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> Puget Sound/Seattle



WTS Puget Sound Glass Ceiling Report

May 2026

Acknowledgements

The Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) Puget Sound/Seattle Chapter Glass Ceiling Committee (Committee) consists of the following individuals whose dedicated work over the last year made this report possible:

- ▶ Kathryn Murdock, Maul Foster & Alongi, Inc, Committee Co-Chair
- ▶ Sydney Weisman, Fehr & Peers, Committee Co-Chair
- ▶ Kitty Chiu, CPCS
- ▶ Feng Li, GeoEngineers
- ▶ Laura Shabe, RailPros
- ▶ Tong Wu, HDR

The Glass Ceiling Committee would also like to thank the graphics team at Maul Foster & Alongi, Inc for donating their time to design and lay out this report.

The Committee acknowledges the additional input and support from the 2023-2024 WTS Puget Sound/Seattle Executive Board, including:

- ▶ Cora Johnson, GeoEngineers, President
- ▶ Brett Pool, HDR, Vice President
- ▶ Gabi Kappes, GFT, Director of Major Programs
- ▶ Hailey Brey, Kimley-Horn, Co-Treasurer
- ▶ Renee Koester, David Evans and Associates, Co-Treasurer
- ▶ Tracy Wyrick, Hill International, Secretary
- ▶ Emily Yasukochi, Sound Transit, Past President
- ▶ Sherry Harris, Ergosync, Regional Council Representative

WTS Puget Sound/Seattle acknowledges that we work on the unceded, traditional land of the Coast Salish Peoples, including the first people of Seattle, the Duwamish People, original stewards of the land, past and present. We honor with gratitude the land itself and the Duwamish Tribe. Please visit realrentduwamish.org to learn how you can support the Duwamish Tribe. We also honor with gratitude the Muckleshoot Tribe, Puyallup Tribe, Tulalip Tribes, Snoqualmie Tribe, Suquamish Tribe, and the Snohomish Tribe in the broader Puget Sound region. To learn more about Coast Salish Peoples, please visit: chiefseattleclub.org/land-acknowledgements.

“The ‘glass ceiling’—a term introduced more than 40 years ago—refers to an invisible, systemic barrier that prevents women from rising to senior leadership.”

Lean In, Women in the Workplace 2019

(<https://leanin.org/women-in-the-workplace/2019/glass-ceiling-and-the-broken-rung>)

“The opportunities are there but the mentorship and support are not.”

—Anonymous employee survey respondent

“I believe women bring leadership qualities of empathy, collaboration, and careful consideration. I try to lead [my city] with compassionate accountability and give [citizens] space to explore new ideas.”

—Veronica O. Davis, Director of Transportation & Drainage Operations at City of Houston and author of Inclusive Transportation, Subtext Issue 1, February 2022

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Executive Summary

WTS Puget Sound/Seattle Chapter advances the transportation industry through the commitment to address barriers faced by women and nonbinary people within workplaces. In the 2021-2022 WTS board year, the Chapter established its first Glass Ceiling Committee (Committee) to research and conduct a baseline survey to determine whether women or nonbinary-identifying transportation professionals face a glass ceiling limiting their career advancement. This report is the Committee's 2025-2026 bi-annual updated assessment to inform the Chapter's advocacy efforts with the region's public and private employers.

As part of this assessment, the Committee conducted:

- ▶ **A literature review:** The Committee researched and reviewed current news articles, journal articles, and reports related to the career advancement and unique challenges of women. In addition, the Committee reviewed current articles that highlighted the challenges unique to the Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) fields and return-to-work policies' impact on women in the workforce.
- ▶ **An employer survey:** The Committee administered an employer survey in Spring 2025. Of the 76 employers contacted in the central Puget Sound region (Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties), 42% of surveys were completed.
- ▶ **An employee survey:** The Committee administered an anonymous employee survey in Spring 2025. The employee survey was distributed to the WTS Puget Sound/ Seattle community in two newsletters, through other professional organizations, and through the Chapter's social media accounts. Chapter board members were also asked to share the survey within their workplaces. Approximately 184 women and nonbinary transportation professionals answered the survey.

“Despite widespread adoption of DEI policies, many women and nonbinary professionals continue to experience sexism, higher performance standards, and “prove yourself” expectations that impede advancement.”

— Key Takeaways

The results of the Glass Ceiling Committee surveys indicate that a glass ceiling does exist within the transportation industry in the Puget Sound. While efforts to address the glass ceiling in the industry continue, recent trends—especially expanded return-to-office policies and recent federal layoffs—risk undermining prior gains in gender equity. In addition, while employers are making progress in supporting and advancing women into leadership positions, gaps remain for women and nonbinary transportation professionals across racial and ethnic identities.

Below are a few additional takeaways and recommendations for employers based on the recent survey data:

- ▶ **Return-to-office policies carry unintended consequences:** Stricter in-office requirements may reinforce long-standing structural barriers in an industry that already struggles to retain and promote women into leadership roles.
- ▶ **Gender pay gaps persist, especially at senior levels:** Although some narrowing is occurring, women in transportation-related engineering and planning roles continue to earn less than men, with gaps widening as experience increases—indicating a glass ceiling in access to higher compensation. Pay inequities are more pronounced for Hispanic/Latino and Black women engineers compared to male and White female counterparts, highlighting the need for targeted equity strategies. Employers are encouraged to maintain pay transparency practices and proactively assess and address internal gender and race pay inequities.
- ▶ **Work culture remains a major barrier:** Despite widespread adoption of DEI policies, many women and nonbinary professionals continue to experience sexism, higher performance standards, and “prove yourself” expectations that impede advancement. Advancing equity will require dismantling exclusionary norms and networks, valuing diverse leadership styles, and holding all employees to equitable performance standards.
- ▶ **DEI commitment is a positive bright spot:** Despite a challenging national climate, DEI programs have largely been sustained and normalized among surveyed Puget Sound employers, providing a foundation for continued progress.

— Next Steps

As part of the Chapter's efforts to address barriers that women and nonbinary people face in the workplace, this report will be shared with the Puget Sound region's major public and private employers via email, through a launch event in June 2026, and promoted at the annual WTS Puget Sound Awards and Scholarship gala in April 2026. In 2027, the Glass Ceiling Committee will begin the next biannual survey to see if the glass ceiling has been raised and, as a Chapter, looks forward to continuing to host advocacy and education events with public and private employers to continue this important conversation.



Introduction and Study Objectives

As part of its mission to strengthen the transportation industry through the advancement of women and nonbinary leaders, the Women's Transportation Seminar (WTS) Puget Sound/Seattle Chapter (Chapter) is committed to addressing barriers that women and nonbinary people face in public and private workplaces throughout the industry. In the 2021-2022 WTS year, the Chapter formed the first Glass Ceiling Committee (Committee) to research whether women and nonbinary people in the Puget Sound transportation industry faced a glass ceiling limiting their career advancement. In spring 2023 the Committee conducted their first industry survey and in February 2024 the Committee released their [baseline report](#) to inform the Chapter's advocacy efforts with the region's public and private employers.

This 2026 report is an updated assessment of barriers women and nonbinary professionals continue to face in the transportation sector.

Similar to the 2024 baseline report, the purpose of this report is to:

- ▶ Better understand the current status of women and nonbinary people in the transportation industry.
- ▶ Track the career advancement of women and nonbinary people in the Puget Sound transportation industry in future years.
- ▶ Identify any barriers to women and nonbinary people's advancement.
- ▶ Identify which programs, provided by companies and agencies in the workforce, support women and nonbinary people's advancement in the profession.
- ▶ Transfer knowledge of best practices to local industry leaders.

The Chapter is intimately familiar with the obstacles, challenges, and opportunities facing the industry, and this report will provide another tool to develop the vital support needed for women and nonbinary transportation professionals to succeed in the industry. Programs will be aimed at equalizing leadership opportunities for all genders and will support a balanced and diverse labor force in the transportation profession.

Study Approach

The Committee's research method consisted of conducting a literature review, a survey of transportation employers in the Puget Sound, and a survey of Puget Sound transportation employees who identify as female and/or nonbinary.

— Literature Review

The Committee updated the Literature Review from the baseline report, researching and reviewing news articles, journal articles, and reports related to the career advancement of women, and identified key themes related to barriers and challenges. In addition, the Committee reviewed articles that highlighted the challenges that women are facing with return-to-work policies and widespread layoffs at the federal level.

— Employer Survey

The Committee administered an employer survey in spring 2025 to follow the WTS Glass Ceiling Committee baseline survey in 2023. The survey requested employee demographic data reported in 2024; information related to policies and programs; and barriers to the recruitment, retention, or advancement of women and nonbinary transportation professionals.

The Committee reached out to 76 public and private transportation employers in the central Puget Sound region (Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties). Of the 76 employers that were contacted, 32 surveys were completed. The overall response rate was 42% which mirrored the 2023 baseline survey response rate.

— Employee Survey

The Committee administered an anonymous employee survey in spring 2025 to update baseline findings from the 2023 survey. The survey requested employee demographic data; information related to policies and programs; the importance of policies and programs for career advancement; whether employees feel supported at their workplace; and whether employees experience barriers at their workplace.

The Committee sent the employee survey out to the WTS Puget Sound/Seattle community in two newsletters, through WTS Puget Sound Facebook and LinkedIn posts, at the 2025 WTS Gala, and through multiple professional organizations. In addition, Chapter board members were asked to share the survey within their workplaces. Approximately 184 women and nonbinary transportation professionals answered the 2025 survey, as compared to 190 women and nonbinary transportation professionals in the 2023 baseline survey.

Literature Review

The baseline literature review largely considered the gender pay gap across all employed persons. The updated literature review reviewed studies from several institutions and sources with data-focused job classifications that reflect a large segment of the Chapter’s “Women in Transportation” membership, such as planning and engineering, science, technology, construction, management, and public-sector professionals. In addition, this literature review considers newer studies and highlights post-pandemic and return-to-work trends that affect women and nonbinary professionals.

In reviewing research for this literature review, the Committee found more research conducted on barriers to women in the workplace, and had difficulty finding trusted research on barriers nonbinary professionals face. The lack of wage gap data for LGBTQ workers was highlighted in a blog post by the National Women’s Law Center.¹ The lack of research on nonbinary professional advancement presents yet another barrier within the transportation industry and limits the research included in this report.

“...among full-time, year-round workers, median earnings increased 3.7% for men, but did not change significantly for women between 2023 and 2024.”

— Gender-earning Gap Across All Occupations

In 2024, according to a Pew Research Center analysis of median hourly earnings of both full- and part-time workers, women in the United States (U.S.) earned on average 85% of what men earned. In comparison to 2003, the gender pay gap in the U.S. was slightly wider with women earning an average of 81% of men’s earnings.² The gender pay gap also varies by age with women ages 25-34 having a narrower pay gap (95% in 2024) as compared to all women workers over 16 (85% in 2024).³

¹ National Women’s Law Center, We Need Wage Gap Data for LGBTQ Workers. Here’s Why. June 16, 2021, <https://nwlc.org/we-need-wage-gap-data-for-lgbtq-workers-heres-why/>.

² Fry, Richard and Aragao, Carolina, Pew Research Center, March 4, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/03/04/gender-pay-gap-in-us-has-narrowed-slightly-over-2-decades/>.

³ Ibid.

When looking at only full-time salary workers in the U.S., a website called “Narrow the Gap” uses 2023 median weekly earnings of full-time salary workers (as reported by the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics) to identify the wage gap between men and women across a full range of occupations. Overall, “Narrow the Gap” reports that women in the U.S. who worked full-time earned 84% of what men earned in 2023.⁴

Some of the gains shown by these 2023 numbers may be eroding. The United States Census Bureau’s publication “Income in the United States: 2024” shows that among full-time, year-round workers, median earnings increased 3.7% for men, but did not change significantly for women between 2023 and 2024. And the women-to-men earnings ratio fell from 82.7% in 2023 to 80.9% in 2024.

In recent years, women of color are experiencing downward trends. During the first seven months of 2025, the labor market slowed for all workers, but the unemployment rate for Black women over age 20 rose by nearly a percentage point to 6.3%.⁵ Another study shows unemployment for Black women rose to 7.8% in December 2025.⁶

Specifically, it was Black women with bachelor’s degrees who lost the most ground. In 2024, 74% of Black women with bachelor’s degrees were employed; that rate fell to 71% in the first nine months of 2025. The rate for white women with bachelor’s degrees fell less than one percentage point during the same period.⁷

Women in Science, Technology, Engineering, and — Mathematics

The results of the literature review indicate that across the Science, Technology, Planning and Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) industry in the U.S., women’s median earnings are generally less than men’s - with some notable exceptions by state. However, on average, the pay gap between women and men in STEM-related fields is narrower than the overall pay gap cited above.

According to the National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), which collected salary data via a National Survey of College Graduates in 2019, much of the

⁴ Narrow the Gap, <https://narrowthegap.co/>, accessed February 10, 2026.

⁵ Mothers are leaving the workforce, erasing pandemic gains, Washington Post, August 11, 2025, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/08/11/mothers-leaving-workforce-large-numbers/>.

