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Introduction

Bringing Circles to your organization is easy

1. Comprehensive start-up kit

This Circles start-up kit provides everything you need to launch and grow your program, including email templates to get your team excited, a kick-off presentation and Circle leader training guide, and best practices for scaling Circles to reach more employees.

2. Central platform to manage your Circles Program

We provide a centralized platform to help you track your Circles program via a dedicated web page for your company where employees across any of your global offices can find a Circle to join.

3. No cost to your team

We believe all companies, regardless of size or budget, should have the tools they need to advance women and create an equal and inclusive workplace—so we offer all of our resources and programming for free.

This guide will walk you through five simple steps to roll out Lean In Circles at your company:

- 1. Plan out your Company Circles Program
- 2. Create a Lean In Network to manage your Circles Program
- 3. Host a Circle Launch Event to promote your Circles program
- 4. Recruit and Train Circle Leaders
- 5. Open your Circles for registration

You will also find in this guide:

- Tips for managing your Circles program
- FAQs

Additional resources

- Company Playbook with everything you need to promote the program and get employees excited and engaged.
 - Marketing toolkit with assets to announce your Circles launch
 - Email templates for each stage of the launch
- Circle Launch presentation and speaker notes
- Circle Leader Training presentation and speaker notes

TIP: The LeanIn.Org team is here to help

If you have not done so already, we encourage you to attend a training session run by the LeanIn.Org team on "How to bring Lean In Circles to your Company." We'll guide you through the steps laid out in this guide, give you the opportunity to experience the power of Lean In Circles, and answer any questions you have. Sign up HERE.

Introduction (cont.)

Lean In Circles help women go further, together

For many women, finding connection and support at work is a major challenge. About 20% of women say they're often the only woman in the room at work. And since most senior leaders are men, women have less access to mentors, sponsors, and role models who can relate to their experiences. For women of color and women with other marginalized identities, it's even harder to find support to navigate challenges or chart a unique career path.

Lean In Circles creates a space where women can come together in small groups across roles and levels to get peer-to-peer mentorship, connect with each other, recognize and combat gender bias, and build leadership strengths.

Circles are active in over 180 countries and more than 3,000 companies—including P&G, Amazon, Coca-Cola, and Airbnb—are running them for their women employees using our free resources.

The impact of Circles

Whether your objective is to support, retain, or mentor your women employees—here's how our free Circles program can help you achieve your organizational goals.

- **Connection:** Lean In Circles create a space for women in your organization to share their experiences, give and receive advice, and tackle challenges together. That's particularly important right now, when employees are feeling less connected to their coworkers.
- Career development: Circles empower women to achieve their personal and professional goals: two-thirds of women in Circles have taken on a new challenge as a result of being in their Circle. Women in Circles are more confident and ambitious—and more likely to get promoted.
- **Mentorship:** Circles encourage members to discuss new ideas and practice new skills together. Members also benefit from the insights and expertise of their peers, which can be just as effective as traditional mentor-mentee relationships. In addition, women who are part of Circles are more likely to offer to mentor a colleague.
- **Leadership:** Circles build better leaders—with moderators gaining valuable facilitation and management experience. And 73 percent of women in Circles feel equipped to be better leaders as a result of being part of a Circle.
- **Diversity and employee satisfaction:** Women who participate in Circles are more likely to think that their company is doing what it takes to improve gender diversity and more likely to talk openly about gender issues in the workplace.



Introduction (cont.)

How Circles work at companies:



Small groups built to skill

Circles typically include 8–12 women, and often form around shared identities and experiences. Many companies integrate Circles as part of existing Employee Resource Groups or other learning and development initiatives as a way to engage employees at.



Virtual or in-person meetings

Circles usually meet once a month for 60 to 90 minutes, either inperson or virtually. Virtual meetings can be a powerful way for women to connect and grow their networks across geographic lines— especially as many companies continue to work remotely.



Employee led

Lean In's Circles resource library makes it easy for employees at any level to lead a Circle. This model empowers women in your organization to make Circles their own and lays the foundation for a scalable program that engages women across roles, backgrounds, and identities.

TIP: Lean In's Circles resource library makes it easy for employees at any level to lead a Circle.

Our education library provides Circle leaders with everything they need to facilitate more than two years' worth of Circle meetings. From expert advice on navigating gender bias, managing work-life balance, and more—all designed to help women overcome barriers and advance their careers.

