

How Companies Can Support Careers for Women in STEM

While women are often broadly underrepresented in leadership, data suggests that discrimination is especially pronounced in STEM fields. According to Pew Research, women face more discrimination in STEM jobs, struggle to reach pay equity and are often passed over for promotions and leadership roles.

Addressing the discrimination against women in STEM must involve efforts to combat systemic bias throughout the career lifecycle. Whether dispelling gendered stereotypes or broadening professional development resources, young girls and seasoned professionals both benefit from initiatives that create fairer STEM workplaces.

Foundational Education

Although women in STEM often face professional discrimination, the forces driving that discrimination can begin at a young age. The stereotypes that associate men with superior skills in math and science are introduced as early as elementary school, according to a study published in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*. The study shows how such early stereotype stratification may cause later gendered disparities in math scores. Efforts to overcome systemic bias against women in STEM must begin equally early.

For example, Eli Lilly and Company (No. 5 on the 2023 Top 50 list) began funding the *Lilly Girls and Young Women in STEM* initiative in 2020. The program is a partnership with the Children’s Museum of Indianapolis, where Eli Lilly is based. In a statement on the museum’s website, Jennifer Pace Robinson, the museum’s CEO, said the initiative encourages young girls to pursue STEM careers by showcasing successful women in the industry.

“The Children’s Museum of Indianapolis strives to highlight successful women in STEM as positive role models for children and families,” Robinson said.

“In particular, we believe that in order to support girls and young women in their explorations of STEM, it’s vital to connect them with role models who are women working in, and making significant contributions to, STEM fields and concepts.”

The program will provide that role model in 2023 and 2024 by way of a visiting scientist sponsored by Eli Lilly. The visiting scientist is a woman working in STEM who will provide hands-on education to young girls at the museum and will support outreach efforts that offer greater visibility for female STEM professionals.

Improving Recruitment Practices

Gender equity in STEM roles depends on a talent pipeline that affords women the opportunity to pursue STEM careers. Collaborating with other organizations that focus on professional development for women in STEM is a great way to begin building that pipeline. Ninety percent of Top 10 companies have a formal recruiting partnership with the *Society of Women Engineers* (SWE). The non-profit supports STEM education for women and provides professional networking services to help women get a foothold in engineering careers.



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Abbott (No. 9 on the 2023 Top 50 list) is one such company. Advancing opportunities for women in STEM is a core part of Abbott's long-term sustainability plan, which it pursues through its SWE partnership and internal recruitment practices.

Abbott's internship program is a staple of those internal efforts. The program is an early investment in future talent, targeting high school students with a specific focus on women and minorities. According to Abbott, the program has developed a reliable stream of qualified workers that support the company's operational success while also closing the STEM gender gap.

Students from underrepresented groups represent more than two-thirds of the program's interns and young women account for more than half of interns. Abbott said approximately 80% of eligible interns move onto its college internship program. The company has also hired former high school interns as full-time engineers, 70% of whom are women.

Within the decade, Abbott plans to leverage its internal programs and external partnerships to open professional opportunities in STEM for over 100,000 young people. The goal is for women and minorities to represent at least half of the candidate pool for such opportunities.

Abbott's recruitment practices represent a synergy between the early introduction of STEM education and later career pathways for young professionals. Investment in childhood STEM education for young girls prepares them to later take advantage of opportunities like Abbott's internship program. Together, these initiatives demonstrate a holistic approach to dismantling STEM inequity by addressing historical structural barriers to gender parity.

Development Opportunities at STEM Companies

Many of the obstacles that create gender inequality in STEM fields are not unique to science and technology industries. Disproportionate representation in leadership, for example, affects organizations across various industries. For technology companies, advancing opportunities for women in STEM means confronting such challenges through programs that create development and advancement opportunities for women within the organization.

Medtronic (No. 2 on the 2023 Top 50 list) has several such programs designed to support women's professional growth. One of the most comprehensive is the Medtronic Women's Network (MWN).

According to Medtronic, the MWN "offers employees a full suite of professional development, networking and mentoring programs." More than providing these resources for women, MWN encourages allyship through its connected group, Men Advocating Equity. This allied group creates space for women



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to voice their needs and helps make men more aware of the unique issues that women face in the workplace. This group pairing is meant to invite men into organizational advocacy efforts while working to create a culture that supports women's development through dialogue and education.

An outgrowth of MWN, Medtronic also launched WISE (Women in Science and Engineering). This initiative supports the holistic advancement of women in STEM, from early education to

professional leadership development. WISE sponsors educational events at primary schools and universities, as well as internships, networking events and conferences that promote fairness and inclusion for women in STEM careers. Supporting women through the entire professional pipeline in these ways works against the early systemic bias that many women in STEM face and develops the next generation of leaders in science and technology organizations.