⁶ Black Women Turn to One Another as Their Career Paths Suddenly Recede, New York Times, January 17, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/17/business/black-women-job-market-hiring-careers-dei.html>.

⁷ Black Women Turn to One Another as Their Career Paths Suddenly Recede, New York Times, January 17, 2026, <https://www.nytimes.com/2026/01/17/business/black-women-job-market-hiring-careers-dei.html>.

prevailing gender pay gap can be traced to men holding significantly more supervisory roles than women in science and engineering fields.⁸ Within the engineering field, engineering is among those with the lowest share of female degree recipients. The NCSES analysis found that in 2019, the women’s median salary in engineering was approximately 92% of the men’s median salary in engineering.⁹

It is not just that there are a higher number of men in the STEM industry, but instead that a higher proportion of men chose to enter the field as compared to women.¹⁰

Table 1. Female and male education attainment in the STEM industry

Gender	Number of workers in STEM	Sub-baccalaureate credential	Bachelor’s degree or higher
Female	12 million (17% of total female workers)	5 million	7 million
Male	23.5 million (29% of total male workers)	13 million	10.5 million



⁸ The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics, Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering, <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf21321/report/occupation#supervisory-status>.

⁹ The National Center for Science and Engineering Statistics (NCSES), Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering, <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf21321/report/occupation#median-salary>.

¹⁰ Ibid, <https://nces.nsf.gov/pubs/nsf21321/report/academic-careers>.

The literature indicates that the gender pay gap within the STEM field varies by discipline. Using data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Society of Women Engineers (SWE) found that for selected engineering occupations in 2023, female mechanical engineers had the narrowest earnings gap (96% of male median earnings) and petroleum engineers had the widest earning gap (86% of male median earnings).¹¹

The gender pay gap in engineering also varies by location with some states in the U.S. showing a shift to higher pay for women. Averaging across all engineering disciplines by state, SWE found that the earnings of women engineers are 77-111% of men's. Salary gaps are larger in the Northeast, while in some Western states, including Nevada, women's engineering salaries are outpacing those of men.¹²

The "Narrow the Gap" website found that the wage gap in architecture and engineering has narrowed over the past decade. Using the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, Narrow the Gap calculates that in 2023 women in architecture and engineering occupations who worked full-time made 88% of what men earned. In 2011, this gap was 3% larger.¹³

— Women in Construction

The National Association of Women in Construction (NAWIC) notes on their website that support for women in construction has been growing for decades, however women within the construction industry continue to represent only 9-10% of the workforce, with 44% of these women in professional and management roles. In 2020, construction women across the industry earned 74% compared to construction men, with construction women in managerial roles earning 86% as compared to construction men in managerial roles.¹⁴

— Federal Workforce

The federal government is the largest single employer in the United States with over 2,035,000 civilian employees (does not include active-duty military or the postal service) in January 2026.¹⁵ In November 2024, the federal workforce was significantly larger with

¹¹ U.S. Earnings Gap, Society of Women Engineers, <https://swe.org/research/2025/us-earnings-gap/>, accessed February 10, 2026.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Narrow the Gap, <https://narrowthegap.co/gap/architecture-and-engineering-occupations>, accessed February 10, 2026.

¹⁴ The National Association of Women in Construction, Breaking down the pay gap between construction women and men, <https://nawic.org/breaking-down-the-pay-gap-between-construction-women-and-men/>.

¹⁵ U.S. Office of Personnel Management, Federal Workforce Data, accessed March 12, 2026, <https://data.opm.gov/explore-data/analytics/workforce-size-and-composition>.

over 2,400,000 civilian employees.¹⁶ This reduction has led to significant demographic shifts in the federal workforce.

According to the literature, including an analysis by the National Women’s Law Center, the federal agency cuts and layoffs initiated by the Trump-Vance Administration that began in January 2025 were focused on federal agencies with high shares of Black workers, women and in particular Black women.¹⁷

Black workers held an 18% share of the overall federal workforce in September 2024. However the cabinet-level departments that experienced large-scale layoffs since January 2025 had higher shares of Black workers. These include the Department of Housing and Urban Development (39% Black workers), the Department of Education (36% Black workers), Department of the Treasury (29% Black workers), Department of Veterans Affairs (25% Black workers) and the Department of Health and Human Services (20% Black workers).¹⁸

Women made up 46% of the total federal workforce in September 2024. Like Black workers, the cabinet-level departments that experienced large-scale layoffs since January 2025 had higher shares of women. These departments include the Department of Housing and Urban Development (59% women), the Department of Education (63% women), the Department of the Treasury (61% women), the Department of Veterans Affairs (64% women), and the Department of Health and Human Services (63% women).¹⁹

More detailed data on the demographics of the current federal workforce are not available for reference. In March 2025, the Trump-Vance administration removed current and historic diversity data, which includes race and ethnicity indicators for the federal workforce, from the main public data website.

The National Women’s Law Center also notes that the gender wage gap in the federal sector in September 2024 was 95% - significantly narrower than the national average of 83%.²⁰ However, the Government Executive publication found that the gender pay gap between men and women in the federal sector widens with age. The gap is more than double for women aged 40 and older compared to those under 40 years old.²¹

¹⁶ Pew Research Center, What the data says about federal workers, January 7, 2025, <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2025/01/07/what-the-data-says-about-federal-workers/>.

¹⁷ National Women’s Law Center, Attacks on the Federal Workforce Target Women and People of Color, May 2025, <https://nwlc.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/05/Federal-Workforce-FS-5.5.25v2.pdf>.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Government Executive, 2025, <https://www.govexec.com/pay-benefits/2025/01/eeoc-federal-gender-pay-gap-gets-worse-age/402080/>.



— Post Pandemic Trends

The impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic varied by gender. Following the national emergency and mandatory stay-at-home orders in response to the COVID-19 virus, the Institute for Women’s Policy Research reports that the overall rate of unemployment spiked to 14.7 % in April 2020, up from 4.4 percent a month earlier, with the unemployment of women reaching 15.5% as compared to 13% for men.²² Although women’s employment fully recovered from the pandemic by January 2023, it took 11 months longer than men’s to reach pre-COVID employment levels.²³

Mothers’ labor force participation rates reached pre-pandemic levels following the recovery of child care center jobs. The differences between mothers’ and fathers’ labor force participation however remain large. In 2024, 73.7% of mothers and 94.9% of fathers

²² Institute for Women’s Policy Research, Women at Work Five Years Since the Start of the COVID-19 Pandemic, March 2025, https://iwpr.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Women-at-Work-Five-Years-Since-the-Start-of-the-COVID-19-Pandemic-fact-sheet_March-2025.pdf.

²³ Ibid.

were in the labor force; in 2019, those rates were 71.9 and 94.7%, respectively.²⁴ This trend shows a gain in employment among working mothers that could be attributable to work-from-home and hybrid work models.

Recent roll backs in flexible work policies post-pandemic have reversed these gains for working mothers. According to 2025 federal labor statistics analyzed by the Washington Post, the labor force participation rate for women ages 25 to 44 with children under 5 fell nearly three percentage points between January and June of 2025, reaching its lowest level in over three years.²⁵

For female STEM professionals, more women than men (4.6% versus 3.1%) are choosing to move to lower-ranking positions in a different industry as a result of return-to-office mandates, further exacerbating existing gender pay gaps in STEM fields. In addition, while firms experience abnormally high employee turnover following return-to-office mandates, the increase in turnover is more pronounced among women and more senior and skilled employees.²⁶

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ The Washington Post, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/business/2025/08/11/mothers-leaving-workforce-large-numbers/>.

²⁶ RTO or not: Weighing the Options, Society of Women Engineers, December 2025, <https://swe.org/magazine/rto-or-not-weighing-the-options/>.

Survey Findings: Employer Survey

— Distribution and Participation

In spring 2025, the Committee distributed a survey requesting the following information from employers:

- ▶ Employee demographic data reported in 2024
- ▶ Information related to the policies and programs that support women and nonbinary people in career development as well in competing responsibilities at home and at work
- ▶ Barriers to the recruitment, retention, or advancement of women and nonbinary people

The Committee reached out to 76 public and private transportation employers in the central Puget Sound region (Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties). The list of public and private transportation employers was developed through consulting WTS Puget Sound/Seattle committees, board members, and research by the Membership Committee into Women and Minority-Owned Businesses (WMBE) in the Puget Sound.

Of the 76 employers that were contacted, 32 unique surveys were completed, representing a 42% response rate. None of the questions were required for survey submission, so the number of responses for a given question ranged from three to 32 responses, with most questions generating between 15 to 25 responses.

Based on WTS Glass Ceiling efforts around the country, this response rate is fairly typical for survey efforts. While response rates typically increase as WTS chapters publish more reports, this survey had an equivalent survey response rate to the Glass Ceiling Committee 2023 baseline survey. This response rate is likely due to the timing of the survey as multiple public agencies were experiencing financial uncertainty, and hiring and spending freezes in spring 2025.

The survey was organized into the following sections:

1. Organizational demographics
2. Employment data
3. Organizational policies

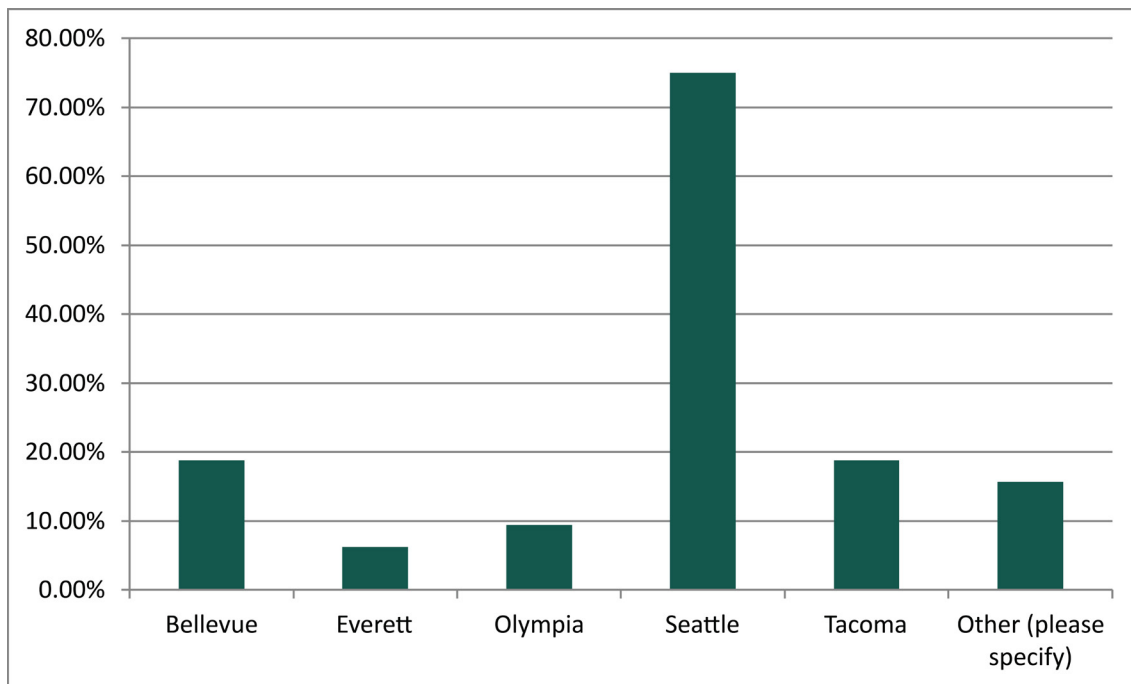
The following content summarizes 2025 findings by survey section.

— Organizational Demographics

The Committee received survey responses from employers in all three of the central Puget Sound counties: Snohomish, King, and Pierce counties. Of the jurisdictions represented, the highest number of responses came from Seattle (75%), followed by Bellevue (19%), and Tacoma (19%).

The responses from “Other” jurisdictions included Kirkland, Spokane, Gig Harbor, Pasco, Snohomish, and Sammamish. It is important to note that while Spokane and Pasco are outside the Puget Sound, these two offices were associated with a firm who also has a Puget Sound office. Figure 1 outlines the breakdown of office location by jurisdiction.