Each topic in our education library comes with a Circle meeting guide, including an agenda, discussion prompts, and activities. Some companies select recommended meeting guides for their Circles, for example the first six month of meetings.

This model empowers women in your organization to make Circles their own and lays the foundation for a scalable program that engages women across roles, backgrounds, and identities.



Meeting 1
Getting to know each other



Meeting 2
Authentic
Leadership



Meeting 3
Women in the
Workplace



Meeting 4
Public
Speaking



Meeting 5
Acceptance and healing

Plan out your Company Circles program

Here are some things to consider as you plan your Circles program:

Setting goals for your Circles program

We recommend setting clear goals for your Circles program. This will help you set your Circles up for success and track the impact of your program.

You can tailor your Lean In Circles program to meet your organization's specific goals with regard to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DE&I). For example, many companies struggle to decide whether their Circles should be all women or co-ed, whether to include employees at the same or mixed levels, whether to organize them by department or make them cross-functional, and so on. The answer: It depends on what you're trying to accomplish. Decide what your goals are first.

- If your goal is **peer support**, we know from research that women are more likely to share openly in all women groups. On the other hand, if your mission is to bring together diverse groups and encourage men to join the conversation, a co-ed Circle might work better.
- If your goal is **mentorship**, you can structure your Circles in a few different ways. For groups of employees at a similar level, Circles provide an opportunity for peer-to-peer mentorship, which we know from research can be just as effective as traditional 1:1 mentorship. Or you can use Circles to provide traditional mentorship at scale by pairing one senior leader in a Circle with eight more junior employees.
- If you're trying to **retain specific groups of women**—for example, we know from **research** that one in four women are considering downshifting their careers or leaving the workforce due to Covid-19—inviting these women to join Circles can help ensure they feel supported at work during this time.

Lean In Circles can complement your existing initiatives

Lean In Circles can exist as a standalone initiative, or fold into your existing mentorship, leadership, and networking initiatives for employees.

The peer-to-peer Circle format is a great way to engage existing ERG members, providing an always-on engagement plan to complement any large-group or 1:1 initiatives you already offer. You might also think about integrating Circles into existing events and training, such as new-hire orientation and your summer internship program. Having a group of peers to lean on is a great way to help new hires feel supported.



Step 1: Plan out your Company Circles Program (cont.)

Coordinating your Lean In Circles program

Identify a leader or group of leaders to manage your Circles program. We call this leader the Partner Champion, and they can come from any department or level and be a single individual or a small group of employees. Partner Champions just need to have the passion and resources to support the program. Key responsibilities include:

- Introducing and promoting Lean In Circle Program to employees
- Hosting a Circles Launch Event and Circle Leader Training
- Encouraging and supporting Circle Leaders to continue to meet regularly

TIP: Identify stakeholders in your organization to support this program

Recruit senior leaders to support and champion the program. Consider asking your CEO or another senior leader to encourage employees to sign up. It's a great way for company leadership to show their support for creating an equal workplace. It also helps to get vocal and respected co-workers at all levels of your organization to participate in your Circles program.

See our full FAQs for more guidance.



Create a Lean In Network to manage your Circles program

We call a group of Circles linked to the same organization a Network. Setting up a Network on the Lean In Circles website only takes a few minutes and makes it easy for you as the Partner Champion to oversee the growth of your program and engage members.

Your Network page on LeanIn.Org will allow you to:

- View all your Circles and members in one place. You can download the list of members at any time via your Network dashboard.
- Employees can join the Circles Network with a few clicks, and you can track the program's growth online. With the right approvals, any employee can start or join a Circle in your Network.
- In addition, Circle Leaders can use the website to find videos, discussion guides, and other materials to help them run effective meetings.

How to register your Network:

- 1. Click here to create your company Network in a few simple steps. You'll be asked to input:
 - Your email (you'll be prompted to register for a LeanIn.Org account if you don't already have one)
 - Location of your Lean In Network
 - We recommend you enter the city and country where you and most of your potential Network/Circle leaders are based. This can be updated at any time.
 - Who will be in your Network (select 'people in my company' and add your company name)
 - The name of your Network—this is up to you!
 - Here are some company Network examples for inspiration:
 - Lean In Circles at Walmart
 - P&G Leans In
 - Lean In Circles at Standard Chartered
- 2. You can edit your Network profile anytime by clicking "Update Profile" on your Network Dashboard.

