our respondents**

"Women are looked at differently in leadership roles. For example, women who speak up are seen as aggressive where men are seen as strong."

"Tone at the top definitely affects the attractiveness of employment at the organization. While administration and top executives may hold fast to beliefs in gender equality, sometimes they can be found using diminutive language with female managers (kiddo, dear, sweetie)."

"To retain more women with aspiration for executive roles in the public sector, we need to equip women with negotiation skills and strategies for breaking through biases towards women in executive roles."

"'Directness' is not considered a good character trait for women in government. It is labeled as 'aggressive' if you are female."

"Give us all the same opportunities. Do not consider our marriage or our parenting roles as reasons why we wouldn't want the same careers as our male colleagues."

"Stop stereotyping!"



## Support flexibility

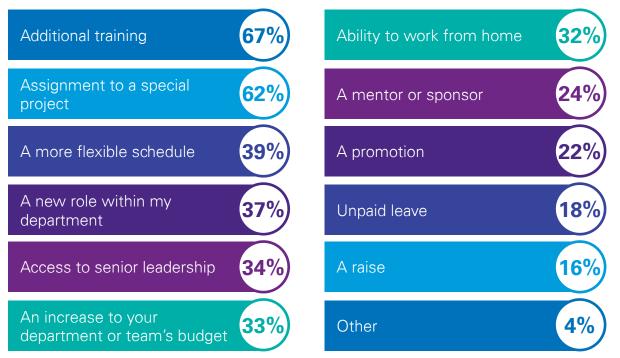
Juggling heavy workloads, sharp deadlines, and occasional all-nighters with the rest of life—from daily school pickups to urgent doctor visits, to trips and vacations with loved ones—is a major challenge facing women in the public sector that emerged in our survey.

Many survey respondents say they do not get enough support balancing the chaos of work and home responsibilities. For example, some respondents say they faced backlash or had their careers curtailed when they returned to work after maternity leave.

While achieving work-life balance can be especially challenging for mothers and caretakers, all sorts of other personal matters that can occur at any point throughout a women's career and are sometimes overlooked by supervisors can cause stress that can be harmful to her physical and mental health—not to mention her career trajectory.

Unfortunately, few women are willing to ask for career accommodations that might make achieving work-life balance possible. Only a small minority of respondents feel comfortable asking their supervisor for a flexible schedule (39 percent), the ability to work from home (32 percent), or unpaid leave (18 percent).

### Which of the following career accommodations or opportunities would you feel comfortable asking your supervisor(s) for? (Please select all that apply.)





#### **Recommendations from our respondents**

"[The greatest challenge is] maintaining an executive-level position and responsibilities while raising young children."

"[Offer] job-share programs to allow part-time work in leadership roles."

"We have got to become more flexible with hours and teleworking."

"Take a page from the corporate sector and provide family-oriented amenities that make it easier for women to get into entry-level positions."



"[Give employees] the ability to be flexible and work in a supportive atmosphere that reduces the stress that is created when [dueling] demands are there."

"Allow greater flexibility in schedules or leaves to allow mothers to perform familial duties while still maintaining career trajectory."



### Make women more visible

Research collected by two journalists who wrote *The Confidence Code* shows that female professionals, despite being better educated and more qualified than ever before, are much more likely to lack confidence at work than men. This can cause numerous problems in the workplace, impacting how women lead, succeed, and feel fulfilled—or don't.<sup>7</sup>

*The Confidence Code* authors say to overcome self-doubt and channel confidence, women can do a lot to help themselves, including stepping out of their comfort zones, taking more risks, and accepting failure.<sup>8</sup> But organizations can also do better at helping to grow women's confidence by making women more visible. For example, our survey shows that many women place great value in seeing others like them in targeted recruiting situations as well as in positions of power in the workplace.

#### **Recommendations from our respondents**

"When you see pictures of executive leadership in government, women are still not sufficiently represented."

"Use female leaders to do recruiting. We need to see ourselves."

"[Create] visibility of current women in leadership roles."

"Take every opportunity available to have women represented in the public eye."

"Have women on hiring panels and in positions of power."

"[I struggle to] stand up for myself or make my own strengths or skills known in a way that is to my advantage. I see men boast about themselves and get good projects but I am not able to do the same with any results."

"I think there needs to be more people verbally and personally encouraging women to apply to positions. Women only apply when they feel like they can do 80 percent of the job duties; men apply when they meet 25 percent of the duties."

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>8</sup> Ibid.



<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>7</sup> The Confidence Code: The Science and Art of Self-Assurance—What Women Should Know (Katty Kay and Claire Shipman, HarperBusiness, April 15, 2014)

### Prioritize mentorship

Our survey shows that female employees feel role models and mentors of their same gender can help inspire them to advance and advocate for them along the way.

A mentor could help women both prepare for the challenges of leadership and pave the way for a female mentee's career advancement, even in spite of those challenges.

Unfortunately, many respondents say they do not have many—or any—opportunities to be mentored by a female in their careers. Some even say there are no mentoring initiatives in place at their organizations in any capacity, led by either women or men.

#### **Recommendations from our respondents**

"While I have been fortunate to have male mentors...who have taken me under their wings, I have not had the opportunity to be mentored by a female."

"[Offer] mentoring by successful female government leaders and managers."

"[Create] a designated mentor program where both the mentee and mentor truly have time built into their schedules."

"[My greatest career challenge has been] finding a mentor who is a woman and has children."

"Establish a succession plan/mentor program—a clear path for growth and leadership roles."

## Final thoughts

This research makes clear that to attract, retain, and advance female employees into leadership positions, much more work needs to done to improve public sector on-the-job experience. California government agencies must be innovative and open to changing the prevailing work culture and conditions that create barriers to women at work.

We hope the insights derived from this research will help California public sector employers identify actions that will help women achieve their potential—professionally and personally.

### Survey methodology

On behalf of KPMG, the Governing Institute surveyed 445 state and local female professionals in government roles in the state of California about their opinions and perspectives on public sector employment. Responses were gathered in an online survey of Governing's proprietary exchange community in March 2017.



#### Organization type you work for:

## KPMG's #ITsHerFutureCA program

At KPMG, we care deeply about the issue of women's leadership in California and beyond. That is why we recently launched the #ITsHerFutureCA program in California.

The #ITsHerFutureCA program is designed to tackle the core challenges facing California women in a traditionally male-dominated information technology (IT) sector. Through research and events, the program creates opportunities for intelligent and hardworking women in California government IT to voice their opinions and perspectives on career development, leadership, work-life balance, and other issues related to public sector employment.

Learn more about #ITsHerFutureCA program by contacting Whitney Sweet at wsweet@kpmg.com.







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