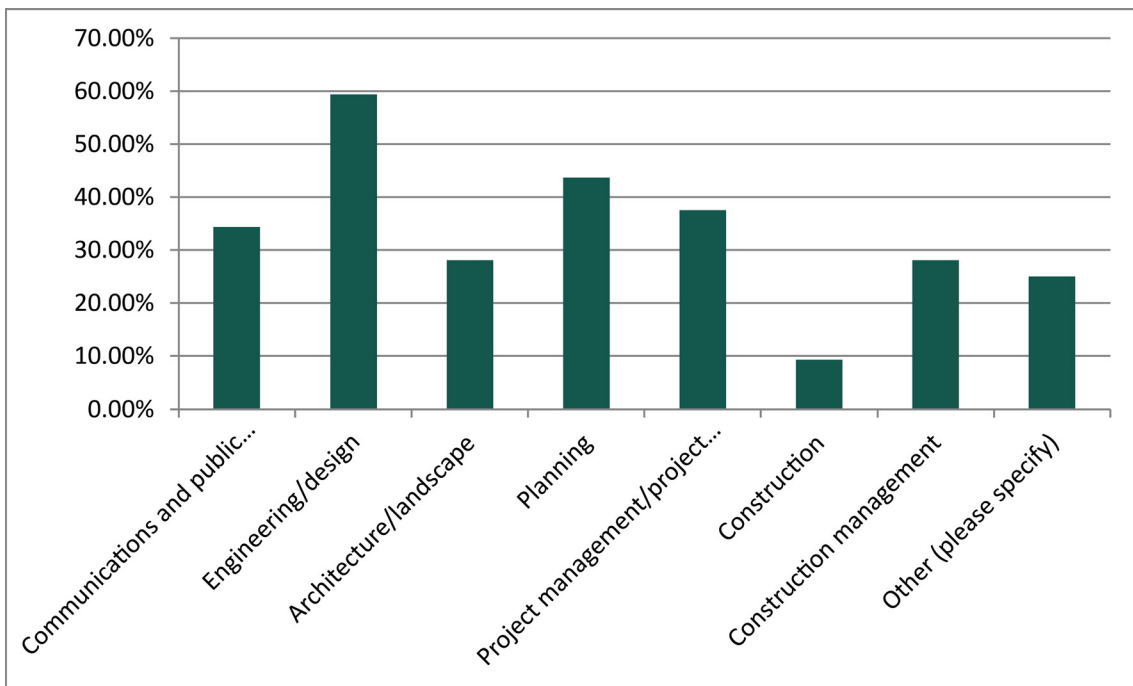
Figure 1. Employer survey respondents’ Puget Sound office location



Of the survey respondents, 16% represented a public agency, as compared to 33% in the baseline report. This significant decrease in public sector participation is likely due to timing of the survey in spring 2025 which, as noted above, was a highly uncertain time for the public sector with hiring and spending freezes. Of the 84% of respondents who represented a private employer, 9% were employee-owned businesses.

All private employers that responded to the survey were also asked to select the types of consulting services provided. Engineering/design received the highest number of responses (59%), with planning (44%), project management/project controls (38%), communications and public engagement (34%), architecture/landscape (28%), and construction management (28%) following. The category of services from the company, agency, and firm respondents is included in Figure 2.

Figure 2. Services provided by private employers



Note: Employers could select multiple services in their response.

Of the 32 employers who responded to the survey, nine employers responded that their firm meets at least one of the following certifications: Women and Minority Business Enterprise (WMBE), Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Small Business Enterprise (SBE), and/or Veteran-owned business (see Table 2). There are seven employers in each certification as employers could select more than one.

Table 2. Employer selection of certification

Employer certification	# of Employers
WMBE	7
DBE	7
SBE	7
Veteran-owned business	0

Note: Employers could select multiple certifications in their response.

Of the 32 employers who responded to the survey, 26 employers provided a response on the total number of employees (full and part-time) who worked in the office or

department at the time the survey was conducted in 2025 (see Table 3). All public agencies who responded to this question, removed any consultant employees from their total employee number.

Table 3. Size of Employer Survey Respondents' Company or Agency

Size of Employer	# of Employers
Small employers (under 50)	8
Medium employers (51-250)	8
Large employers (over 251)	10

“...data shows a clear glass ceiling still exists for women of color in senior-level management of technical STEM-focused teams and participation in company or agency leadership.”

— Employment Data

The survey asked employers whether they collected data disaggregated by gender, (26 employers answered this question), gender identity (22 employers answered this question), race (21 employers answered this question), and by race and gender identity (11 employers answered this question). Table 4 shows that while most employers collect data disaggregated by gender and race, the industry has room to grow in collecting data disaggregated by gender identity.

Table 4. Employer Survey Respondents' Data Collection

Data	Yes (%)	No (%)
Disaggregated by gender	65%	35%
Disaggregated by gender identity	18%	82%
Disaggregated by race	52%	48%
Disaggregated by race and gender identity	27%	73%

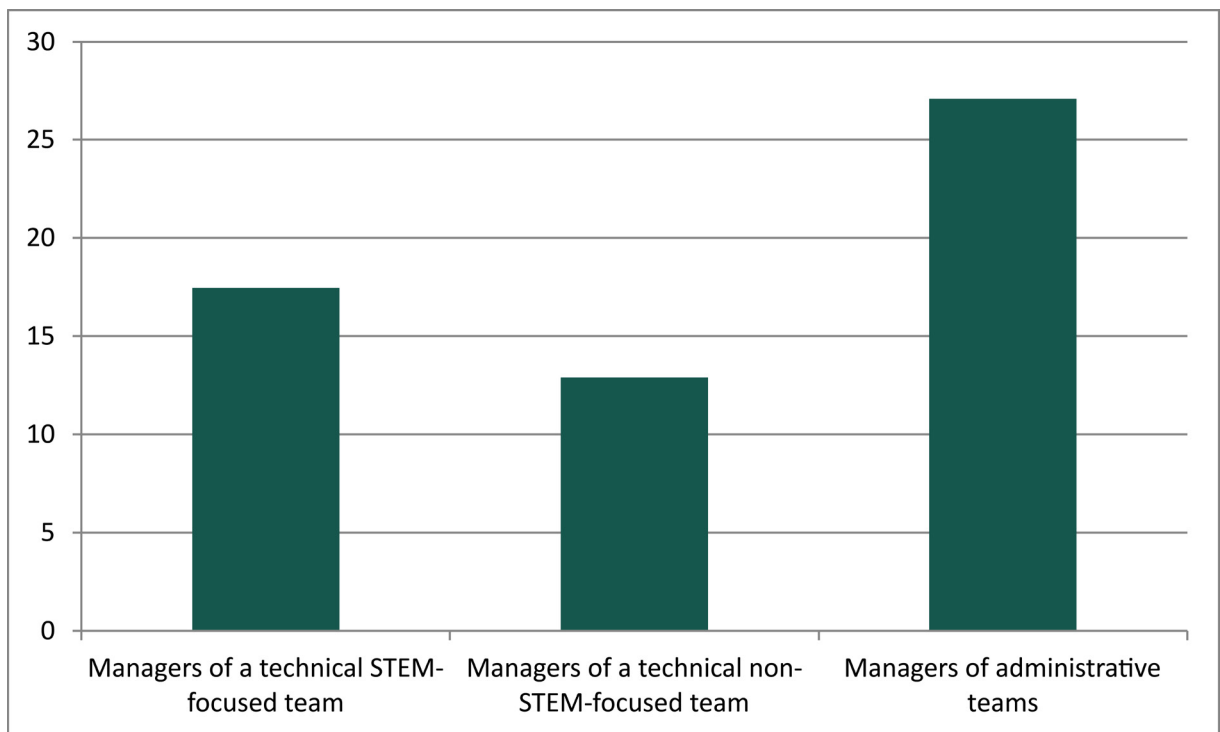
— Employees and managers who identify as women

While 22 employers collect data based on gender identity, only 13 employers shared data on how many employees identified as women. When asked what percentage of employees in the office identify as women, the average of all survey respondents was 41%. When split into public sector and private sector, the public sector average was 35% and the private sector was 42%. While the public sector increased by 7% from the 2023 baseline survey, this is not statistically significant given that only two public employers answered this question.

The same number of respondents answered the survey questions on the percentage of first- to mid-level managers²⁷ identify as women in 2024. Of the responses available, the committee found that an average of 16% of first- to mid-level managers identified as women.

The survey then asked employers, of the 16% of women who identified as first- to mid-level managers, what type of roles did women hold in the company or agency (see figure 3).

Figure 3. Roles of first to mid-level managers who identified as women in 2024.

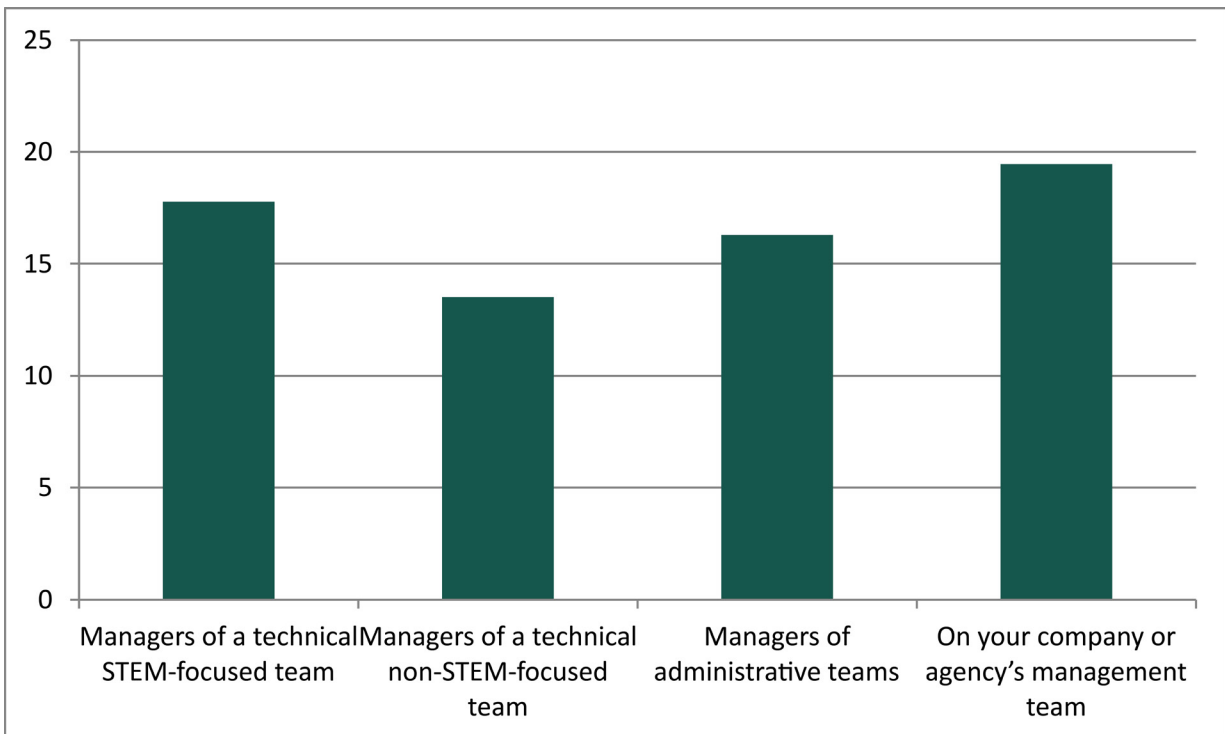


²⁷ First-level managers are defined as entry-level management positions.



When asked the percentage of employees in senior-level management positions who identified as women, the average was 14%. The survey then asked employers, of the 14% of women who identified as senior-level management, what type of roles did women hold in the company or agency. As you can see from Figure 4, while women hold a higher level of administrative roles in first- to mid-level roles, as women elevate to senior-level roles, they are increasingly being elevated to the company or agency’s management team.

Figure 4. Roles of senior-level managers who identified as women in 2024.



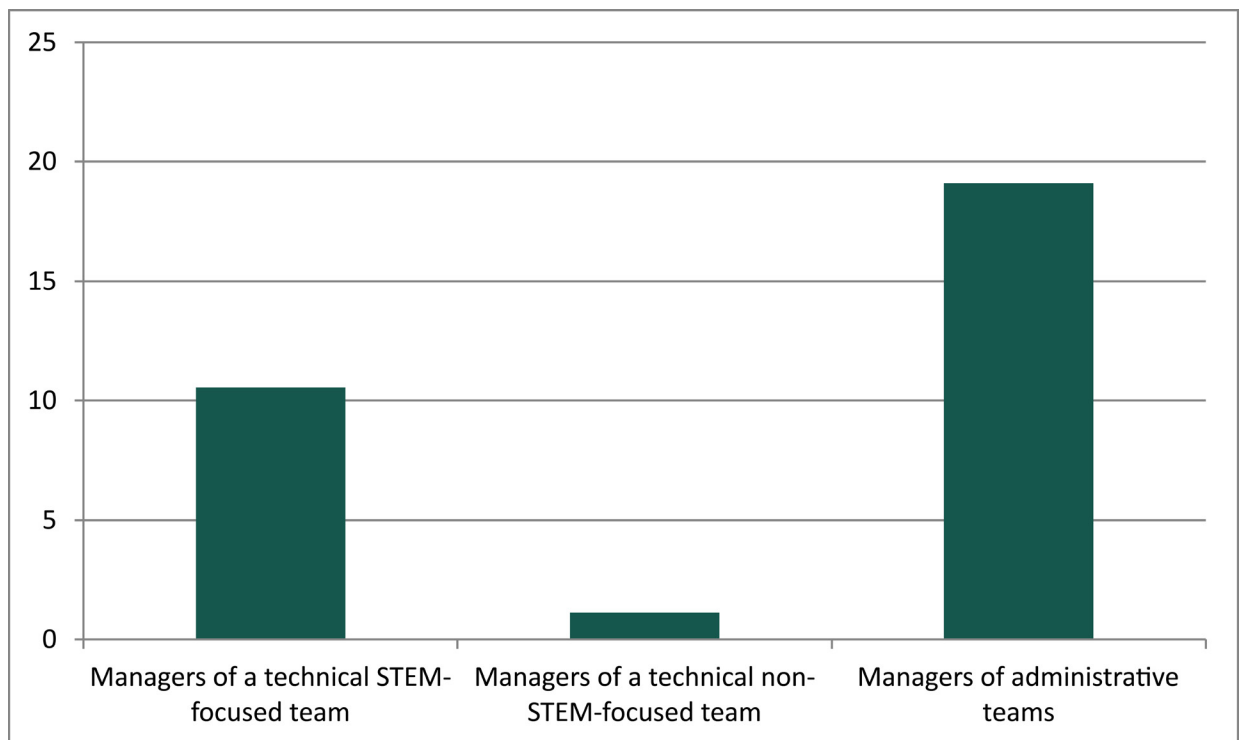
— Employees and Managers who Identify as Women of Color

While 21 employers collect data based on racial identity, only 11 employers shared data on how many employees identified as women of color. When asked what percentage of employees in the office identify as women of color, the average of all survey respondents was 14%. When split into public sector and private sector, the public sector average was 37% and the private sector was 11%. While the public sector appears significantly higher than the private sector, it is important to note that the public sector average is only based on one data point.