You now have your unique Company Network URL link to share with employees so they can create their Circles.

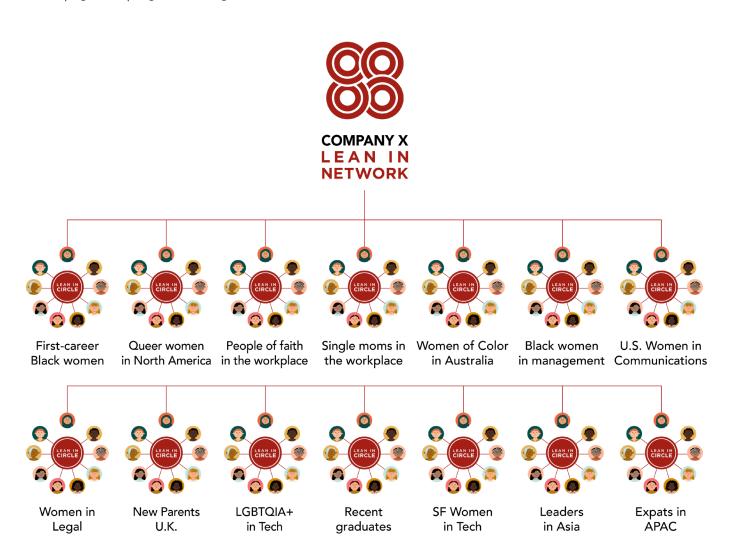
Alternatively: If you prefer to manage your Network and Circles membership on another platform (e.g. your company's intranet), you are welcome to do that, too. If you choose to do this, we would love to hear how many Circles you set up! Please share with the Lean In Team by emailing partners@leanin.org.

Data Protection: LeanIn.Org values our users and respects their privacy. Our Privacy Policy HERE explains how we will and will not use the information collected when you register your Network and Circles.

Step 2: Create a Lean In Network to manage your Circles Program (cont.)

Here's an example of what your Network may look like, once all your Circles are set up (after Step 4):

- Each Circle will be led by a Circle Leader or co-Lead and made up of 8 to 12 women who are the members.
- Circles typically form around a common thread such as level (senior executives), function (sales), or identity (working moms). You can see a real life example of Circles at one company below.
- As your Circles program continues to grow you will be able to add more Circles under your Network page, this program is designed to scale!



Host a Circles Launch Event to promote your Circles Program

After your Lean In Network is set up, you are ready to share more broadly with employees and encourage them to join or start a Circle. We recommend hosting a Launch Event to introduce the Lean In Circles to your organization and identify potential Circle members and leaders. We make this easy by providing everything you need to host your event including email templates to get your team excited, a kick-off presentation and speaker notes.

Circles Launch Event overview:

- **Purpose:** Introduce Lean In Circles and get employees excited to lead or join a Circle. The Launch Event also includes a 15-minute Circles simulation to give people a chance to experience the power of Circles for themselves!
- Target Audience: Anyone at your organization who wants to learn more about Lean In Circles.
- Duration: 60 minutes

Before the Launch Event:

- Invite employees: Promote the Circles Launch Event via email, your company newsletter, or other internal channels. We have a Circles Launch email template, which you can find in our Company Playbook here.
- Review the Circles launch deck and tailor as required for your organization.
- Prepare to deliver the session by reviewing these speaker notes so you know what you're going to say. Our speaker notes guide you through the presentation step by step.

TIP: This event works well for both in-person and virtual formats. If you are hosting a virtual Circles Launch Event, note that for the Circles simulation you'll need to put attendees into **breakout rooms** to experience the power of small group discussions. We recommend hosting your meeting via Zoom or a similar platform that provides breakout room functionality.

After the Launch Event

- 1. Identify who wants to lead a Circle (and invite them to attend Circle Leader training—see Step 4)
 - At the end of the event ask people to identify whether they want to start or lead a Lean In Circle (launch a poll in virtual meetings or share a sign-up form)
 - **Send a post event survey:** Alternatively, send out a short survey to attendees that includes the following questions (and any others relevant to your organization):
 - Relevant employee personal information: Name, Email, Location
 - o Confirm if participants would like to:
 - Lead a Circle
 - Join a Circle as a member
- 2. Send follow up email
 - Send this Circle Launch Follow-Up email to attendees which you can find in our Company Playbook here.