The same number of respondents answered the survey question on the percentage of employees who identify as women of color and were first- to mid-level managers in 2024. Of the responses available, an average of 6% of first- to mid-level managers identified as women of color.

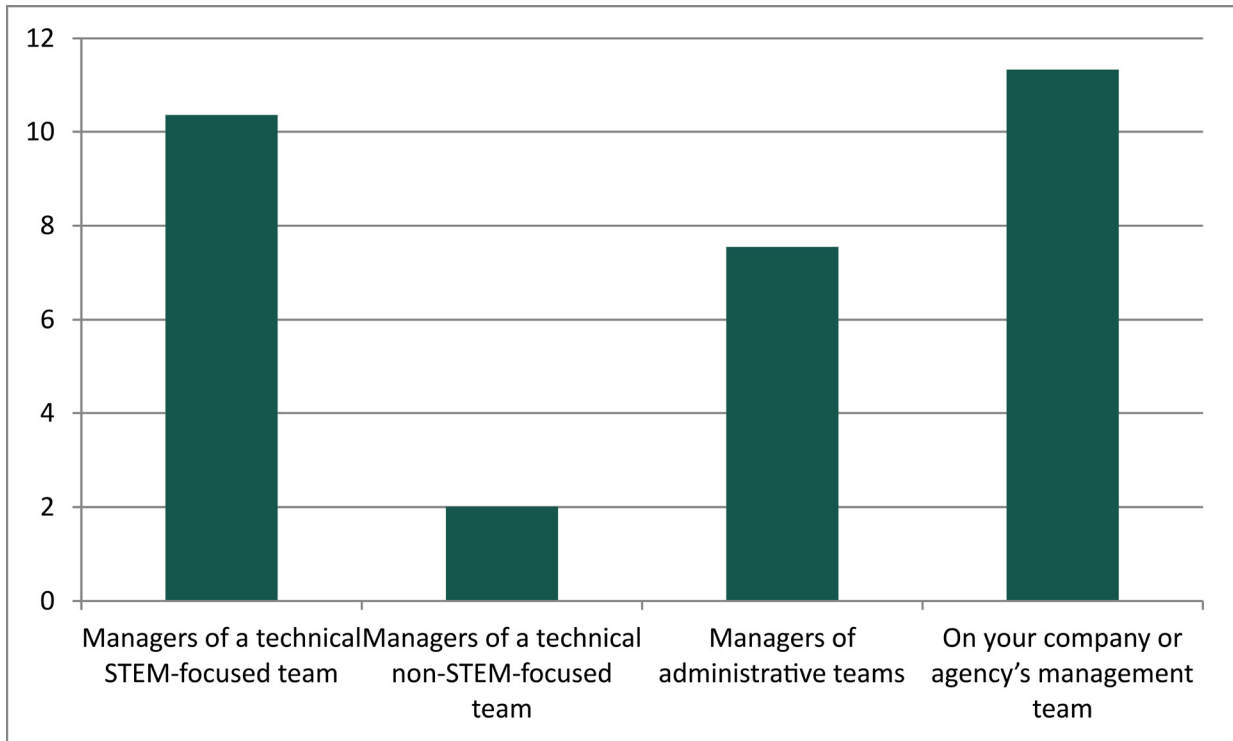
The survey then asked employers, of the 14% of women of color who identified as first- to mid-level managers, what type of roles they held in the company or agency (see Figure 5).

Figure 5. Roles of first to mid-level managers who identified as women of color in 2024.



When asked the percentage of employees in senior-level management positions who identified as women of color, the average was 5%. The survey then asked employers, of the 5% of women of color who identified as senior-level management, what type of roles did women hold in the company or agency (see Figure 6). This data shows a clear glass ceiling still exists for women of color in senior-level management of technical STEM-focused teams and participation in company or agency leadership.

Figure 6. Roles of senior-level managers who identified as women of color in 2024.



— Nonbinary Employees and Managers

The Glass Ceiling committee survey asked similar questions of employers about data on nonbinary employees and nonbinary employees of color. Given that there were only four employers who provided data for nonbinary employees and three employers that provided data for nonbinary people of color, the Committee does not believe that the data will accurately represent industry conditions. Based on the lack of available information from these surveys, the literature review, and the previous baseline report, there is a clear glass ceiling for nonbinary employees and managers in the industry.

— Organizational Policies

In addition to demographics, employers were also asked about their organizational policies.

— Part-Time

Employers were asked whether they had a part-time policy. Of the 21 employers who answered the question, only two answered “no.” Of the employers who answered “yes,” an average of 12% of their employees worked part time in 2024, similar to the results found in the 2024 baseline report.

— Flexible Work Schedule Policy

When asked whether employees can alter their work schedules with supervisor approval (including flexing time and work hours that vary from traditional 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. schedules), all 21 employer respondents selected “yes.” When asked if they had an official policy on flexible work schedules, 67% of respondents selected “yes.”

Employers were also asked if their flexible work policy has been changed since January 2024 - 79% of respondents selected “no”. For the employers who had changed their flexible work policy since January 2024, the survey included a follow-up question about the revisions made to the policies. Respondents elaborated to note that some have updated their in-office policy to two days a week “unless employees live more than 30 miles away” and other respondents noted that they were still evaluating their policies.

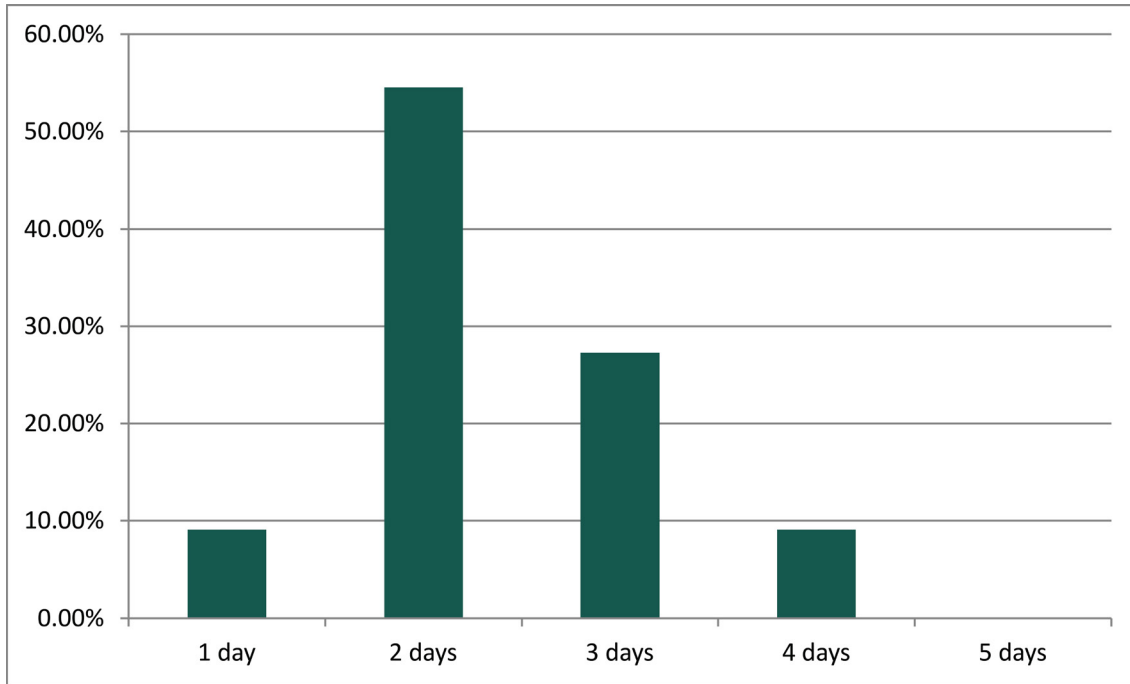
— Remote Work

Of the employers whose default location is an office or in-person location (including field offices, construction sites, etc.), the survey asked if some employees choose to work from home or another location outside the office. All employer respondents selected that “some employees choose to work from home or another location.” However, when asked whether the employer had a remote policy, only 67% selected “yes.” Getting to a more granular level, the survey asked employers for the percentage of employees who worked from home or another location outside the office at least two days a week in 2024, resulting in an average of 66%.

The survey also asked employers if the organization adopted a policy requiring employees to return to office with a minimum number of days in-person. Twenty-one percent of respondents do not have a return-to-office policy, while 57% of respondents added a return-to-office policy prior to 2024, and 21% adopted a policy during 2024.

For the 78% of employers who have a return-to-office policy, the survey also asked for the minimum number of required days in the office. This information is visualized in Figure 7.

Figure 7. Minimum Number of Required Days in the Office



Mentoring

About 38% of respondents stated that they had an official mentoring program, which is an 8% increase from the baseline report in 2022. Of the employers who have a mentoring program, the average employee participation rate was 22%.

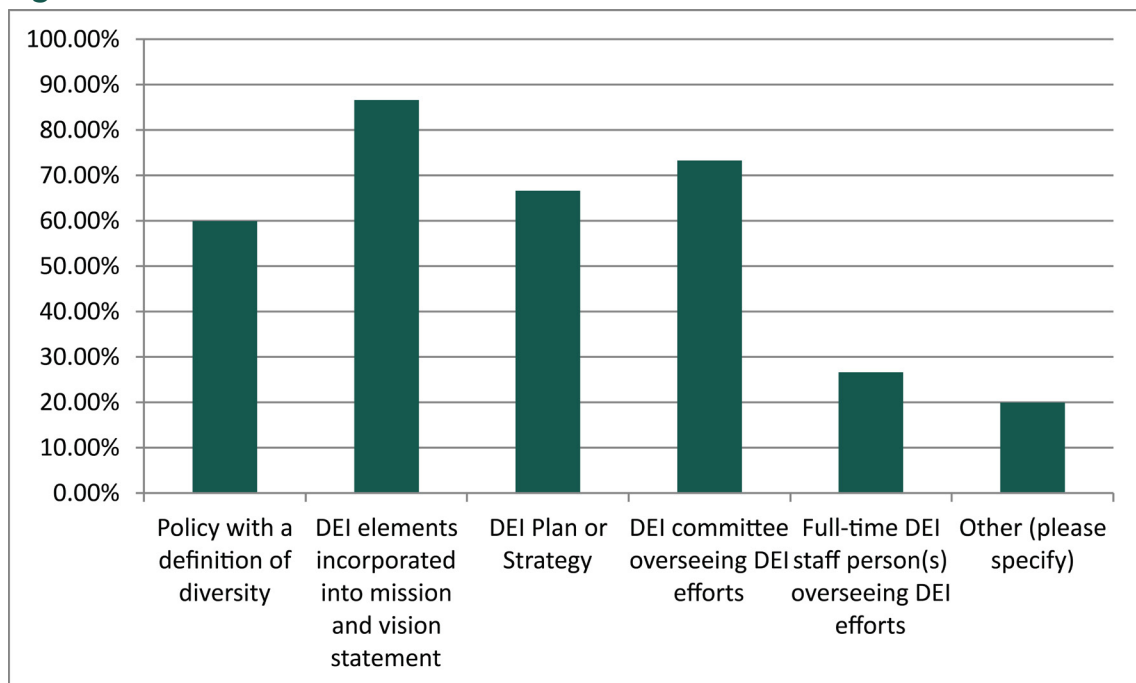
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Approximately 84% of respondents answered that their organization conducts DEI training, and for about 54% of the employers, the training was established prior to 2020. About 62% of employers require DEI training for all staff and 79% of employers formally state their commitment to DEI. Of the employers that have a written DEI commitment, 73% established their commitment in 2020.

Employers were also asked which DEI elements their organization established. The responses are captured in Figure 8.



Figure 8. Established DEI Elements



— Succession Planning

Employers were split on whether their organization had implemented succession planning, with 67% of employers implementing succession planning in their organization as of 2024. A higher rate of respondents noted that they have established a succession plan in the 2024 survey compared to the 2022 survey. Half of employers who have a succession plan have implemented it during the last three years.

Survey Findings: Employee Survey

— Distribution and participation

The Committee administered the second anonymous employee survey in spring 2025 to gain insights on how women and nonbinary transportation professionals in the Puget Sound transportation industry view themselves in the workplace.

The employee survey was sent out to the WTS Puget Sound/Seattle community in two email newsletters, on March 26, 2025 and April 22, 2025. In addition, the Chapter posted on their social media accounts, shared with other transportation professional organizations, and Chapter board members were asked to share the survey within their workplace. Approximately 184 women and nonbinary transportation professionals answered the survey as compared to 190 in the baseline survey. None of the questions were required to be answered in order for the survey to be submitted, so response rates for each question ranged from 176 to 185.

The survey was organized into the following sections:

1. Gender identity
2. Demographic information
3. Organization information
4. Organizational policies and programs
5. Importance of policies and programs

The content below summarizes 2025 findings by survey section.

— Gender Identity

The first question of the survey was a screening question. Respondents were asked which gender(s) they identified with. Respondents who selected “male” were thanked for their interest and the survey terminated. Of the remaining respondents, 98% identified as “female,” 3% identified as “nonbinary,” and 1% identified as “transgender.”

Table 5. Gender identities of employee survey respondents

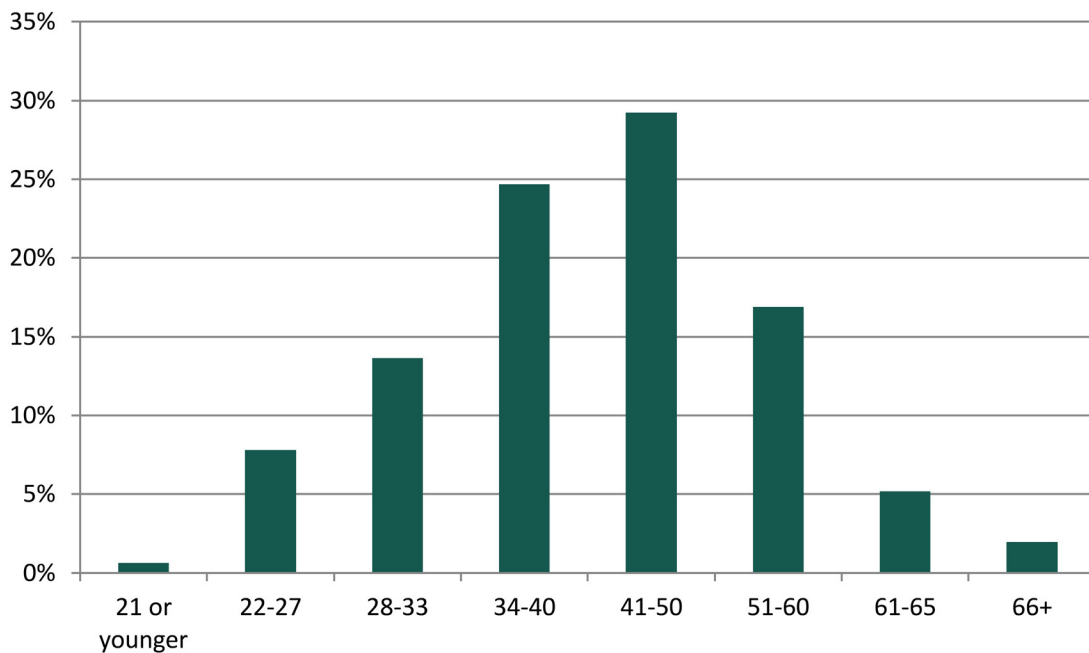
Response Options	Total %
Female	98%
Nonbinary	3%
Transgender	1%
Other	1%

— Demographic Information

A total of 154 people chose to provide the optional demographic information. This information helps the Committee understand who is represented in this survey, and how the survey distribution may need to be modified for the next report.

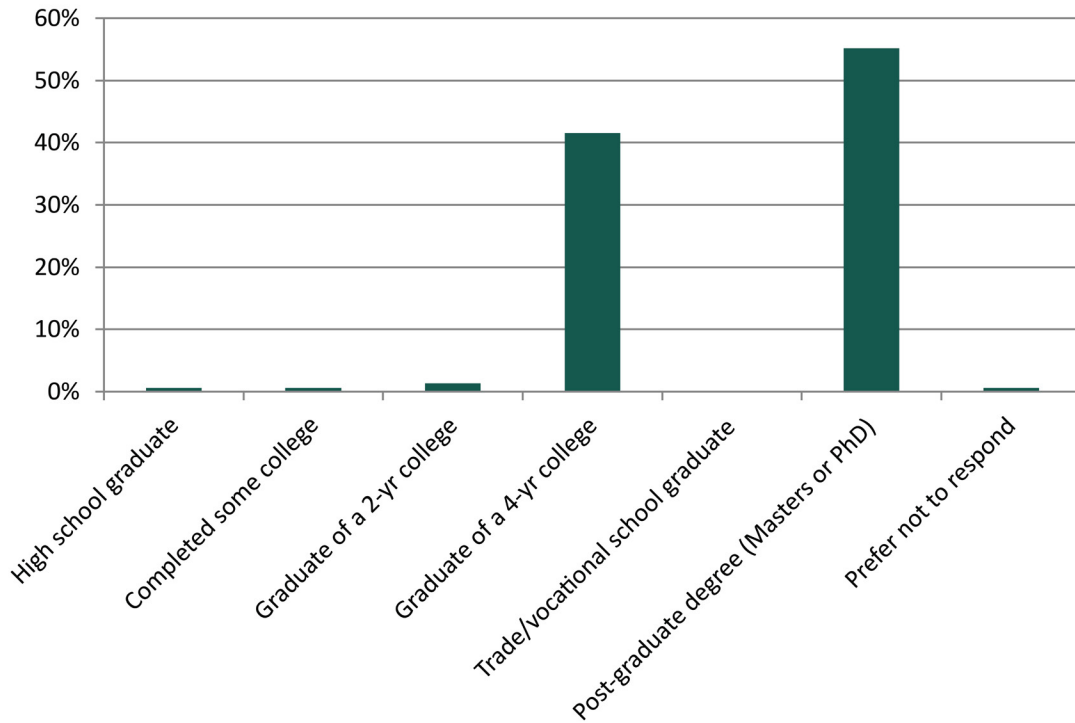
The age distribution of respondents is well balanced, although respondents age 61 and older and age 21 and younger appear to be underrepresented in the survey (see Figure 9). The Committee observed a similar distribution in the 2023 baseline survey and this is likely due to retirement and that those under 21 have not yet joined the workforce.

Figure 9. Age distribution of employee survey respondents



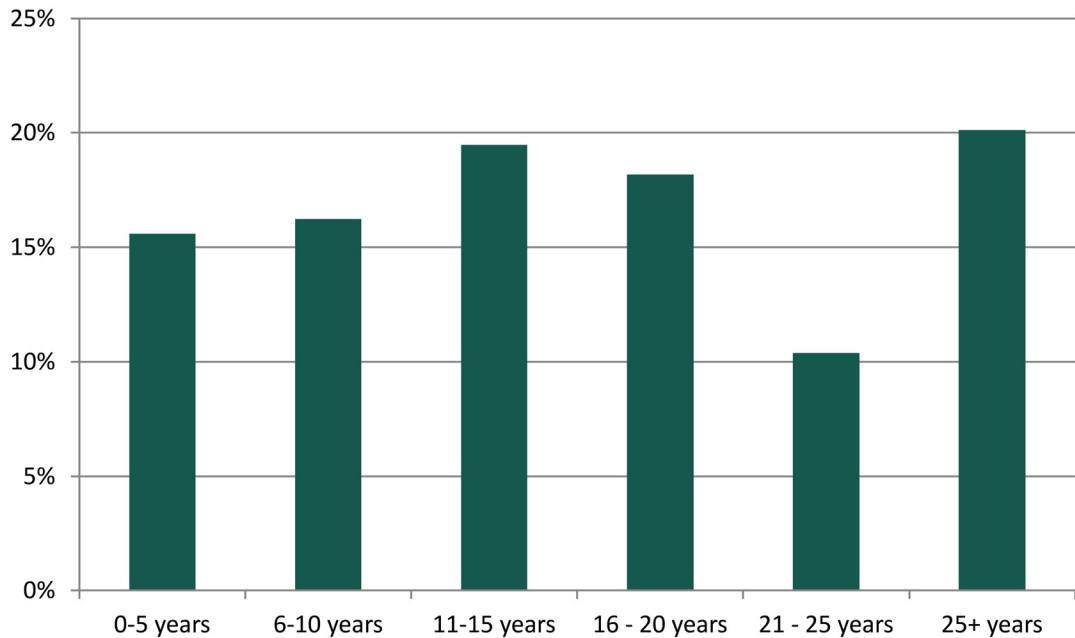
The majority of respondents noted that they are either graduates of a four-year college or have a post-graduate degree (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. Educational attainment of employee survey respondents



The distribution of the number of years of work experience from the respondents is well represented from entry-level professionals to senior, experienced professionals (see Figure 11). This is consistent with the experience distribution of WTS membership.

Figure 11. Years of work experience of employee survey respondents



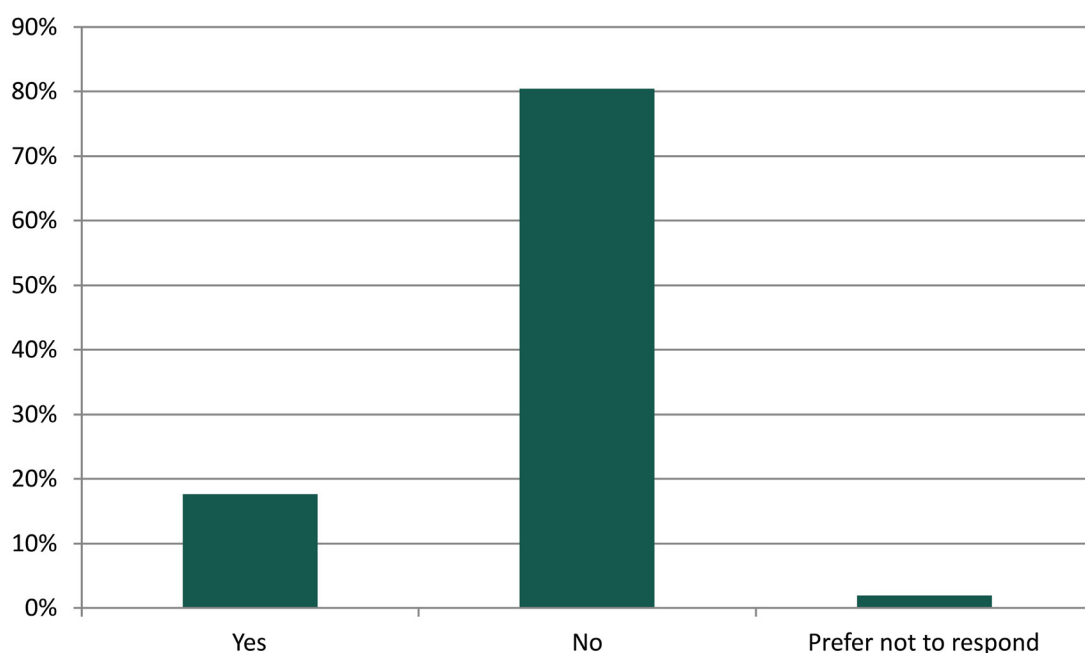
The percentages of each racial or ethnic identity of survey respondents are shown in Table 6. A similar distribution was observed in the 2023 baseline survey.

Table 6. Racial or ethnic identities of employee survey respondents

Racial or Ethnic Identities	Percentage
White	77%
Asian or Asian American	12%
Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx	10%
Prefer Not to Respond	4%
Black or African American	3%
Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander	2%
American Indian or Alaska Native	1%
Other	1%

When asked about identifying as LGBTQIA+, the majority of respondents (80%) said “no.” About 18% of respondents said “yes” and 2% selected “Prefer Not to Respond” (see Figure 12). A similar distribution was observed in the 2023 baseline survey.