Recruit and train Circles Leaders

Great Circle leaders are vital to the success of your program. Circle leaders are responsible for scheduling meetings, helping the group select discussion topics, and facilitating group discussions. Some companies rotate the role of leader in their Circle every month or have co-leaders share responsibilities.

Recruiting Circle Leaders

- Hopefully you've identified some prospective Circle Leaders through the Circles Launch Event.
- You might also reach out to others directly as well as individuals who couldn't attend the Launch Event but are still interested in learning more.

Circle Leader Training

Once you have identified your Circle leaders, we recommend hosting a Circle Leader Training to make sure they are set up for success.

Circle Leader Training overview:

- **Purpose:** Provide guidance for new Circle Leaders on how to get their Circles up and running, from deciding on their Circle's name and purpose and recruiting members right up to hosting their first meeting.
- Target Audience: Anyone who has expressed interest in leading a Lean In Circle.
- Duration: 60 mins

TIP: Circle Leaders can come from any department or level and no prior facilitation experience is required. Our pre-prepared Circle meeting guides will provide step-by-step guidance to help leaders moderate their Circle meetings.

Before the event:

- Invite employees: Promote the Circle Leader Training via email, your company newsletter, or other internal channels. You can use the Circle Leader Training Invitation email, in our Company Playbook.
- Review the Circle Leader Training deck and tailor as required for your organization.
- Prepare to deliver the session by reviewing these speaker notes so you know what you're going to say. Our speaker notes guide you through the presentation step by step.

After the event:

• Send the Circle Leader Training follow-up email, in our Company playbook here, which includes instructions on how to register their Circles under your Lean In Network page.

TIP: LeanIn.Org hosts monthly Circle Leader Trainings for community Circle Leaders. You are welcome to join these sessions by signing up on our event calendar here. They may support your own learning and/or give you some inspiration on how to host your Circle Leader Training.



Open your Circles for registration

Once the Circle Leader Training is complete and Circle Leaders have registered their Circles on your Network page, it's time to open up your Circles program to all employees so they can join Circles as members.

Here are some ideas to promote your Circles Network:

- Share your Network URL within your organization. You can paste it into employee emails, post it to your company intranet, or share it via an internal messaging platform—whatever works for you!
- Invite Employees to join Lean In Circles using the email template in our Company Playbook here.
- Circle Leaders can also directly invite colleagues to join their Circle using a follow up email to prospective members, found in our Company Playbook here.

TIP: It's okay for Circles to start small. We recommend Circles have a maximum of 8 to 12 members, but it's okay for a Circle to start with three or four people and grow from there. The reason we recommend no more than 12 people in a Circle is so that every member has the chance to actively participate in each 60–90 minute meeting and it makes it much easier to schedule meetings each month.

TIP: Circle members don't need to be limited by geography now that we are all accustomed to meeting and connecting virtually! Virtual meetings can be a powerful way for employees to connect and grow their networks across geographic lines—especially as many companies continue to work remotely.

Congratulations on launching your Lean In Circles program! Your Circles are now ready to host their first meetings.

Managing your Circles Program:

Here are some ideas and best practices to support your Circles program ongoing.

Connect and support your Circle Leaders

We recommend you have a space where your Circle Leaders can connect with one another to share best practices and ask questions. Facebook Workplace, Slack, or Skype teams would work well for this—or any other intranet platform that works for you. We recommend that you check in with your Circle Leaders at least once a month to get a pulse check on how their Circles are going, and encourage them to share regularly with one another.

Connect your Lean In Circles Network

You may want to bring your Network of Circles together for larger events, workshops, or networking two or three times a year. This is in addition to individual Circles hosting their monthly meetings to provide an ongoing source of peer-to-peer support and mentorship. Global dates such as International Women's Day are a great time to do this.

Set a timeline for you Circles Program

You might consider setting a timeline for your Circles program of 6 months. This provides structure for your Circles and allows you to set a clear meeting and learning schedule. There will naturally be changes in any organization, as employees are promoted, move departments and new people join the organization. At the end of 6 months you can review the program and then invite a new cohort of members and Circles to your program.

Celebrate your Circles program

Some companies decide to run their Circles program in cohorts for a set amount of time (e.g., six months), while others let the Circles decide how long they want to run. Either way, many companies have found it beneficial to host a bi-annual event to bring their Circles Network together to hear stories from each other and celebrate their Circle Leaders and members. These events are a great way to recognize the contributions of those who have participated in the program, as well as provide a platform to recruit your next cohort of Circle Leaders and members.

Track the impact of your Circles program

Track the impact of your Circles program by surveying your Circle Leaders and members on a quarterly basis. Use the goals you laid out when you launched your program to help you decide what questions to ask and measure the success of the program.

Stay up to date on the latest news and updates from LeanIn.Org:

- Sign up for our newsletter here
- Follow us on Facebook, LinkedIn, Instagram and Twitter
- Join our Lean In Company Leaders LinkedIn page to connect with other Company Partner Champions.



Is there a cost involved with partnering with Lean In or running a Circles program?

No. We believe all companies, regardless of size or budget, should have the tools they need to advance women and create an equal and inclusive workplace—so we offer all of our resources and programming for free.

Is it necessary to recruit senior leaders to support my program?

That depends! In some organizations, this is a crucial first step, but in others, it is not necessary. Where possible, we encourage you to ask your CEO or another senior leader to be an advocate for the program and encourage employees to sign up. You may also want to ask these executives to meet with or mentor your Circles. It's a great way for them to show that supporting women is a priority and hear directly from women in your organization. Further, if they participate in a Circle, it provides a way for them to offer mentorship at scale, by mentoring eight women in one hour rather than eight women over eight hours.

How have other companies used Circles to achieve DE&I goals and what impact have they seen?

Thousands of companies have implemented Lean In Circles to complement their diversity and inclusion efforts. Below are some examples of how different organizations have tailored the program to achieve a specific organizational goal:

- **P&G's** Circles program has helped women find support at every stage of their career, whether they're senior executives or just starting out. Read more about their experience HERE.
- **Gartner** integrated the Circles program with its existing women's employee resource group to provide skills development.
- Intel leveraged the Circles model to retain talent and help women build deeper connections with one another and with senior women leaders at the organization.
- MetLife created an official mentorship structure with Circles, which employees can join annually.
- **Walmart** has integrated Circles into its career development programs to support mentorship and develop inclusive leaders.

Are Circles for women only?

While the majority of Lean In Circles are women-only, there are no rules about who can and can't participate. You may choose to open up your Circles program to anyone who identifies with the mission you set for your Circles program. If you're struggling to decide whether your Circles should be all women or mixed-gender, decide what your goals are first. If you want to create a program focused on peer support, we know from research that women are more likely to share openly in all-women groups. If your mission is to bring diverse groups together and encourage allies to join the conversation, a mixed-gender group may work better.

If there are lots of men at your organization who would like to participate in your diversity and inclusion initiatives, we encourage you to check out Lean In's other programs, designed to engage all employees: 50 Way To Fight Bias and Allyship at Work.

FAQs (cont.)

How many employees should be part of our Circles program?

Circles are typically made up of 8 to 12 people, so depending on how many participants you have, we encourage you to create multiple Circles. Some companies such as Walmart have over 1000 Circles across their organization in multiple countries. You can open up your Circles to all women and men in the organization or consider recruiting people to join through your employee resource groups. Employees at every level of your organization can benefit from the power of peer-to-peer support and mentorship.

How many members should each Circle have?

It's okay for Circles to start small. We recommend Circles have a maximum of 8 to 12 members, but it's okay for Circles to start with 3 or 4 people and grow from there. The reason we recommend no more than 12 people in a Circle is so that every member has the chance to actively participate in each 60–90 minute meeting and it makes it much easier to schedule meetings each month.

Should I pre-assign members to a Circle or allow employees to choose and create their own Circles?

This will depend on your goals. Both options have proved successful. Assigning members to Circles can allow you to bring together employees from different backgrounds and levels of seniority. Allowing Circles to choose their own members often means that members already know their fellow Circle members and this can create a feeling of comfort when sharing.

Do Circles usually have one Leader, or more?

A single Leader can run a Circle as a "manager" (sending information and updates, scheduling meetings, etc.), but Circles can also have co-Leaders or rotate leadership each month to share responsibility. When you recruit for Leaders, you can share these options and let each Circle choose the model that works best for them. In addition, after Leaders have started a Circle, they can decide later on if they want to change the Leader model and share more responsibilities.