Figure 12. Employee survey respondents identifying as LGBTQIA+



The majority of participants indicated that the primary job responsibility which takes more than 50% of work time is either management or technical work (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Primary job responsibilities of employee survey respondents

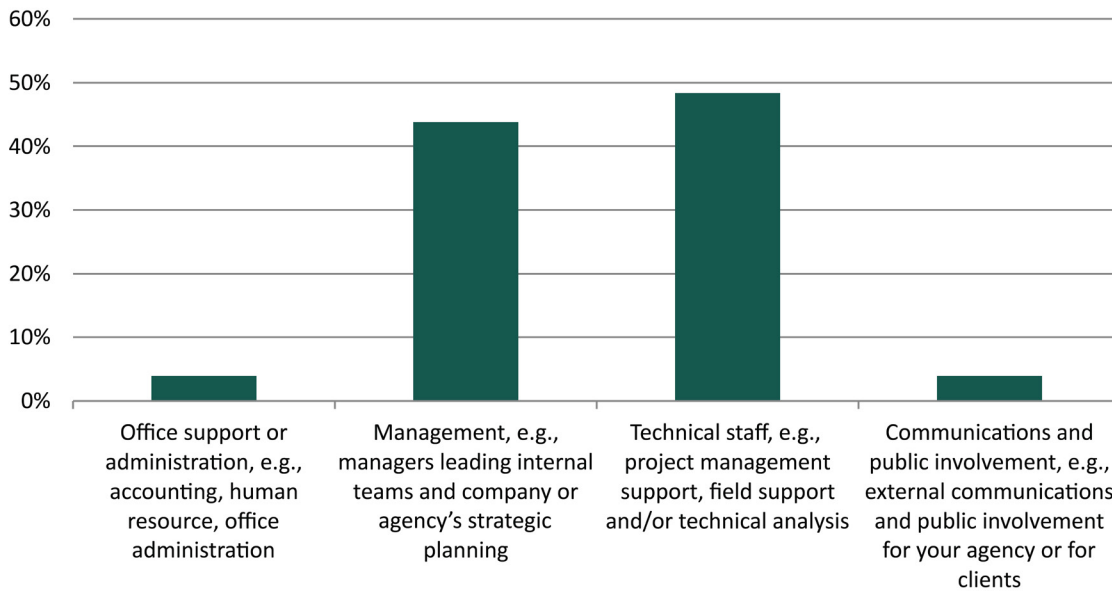


Table 7 shows the respondents' ages compared to their annual salary, and Table 8 shows the respondents' education level compared to their annual salary. Darker shading indicates a larger proportion of respondents in that category. The 2023 baseline survey asked for the household income, meaning the survey results are not directly comparable.

Table 7. Age and annual salary of employee survey respondents

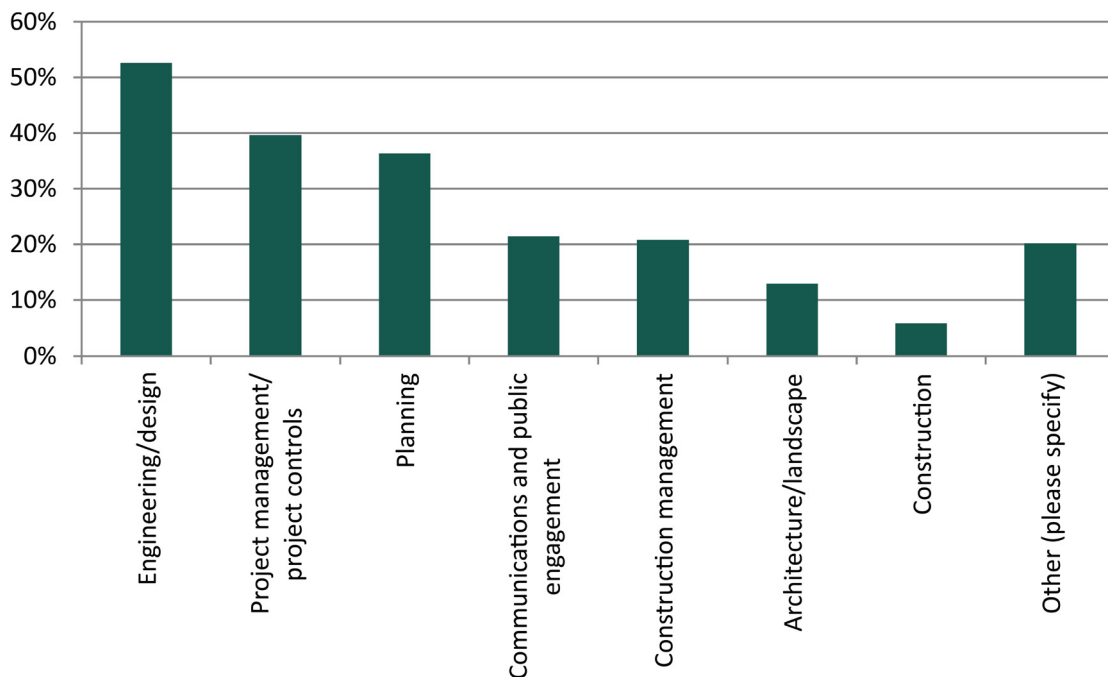
Education	Less than \$25k	\$25-\$49k	\$50-\$74k	\$75-\$99k	\$100-\$149k	\$150-\$200k	\$200-\$250k	\$250k +
21 or younger	-	1%	-	-	-	-	-	-
22-27	-	-	1%	5%	2%	-	-	-
28-33	-	-	1%	5%	7%	-	-	-
34-40	-	-	1%	1%	16%	5%	1%	1%
41-50	-	-	1%	1%	9%	10%	3%	2%
51-60	-	-	1%	2%	3%	3%	3%	3%
61-65	-	-	-	-	1%	1%	1%	1%
66+	-	-	-	1%	1%	-	-	1%

Table 8. Education and annual salary of employee survey respondents

Education	Less than \$25k	\$25-\$49k	\$50-\$74k	\$75-\$99k	\$100-\$149k	\$150-\$200k	\$200-\$250k	\$250k +
Completed some college	-	-	-	-	1%	-	-	-
Graduate of a 2-yr college	-	1%	-	-	1%	-	-	-
Graduate of a 4-yr college	-	-	3%	8%	12%	10%	3%	3%
Post-graduate degree	-	-	3%	7%	25%	9%	5%	3%
Trade/vocational school graduate	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

The employee survey asked respondents for their personal specialization. Figure 14 shows the distribution of responses and multiple answers were allowed for this question. In the “other” category, respondents noted that they specialize in business development, government relations, logistics services, public administration, policy making, environmental services, land survey, and financial services. The distribution below is similar to the 2023 baseline survey.

Figure 14. Specializations identified by employee survey respondents

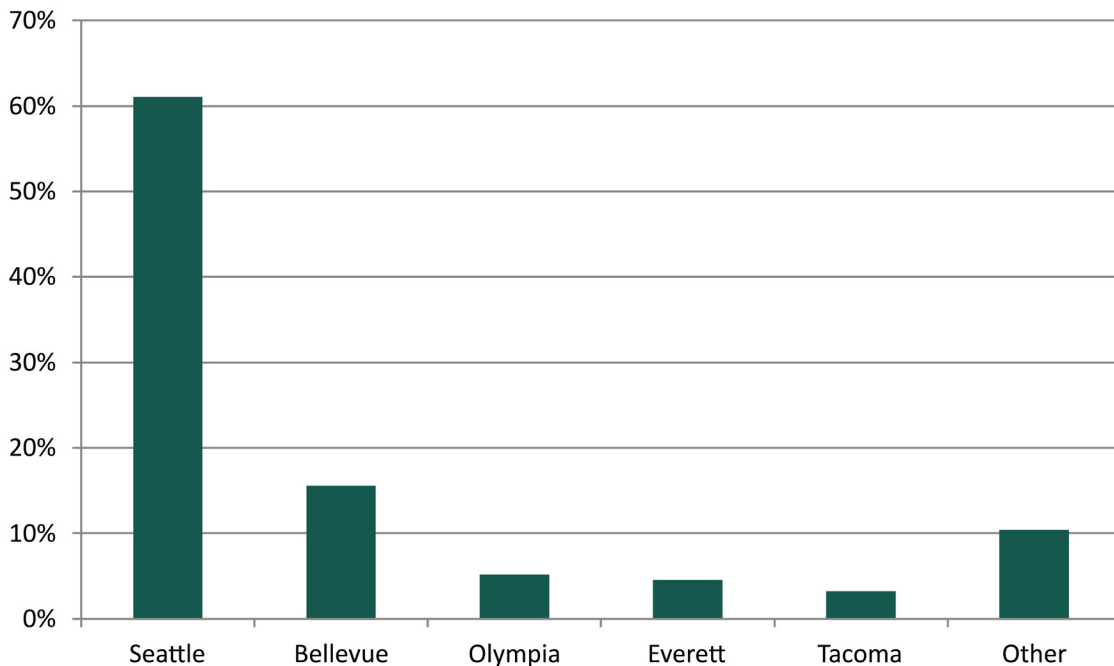


Overall, the majority of survey participants are highly-educated, White professionals with varying years of experience. This is consistent with the membership distribution of WTS.

— Organization Information

The Committee received survey responses from employees in all three central Puget Sound counties - Snohomish, King, and Pierce. Seattle was the location with the highest number of responses (61%), followed by Bellevue (16%), Olympia and Everett (both 5%), and Tacoma (3%). Other locations included Redmond, fully remote, Bellingham, Kirkland, Kent, Auburn, and Issaquah (see Figure 15). A similar distribution of location was observed in the 2023 baseline survey.

Figure 15. Office location of employee survey respondents



The employee survey asked respondents to share the type of company, organization, or agency where they work. Private companies accounted for the highest number of responses, at 64%, followed by 35% from public agencies, and 1% from nonprofit organizations. A similar distribution was observed in the 2023 baseline survey.

Out of 98 respondents, about 21% work for Women and Minority Business Enterprise (WMBE), Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE), Small Business Enterprise (SBE), and Veteran-owned business.

The employee survey asked respondents if they see people with their demographic characteristics represented in leadership within their organization. About 74% responded “yes” and 24% responded “no”.



— Organizational Policies and Programs

The next series of survey questions relate to specific programs and policies within the respondents' organizations.

— Part-Time, Flexible Work Schedule and Policy

The employee survey asked respondents whether they worked full-time or part-time. Of all respondents, 90% are working full time. The survey then continued to ask whether their place of work had a part-time policy. Of the respondents who answered the question, 64% answered “yes,” 25% answered “I don’t know,” and 11% answered “no.” A similar distribution of responses was observed in the 2023 baseline survey.

The survey then asked respondents if they have the option to alter their work schedule with supervisor approval. This includes flex time and work that varies from the traditional 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. working hours. Of the respondents who answered the question, 92% answered “yes,” 3% answered “I don’t know,” and 5% answered “no.” The respondents who answered “yes” slightly dropped (by 4%) compared to the 2023 baseline survey.

These responses differ from the employer survey, where a higher percentage of employers reported a part-time policy. While it is unknown how significantly the employees overlap with employers, this may highlight a gap in communication of company policy to employees.

— Working Location

When asked whether they could choose to work from home or another location outside the office (including field offices, construction sites, etc.), 75% of respondents said “yes,” 14% said “my default location is at home,” 8% said “no,” and 3% did not know. The employees who answered “no” slightly increased (by 2%) compared to that from the 2023 baseline survey.

— Mentoring

When asked about mentorship opportunities, 51% of respondents stated that they have an official mentoring program, while 36% do not have an official mentoring program, and 13% did not know. This data point is significantly higher than the employer survey of which 38% had an official mentoring program. This suggests that a high number of employee survey respondents work for one of the few companies with an official mentoring program.

Compared to the 2023 baseline survey, the percentage of respondents who stated that they have an official mentoring program dropped by 12%.

— Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI)

Approximately 73% of respondents answered that their organization conducts DEI training on microaggression, unconscious bias, or other related topics. Approximately 15% responded “no” and 12% responded “I don’t know.” When being asked whether DEI training is required for all employees, less than half of respondents (47%) said that the training is required. A quarter of respondents (25%) said “no” and 23% said “I don’t know.”

The survey asked respondents to identify which DEI elements their workplace has established. Respondents were able to select all that applied. Compared to the 2023 survey results, the proportion reporting the presence of certain DEI elements has generally declined, possibly due to recent shifts in the political climate.

Although not a direct comparison, results from the employer survey (shown in Table 9) are included below. Across both surveys, most employers seem to have DEI elements incorporated into mission and vision statements, a DEI Plan or Strategy, and/or a DEI committee, whereas the employee respondents reported fewer DEI elements. These differences could be due to either employees not being aware of their organization’s DEI commitments or more respondents that answered the survey from companies with fewer DEI elements. This observation is consistent with the 2023 baseline survey.

Table 9. DEI elements identified by employee and employer survey respondents

Answer Choices	Employee Responses	Employer Responses
Policy with a definition of diversity	54%	60%
DEI elements incorporated into mission and vision statement	54%	87%
DEI Plan or Strategy	53%	67%
DEI committee overseeing DEI efforts	51%	73%
Full-time DEI staff person(s) overseeing DEI efforts	35%	27%
Unknown	18%	N/A
None	8%	N/A

“After having a child, having more flexibility around hours for childcare related things (illness, school drop offs, etc.) can be mistaken for lack of commitment to your job.”

— Importance of Policies and Programs

In this section, the survey asked respondents to rank the importance of policies and programs to help advance them in their career. A total of 157 respondents submitted their rankings. Particularly insightful statistics are highlighted in Table 10 below.