FAQs (cont.)

What should Circles discuss in meetings?

Our education library provides Circle leaders with everything they need to facilitate Circle meetings. From expert advice on navigating gender bias, managing work-life balance, and more—all designed to help women overcome barriers and advance their careers. Each topic in our education library comes with a Circle meeting guide, including an agenda, discussion prompts, and activities. We recommend Circles create a meeting schedule to help provide structure to the meetings. This model empowers women in your organization to make Circles their own and lays the foundation for a scalable program that engages women across roles, backgrounds, and identities.

Should I encourage Circle Leaders to set a goal for their Circle?

We recommend that each Circle sets goals of its own. We encourage Circle Leaders to start a Circle that is focused on something they are personally interested in, with others who share a similar interest (for example, people at similar career levels, life stages, or who have similar hobbies/interests). Being specific about the goal helps employees (members) select a Circle that aligns with their personal interests, gives moderators a road map for choosing meeting topics, and helps keep the Circle on track. All of this is covered in our Circle Leader Training.

How long should a Circles program run for?

We recommend setting a timeline for your Circles program for a minimum of 12 months. This provides structure for your Circles and allows you to set a clear meeting and learning schedule for the year. There will naturally be changes in any organization, as employees are promoted, move departments and new people join the organization. At the end of the year you can review the program and then invite a new cohort of members and Circles to your program.

Can our Circles program be scaled to our organization offices in different countries?

Absolutely! Circles are a great way to connect employees across different markets and build a more connected workforce. Especially now—when most Circles are meeting virtually—it's a great way to build relationships with colleagues in different parts of the world or businesses that you wouldn't normally have a chance to connect with. You'll be surprised how much your employees and teams have in common!

How do I register Circles under my Company Lean In Network?

- 1. Register your Network on LeanIn.Org. Refer to Step 2 in this start up kit.
- 2. Share your registered Network URL link with Circle Leaders from your organization.
- 3. Ask them to click on "Start a Circle in this Network" and follow the prompts to register their Circle.

Once I have registered my Network and/or Circle, how can I access my dashboard?

- Go to https://leanin.org/
- In the top right hand corner of the webpage, sign in with your email and password
- At the top of the page hover over the tab 'Lean In Circles' and scroll down to click on 'Your Circle dashboard'
- Click on 'View Dashboard'

FAQs (cont.)

What functionality does the LeanIn.Org website offer for my Network?

Once your Network and Circles are registered, you can log in at LeanIn.Org, click on the "Lean In Circles" tab on the website, and scroll down to click on "Your Circle Dashboard." Through your Dashboard, you can manage your Network, including:

- Make updates to your Network name, description, and mission
- Click on 'Invite leaders to help' to invite other Leaders to help run your Network (they would have administration responsibilities to help you accept Circles and members to your Network and have access to your Dashboard)
- Click on 'Manage Circles' to accept and delete Circles under your Network
- Download a list of your members under 'Network's downloads'

Dashboard image:



Network's

My organization is outside of the United States. Can we still launch a Circles program?

Yes. Companies all over the world and of all sizes use our programs to achieve real, measurable DEI results. More than 56,000 Lean In Circles have been started in 188 countries and over 3000 companies.

How else can I partner with Lean In?

Join our Women in the Workplace study. It is the largest comprehensive study of the state of women in corporate America. LeanIn.Org and McKinsey & Company have published this report annually since 2015 to give companies the information they need to advance women and improve gender diversity. Over the past six years, we have collected information from almost 600 organizations employing more than 20 million people. Read our latest report and express your interest in participating in the 2021 Women in the Workplace study here.

Bring 50 Ways to Fight Bias to your organization. 50 Ways is a free digital program to empower all employees to identify and challenge bias head-on. 95% of participants who use the program say they are more committed to challenging bias in their workplace.

Bring Allyship at Work to your organization. Allyship at Work is a training program that engages employees at all levels to build an inclusive workplace. The program is deeply intersectional and provides employees with specific, meaningful actions to be an ally. **97%** of participants who use the program say they are more committed to practicing allyship at work.

Please contact the Lean In team at partners@leanin.org for any further questions you have.