In general, the responses for most programs and policies skew toward “very important” and “important.” Notably, the “childcare (onsite) or subsidized childcare” category is the only program or policy where the majority of respondents (65%) said “not important.” Respondents said “work culture,” “vacation and sick time PTO policy,” and “compensation” were “very important” and ranked these highest out of the programs and policies listed (see Table 10).

While this is consistent with the 2023 survey results, it is also important to note that the Glass Ceiling Committee does not currently have data on how many employees are parents of childcare-age children which may be a reason for the lack of importance noted for childcare. The Committee plans to add this question to future surveys.

Table 10. Importance of policies and programs for employee survey respondents

Program or Policy	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
Flexible work schedule	3%	18%	34%	45%
Flexible work location	8%	18%	34%	39%
Childcare (onsite) or subsidized childcare	65%	19%	10%	6%
Family Leave	15%	25%	31%	28%
Work culture	2%	4%	25%	69%
Compensation	0%	3%	37%	60%
Promotion opportunity	0%	15%	36%	49%
Professional development opportunities	1%	18%	42%	40%
Vacation and sick time PTO policy	1%	7%	26%	66%

The survey asked respondents if they would add any additional policies or programs to the list shown in the table above. Seventy-five respondents provided answers, which are categorized in the list below:

- ▶ Mentoring (20)
- ▶ Advocate at managerial level or supportive leadership (13)
- ▶ Supportive resources or sponsored training, e.g., attendance at trainings and conferences, tuition reimbursement, leadership training, sponsored educational and developmental opportunities (8)
- ▶ Interesting or challenging projects/tasks/opportunities (8)
- ▶ Representation in leadership (5)
- ▶ Work culture (5)
- ▶ Healthcare benefits (4)
- ▶ Sense of belonging (2)
- ▶ Work-life balance (1)
- ▶ Part-time policy (1)
- ▶ Profit share (1)

Multiple respondents elaborated on the importance of mentorship. One respondent mentioned “Mentorship has been invaluable. Someone to open doors, introduce me to key people in the industry, and show me how they use their experience to accomplish company goals while also allowing me to participate in that work.” Another person indicated that “diverse role models either above or at the same level as I am” are desired. Another person highlighted that “having a mentor to exemplify what reasonably healthy work/life balance and work ethic looks like” is important.

Many respondents expressed a strong interest in sponsored training and career opportunities, citing phrases such as “sponsored educational and developmental opportunities,” “training opportunities, studies/courses support,” and “professional development and networking opportunities during work hours.”

Many respondents emphasized the importance of work culture. One participant highlighted “mutual respect and courtesy” as essential. Others noted that supportive colleagues, workload balance, and team-building efforts are important.



Support at Work

The employee survey asked respondents to answer the question, “do you feel like you have opportunities to advance in your career as a woman or nonbinary person in your workplace?” A total of 140 people answered the question. Responses were open-ended and categorized into four categories: Yes, Mostly, Somewhat, No. Of the people who responded, 71% answered “yes,” 9% answered “mostly,” 7% answered “somewhat,” and 11% answered “no.”



Of those categorized as “yes,” one person said “In my community/workplace, yes. The leadership is mostly women, which makes it much easier because it is welcoming and the culture is aimed to lift one another up.” Another qualified the response by saying, “Yes, more so now that my child is in high school. While she was very young (in daycare) and elementary school, it was much more difficult to advance my career.”

Of those categorized as “mostly,” one person said “generally, yes. Although I do believe that the advancement may be slower during certain seasons (e.g. having young children).” Another person said “for the most part yes. There are very few women in leadership ahead of me, so it does feel like I am still paving the way.” Another person said “Yes, however, the compensation is consistently lower than my male peers.”

Of those categorized as “somewhat,” one person said “to a certain level. there’s a ceiling.” Another person said “for work culture, PTO, professional opportunities/development, YES - probably because this is also what men need. For family leave/childcare - I don’t think this is valued as much in a male-dominated field, because these are typically concerns women have to address (although I am seeing more parental leave offered for men and I think this is changing). For compensation - I think I’m paid fairly in my current job, but asking for raises, advocating for bonuses and promotions, is still something I have a lot of anxiety around.”

Of those categorized as “no,” one person said “I am always passed up for promotion.” Another person said “I’m not entirely certain, but it seems that the opportunities for women to advance in their careers are not equal to those of their male peers. The company currently has a significantly smaller number of female leaders. This disparity may be partly due to women taking on more family responsibilities. However, it could also be influenced by potential biases in the workplace favoring men.” Another person

said “the opportunities are there but the mentorship and support are not. I have young children and feel like my career progression has been stunted because of it.”

— Barriers to Advancement

The survey asked employees to answer the question, “are there barriers to your advancement as a woman/nonbinary person in the workplace?” There were 120 respondents to this question. Of those who responded, 33% responded “no,” and 67% responded “yes” with a space to elaborate. For those who responded yes, their answers were categorized into the following barriers:

- ▶ Overt or subconscious sexism partially due to dominant male leadership and culture (29)
- ▶ Lack of representation in leadership (4)
- ▶ Lack of accommodation for working parents and families with young kids (18)
- ▶ Compensation gap (2)

Regarding the barrier of sexism, responses ranged from overt instances of sexism, to bias toward cisgender men, to a “good old boy” mentality in the workplace. One person said “transportation is still dominated by men and historically mostly male and white, so the old guards may view women and gender-nonconforming people with skepticism to say the least.” Another said “There is a ‘prove yourself’ barrier for women in my workplace. They must show that they are able to compete and handle the assignments given by leadership.” A few respondents indicated they noticed “higher expectations for women than men in order to advance.”

Regarding the barrier of lack of representation in leadership, the respondents shared concerns of “very few women in leadership positions” and, hence, “there aren’t as many women to advocate” for them or “there’s not a lot of understanding or helpful advice when facing challenges with career advancement.”

Many respondents are concerned about advancing their career while taking care of young children. One person said “after having a child, having more flexibility around hours for childcare related things (illness, school drop offs, etc.) can be mistaken for lack of commitment to your job.” Another person said “The need to provide drop off and/or pick up from childcare and school, and the need to stay home with sick children limits ability to take on overtime, or to step into roles that require long hours.” Several people noted the discrimination against women and nonbinary people who have children, and the disadvantage they are at due to the lack of flexibility to work longer hours or participate in after-hours events where internal relationships are developed that often lead to promotional opportunities. Several respondents highlighted that their “pay is different from males.”

Recommendations for Employers

Progress continues on addressing the glass ceiling in the transportation industry in the Puget Sound. Flexible work remains an important area to focus on, as the rise of return-to-office policies have challenged previously made gains in making opportunities more accessible, especially for working parents to young children. The gender pay gap, the need for a supportive work culture, and opportunities for advancement continue to be primary concerns for employee respondents. These issues are deeply intertwined and go hand-in-hand in impacting how women and nonbinary staff professionals engage in the industry. One positive sign is that DEI programs have sustained and grown to be a staple among most surveyed employers despite headwinds from a shifting national climate.

— Flexible Work

Flexible work policies remain a critical lever for breaking the glass ceiling for women in the transportation sector, yet recent trends suggest progress may be stagnating and possibly reversing in some regards. A notable shift since the last report is the expansion of return-to-office requirements, such as mandating specific in-office days or a minimum number of in-office days for employees. While there may be practical reasons for encouraging increased time spent in the office, these tightening policies collide with a troubling labor trend of women, especially women who are working mothers with young children, leaving the labor force in 2025. This trend, first uncovered through the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS) data in August 2025, has come as a sharp reversal from historic increases in women participation in the workforce in the post-pandemic period, owing largely to generous flexible work arrangements that grew out of pandemic era remote work practices.

In the Puget Sound, most employers in the recent survey responded that they had a part-time policy in place, and while not every employer had an official policy for flexible work, most indicated that employees were able to alter their work schedules with supervisor approval. Employers are encouraged to be mindful of the potential unintended consequences associated with strict return-to-office policies. In a sector that has historically struggled to retain and promote women, especially into leadership, the erosion of flexibility threatens to reinforce the very structural barriers that have long kept the glass ceiling firmly in place.

— Gender Pay Equity

Consistent with the findings from the 2024 Baseline Report, compensation remains among the most important considerations identified by employee respondents and by employer respondents based on feedback gathered from exit surveys. While research shows some indication that the gender pay gap is narrowing, there is still room for improvement.

Based on data from the U.S. Census Bureau, the Society of Women Engineers reported in 2025 that female engineers in most states have average salaries that are 80-89% of the average salaries of male engineers. Differences in earnings also exist among women engineers of different race and ethnicities, with Hispanic or Latino and Black or African American women engineers earning less than their male and White female counterparts. While some states such as Oregon and Utah are reportedly approaching parity in pay between women and men engineers, Washington maintains an 82% gender pay gap when considering all engineering disciplines. Looking more specifically at transportation related engineering disciplines such as Civil, Environmental, and Mechanical reveals female engineers earn on average 88%, 90% and 96% that of male engineers, respectively.³⁰

The American Planning Association had similar findings in their 2025 Planners' Salary and Benefits survey. Female planners in the US earned, on average, 9% less than their male counterparts. While the gender pay gap exists to some degree across workers of all experience levels, the data showed that this gap becomes more prominent with more years of experience, with the largest gap among those with 30 years or more of experience. This suggests that there may be a glass ceiling for highly experienced women professionals in accessing higher levels of compensation.³¹

Employers will need to sustain and deepen their efforts to close the gender pay gap. Pay transparency, as recommended in the baseline report, should remain a foundational practice. Beyond disclosure, employers should undertake comprehensive internal reviews to understand the state of gender pay equity within their organizations and address the structural barriers that limit progress toward parity.

“The Glass Ceiling Committee survey revealed workplace dynamics that create a persistent “prove yourself” expectation for women. They are often required to repeatedly demonstrate their capability, face higher performance standards, and take on extra scrutiny—pressures their male colleagues may not experience.”

³⁰ U.S. Earnings Gap, Society of Women Engineers.

³¹ 2025 Planners' Salary and Benefits Survey, American Planning Association, <https://www.planning.org/salary/2025/>, accessed February 15, 2026.

As part of this work, employers should critically examine their pay bands to identify inequities within pay ranges for comparable roles and role levels—particularly at senior and executive levels, where disparities often become most pronounced. This includes assessing how individuals are positioned within pay ranges, identifying whether gender-based patterns emerge, and evaluating how these patterns influence long-term career earnings and advancement opportunities. By confronting these internal dynamics with rigor and transparency, employers can take meaningful steps toward building equitable compensation systems.

— Work Culture

Work culture is one of the most powerful forces shaping whether women in the transportation sector can break through the glass ceiling, because it impacts not only how women experience their work environments day-to-day but also how their potential is perceived. Despite positive developments such as formalized DEI policies among most employers in the Puget Sound, many women and gender non-conforming people in the field continue to encounter environments marked by subtle and overt sexism and persistent male-dominant mentalities that signal who truly belongs.

The Glass Ceiling Committee survey revealed workplace dynamics that create a persistent “prove yourself” expectation for women. They are often required to repeatedly demonstrate their capability, face higher performance standards, and take on extra scrutiny—pressures their male colleagues may not experience. When workplaces normalize these patterns, they reinforce structural barriers that keep women from advancing and reaching their full potential. To shift these dynamics, workplaces can take intentional steps to create cultures where women can fully thrive, including:

- ▶ Elevating and celebrating diverse leadership styles to shift cultural norms and broaden the definition of effective leadership.
- ▶ Providing training for all staff on inclusion and equity standards to build shared expectations.
- ▶ Increasing manager accountability for applying equity principles in promotion decisions, workload distribution, and the assignment of stretch opportunities to create transparent, accessible pathways for growth.
- ▶ Assessing the accessibility of high-impact opportunities—including leadership development programs, mentorship, special projects, and client-facing roles—to promote equitable participation and advancement.
- ▶ Shift cultural perceptions around flexibility and commitment, emphasizing results and performance over in-office hours logged.



Next Steps for the Glass Ceiling Committee —

Next steps for the Glass Ceiling Committee include sending another employer survey out in 2027, which will incorporate lessons learned from the Glass Ceiling Committee baseline and spring 2025 surveys.

For employers reading this report who would like to be included in the next survey, please email the Committee at WTSPugetSoundGlass@gmail.com. Finally, the Committee plans to publish an updated report in 2028 that includes the latest survey data and a review of new or updated literature.

Appendix A

WTS Glass Ceiling Employer Survey Questions

Questions About Your Organization

1. Where is your Puget Sound office located?

Select all that apply

- ▶ Bellevue
- ▶ Everett
- ▶ Olympia
- ▶ Seattle
- ▶ Tacoma
- ▶ Other (please specify)

2. What type of services does your company, agency, or firm provide?

Select all that apply.

- ▶ Communications and public engagement
- ▶ Engineering/design
- ▶ Architecture/landscape
- ▶ Planning
- ▶ Project management/project controls
- ▶ Construction
- ▶ Construction management
- ▶ Other (please specify)

3. What is your company, organization, or agency status?

- ▶ Public
- ▶ Private
- ▶ Nonprofit
- ▶ Other (please specify)

4. Is your firm any of the following? Select all that apply.

- ▶ Women and Minority Business Enterprise (WMBE)
- ▶ Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)
- ▶ Small Business Enterprise (SBE)
- ▶ Veteran-owned business
- ▶ None of the above

Questions About Employment Data

All questions that reference 2024, reference the calendar year from January 1, 2024 - December 31, 2024.

5. How many total employees (full and part-time) worked in this office or department in 2024?

If public agency or nonprofit, please do not include consultants.

6. Did your organization collect employment data that was disaggregated by **gender** in 2024?

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No

7. What percentage of employees in this office in 2024 identified as a **woman**?

8. What percentage of employees who **identified as women** were first- to mid-level managers in 2024?

First-level managers are the entry-level management position within an organization, directly overseeing the day-to-day work of non-management employees, and reporting to higher-level managers.

Mid-level managers are management positions within a company that sit between senior executives and first-level managers, responsible for implementing the strategic plans set by top management by overseeing day-to-day operations within a specific department or unit.

9. What percentage of first- to mid-level managers **who identified as women** in 2024 were in the following roles?

Technical STEM roles include architecture, engineering, and environmental science, and urban planning. Non-STEM roles include communications and public engagement.

Administrative roles include administration, accounting, or human resources.

Depending on your firm's focus, you may only have STEM or non-STEM roles; please fill in the appropriate percentage below.

- ▶ Managers of a technical STEM-focused team
- ▶ Managers of a technical non-STEM-focused team
- ▶ Managers of administrative teams

10. What percentage of employees **who identified as women** were senior-level managers (or above) in 2024?

Senior-level managers are responsible for making high-stakes decisions that impact an entire organization. They often lead teams of mid-level managers and are responsible for the success of the organization's operations.

11. What percentage of senior-level managers **who identified as women** in 2024 were in the following roles?
- ▶ Managers of a technical STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of a technical non-STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of administrative teams
 - ▶ On your company or agency's management team
12. Did your organization collect employment data that was further disaggregated by **gender identity** (i.e. nonbinary employees) in 2024?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
13. What percentage of employees in this office in 2024 were **nonbinary**?
14. What percentage of **nonbinary** employees were first- to mid-level managers in 2024?
15. What percentage of **nonbinary** first- to mid-level managers in 2024 were in the following roles?
- ▶ Managers of a technical STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of a technical non-STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of administrative teams
16. What percentage of **nonbinary** employees were senior-level managers (or above) in 2024?
17. What percentage of **nonbinary** senior-level managers in 2024 were in the following roles?
- ▶ Managers of a technical STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of a technical non-STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of administrative teams
 - ▶ On your company or agency's management team
18. Did your organization collect employment data that was disaggregated by **race** in 2024?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No

In the questions below, employees of color are defined as employees identifying as any race other than "white, non-Hispanic/Latino."

19. What percentage of employees in this office in 2024 identified as **women of color**?
20. What percentage of employees identifying as **women of color** were first- to mid-level managers in 2024?

21. What percentage of employees identifying as **women of color** in 2024 were in the following first-to-mid-level manager roles:
- ▶ Managers of a technical STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of a technical non-STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of administrative teams
22. What percentage of employees identifying as **women of color** were senior-level managers (or above) in 2024?
23. What percentage of employees identifying as **women of color** in 2024 were in the following senior-level manager roles:
- ▶ Managers of a technical STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of a technical non-STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of administrative teams
 - ▶ On your company or agency's management team
24. Did your organization collect employment data that was further disaggregated by **race and gender identity** (i.e. nonbinary people of color) in 2024?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
25. What percentage of employees in this office in 2024 identified as **nonbinary people of color**?
26. What percentage of employees identifying as nonbinary people of color were first- to mid-level managers in 2024?
27. What percentage of employees identifying as **nonbinary people of color** in 2024 were in the following first-to-mid-level manager roles:
- ▶ Managers of a technical STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of a technical non-STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of administrative teams
28. What percentage of employees identifying as **nonbinary people of color** were seniorlevel managers (or above) in 2024?
29. What percentage of employees identifying as **nonbinary people of color** in 2024 were in the following senior-level manager roles:
- ▶ Managers of a technical STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of a technical non-STEM-focused team
 - ▶ Managers of administrative teams
 - ▶ On your company or agency's management team

Questions About Organizational Policies

30. Does your company have a part-time policy?*

**A policy that allows people to work 31 hours/week or less.*

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No

31. What percentage of employees worked part time in 2024?

32. Can employees alter their work schedules with supervisor approval?

This includes flex time and work that varies from the traditional 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. working hours.

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No

33. Do you have an official flexible work policy?

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No

34. Has your flexible work policy changed since January 2024?

- ▶ Yes, it has been revised
- ▶ Yes, it has been canceled
- ▶ No
- ▶ Other (please specify)

35. How was this policy revised?

36. For employees whose default location is an office or in-person location (including field offices, construction sites, etc.), do some choose to work from home or another location outside the office?

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No

37. Do you have an official remote work policy?

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No

38. What percentage of employees work from home or another location outside of the office at least two days a week in 2024?

- 39.** Did your organization adopt a policy requiring employees to return to office with a minimum number of days in-person?
- ▶ Yes, in 2024
 - ▶ Yes, before 2024
 - ▶ No
- 40.** What is the minimum number of required days in the office?
- ▶ 1 day
 - ▶ 2 days
 - ▶ 3 days
 - ▶ 4 days
 - ▶ 5 days
- 41.** Does your organization have an official mentoring program?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
- 42.** What year was the program established?
- 43.** What percentage of employees participated in an official mentoring program in 2024?
- 44.** Does your organization conduct diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training (e.g. microaggression, unconscious bias or other trainings)?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
- 45.** What year was this training established?
- 46.** Are DEI trainings required for all employees
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
- 47.** Not counting Equal Employment Opportunity (EEO) statements, does your organization formally state its commitment to diversity, inclusion, equity, and/or justice?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
- 48.** What year did your organization establish its commitment to diversity, inclusion, equity, and/or justice?

49. Which DEI elements has your organization established?

Select all that apply.

- ▶ Policy with a definition of diversity
- ▶ DEI elements incorporated into mission and vision statement
- ▶ DEI Plan or Strategy
- ▶ DEI committee overseeing DEI efforts
- ▶ Full-time DEI staff person(s) overseeing DEI efforts
- ▶ Other (please specify)

50. Does your organization have succession planning?

Succession planning is defined in this survey as “...a comprehensive, ongoing strategic process that provides for forecasting an organization’s senior leadership needs; identifying and developing candidates who have the potential to be future leaders; and selecting individuals from a diverse pool of qualified candidates to meet executive resource needs” (GAO, 2005).

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No

51. What year did your organization establish succession planning?

Contact Information

All responses will be kept strictly confidential, and no responses will be attributed to any individual or organization. We are requesting your contact information so we can share the report with you when it is finalized, and in case there are any questions regarding your response.

52. Please fill in your contact information below.

- ▶ Name
- ▶ Company/ Organization/ Agency
- ▶ Email Address

Appendix B

WTS Glass Ceiling Employee Survey Questions

1. Which gender(s) do you identify with?
 - ▶ Female
 - ▶ Male
 - ▶ Nonbinary
 - ▶ Transgender
 - ▶ Other (please specify)
2. Which of the following best describes your job type?
 - ▶ Full-time
 - ▶ Part-time with 30 or more hours per week
 - ▶ Part-time with 20 to 29 hours per week
 - ▶ Intern with 30 or more hours per week
 - ▶ Intern with less than 30 hours per week
 - ▶ Other (please specify)
3. Which of the following best describes your primary job responsibility which takes more than 50% of your work time?
 - ▶ Office support or administration, e.g., accounting, human resource, office administration
 - ▶ Management, e.g., managers leading internal teams and company or agency's strategic planning
 - ▶ Technical staff, e.g., project management support, field support and/or technical analysis
 - ▶ Communications and public involvement, e.g., external communications and public involvement for your agency or for clients
 - ▶ Other (please specify)

4. Please rank the importance of the following items in helping you advance in your career using the ranking scale below (not important to very important).

	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
Flexible work schedule				
Flexible work location				
Childcare (onsite) or subsidized childcare				
Family Leave				
Work culture				
Compensation				
Promotion opportunity				
Professional development opportunities				
Vacation and sick time PTO policy				

5. Are there any additional items that are important to advancing your career that were not listed above?
6. With your rankings above in mind, do you feel like you have opportunities to advance in your career as a woman or nonbinary person in your workplace?
7. With your rankings above in mind, are there barriers to your advancement as a woman or nonbinary person in your workplace? If yes, please elaborate below.
8. Where is your Puget Sound office located?
9. What type of services do you specialize in?

Select all that apply.

- ▶ Communications and public engagement
- ▶ Engineering/design
- ▶ Architecture/landscape
- ▶ Planning
- ▶ Project management/project controls
- ▶ Construction
- ▶ Construction management
- ▶ Other (please specify)

10. How many years of experience do you have in the types of services you selected above?

- ▶ 0-5 years
- ▶ 6-10 years
- ▶ 11-15 years
- ▶ 16 - 20 years
- ▶ 21 - 25 years
- ▶ 25+ years

11. What type of company, organization, or agency do you work for?

- ▶ Public
- ▶ Private
- ▶ Nonprofit
- ▶ Other (please specify)

12. Is your firm any of the following? Select all that apply.

- ▶ Women and Minority Business Enterprise (WMBE)
- ▶ Disadvantaged Business Enterprise (DBE)
- ▶ Small Business Enterprise (SBE)
- ▶ Veteran-owned business
- ▶ None of the above
- ▶ I don't know

13. Does your company, organization, or agency have a part-time policy*?

**A policy that allows people to work 31 hours/week or less.*

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No
- ▶ I don't know

14. Do you have the option to alter your work schedule with supervisor approval?

This includes flex time and work that varies from the traditional 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. working hours.

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No
- ▶ I don't know

- 15.** If your default location is an office or in-person location (including field offices, construction sites, etc.), can you choose to work from home or another location outside the office?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
 - ▶ My default location is at home
 - ▶ I don't know
- 16.** Does your company, organization, agency, or office have an official mentoring program?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
 - ▶ I don't know
- 17.** Do you have a professional mentor outside your company?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
- 18.** Does your company, organization, or agency conduct diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) training (e.g. microaggression, unconscious bias or other trainings)?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
 - ▶ I don't know
- 19.** Are DEI trainings required for all employees?
- ▶ Yes
 - ▶ No
 - ▶ Not applicable
 - ▶ I don't know
- 20.** Which DEI elements has your company, organization, or agency established?
- ▶ Select all that apply.
 - ▶ Policy with a definition of diversity DEI elements incorporated into mission and vision statement
 - ▶ DEI Plan or Strategy
 - ▶ DEI committee overseeing DEI efforts
 - ▶ Full-time DEI staff person(s) overseeing DEI efforts
 - ▶ I don't know

- ▶ My company, organization, or agency has not established any of these requirements
- ▶ Other (please specify)

21. Do you see people with your demographic characteristics represented in within your organization?

- ▶ leadership
- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No
- ▶ Prefer not to respond

Demographic Information

The following information is optional but will help us better understand if we are reaching a representative group of female and nonbinary professionals in the transportation industry in the Puget Sound.

22. How old are you?

- ▶ 21 or younger
- ▶ 22-27
- ▶ 28-33
- ▶ 34-40
- ▶ 41-50
- ▶ 51-60
- ▶ 61-65
- ▶ 66+

23. Which racial or ethnic identities do you identify with?

Select all that apply

- ▶ American Indian or Alaska Native
- ▶ Asian or Asian American
- ▶ Black or African American
- ▶ Hispanic or Latino/Latina/Latinx
- ▶ Native Hawaiian or other Pacific Islander
- ▶ White
- ▶ Prefer not to respond
- ▶ Other (please specify)

24. Do you identify as LGBTQIA+?

- ▶ Yes
- ▶ No
- ▶ Prefer not to respond

25. What is your annual salary?

- ▶ Less than \$25,000
- ▶ \$25,000-\$49,999
- ▶ \$50,000-\$74,999
- ▶ \$75,000-\$99,999
- ▶ \$100,000-\$149,999
- ▶ \$150,000-\$200,000
- ▶ \$200,000-\$250,000
- ▶ \$250,000 or more
- ▶ Prefer not to respond

26. What is the highest level of education you have received?

- ▶ High school graduate
- ▶ Completed some college
- ▶ Graduate of a 2-yr college
- ▶ Graduate of a 4-yr college
- ▶ Trade/vocational school graduate
- ▶ Post-graduate degree (Masters or PhD)
- ▶ Prefer not to respond
- ▶ Other (please specify)



WTS Advancing women
Advancing transportation
› Puget Sound/Seattle

Thank you to the graphics team at Maul Foster & Alongi, Inc for donating their time to design and lay out this report.