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Women Creating Change Releases Report Assessing Landscape of Civic Engagement for Women in New York City Ahead of Primary Election

—Publication analyzes the barriers and drivers to participation, proposes solutions to increase engagement in civic processes—

—The groundbreaking report, [A Blueprint for Women’s Civic Engagement in New York City: Toward a More Just and Equitable Democracy](#), shows it’s time to take action—

(New York, NY) - [Women Creating Change](#) (WCC), a nonprofit that partners with underserved women to develop and strengthen the skills and resources needed to effectively advocate for New York’s diverse communities, today released a report assessing the landscape of civic engagement for women in New York City.

The 68-page report, “[A Blueprint for Women’s Civic Engagement in New York City: Toward a More Just and Equitable Democracy](#),” examines the current landscape and barriers to engagement, and provides recommendations for ways to increase involvement in civic life by those who have been historically excluded. Civic engagement is fundamental to the underpinnings of our democracy. With the upcoming citywide municipal elections and amid fallout from the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, it is more important than ever for all New Yorkers to have the opportunity to shape the future of our city.

The report was released in conjunction with an online panel discussion today, moderated by veteran Emmy-winning journalist Vivian Lee, and featuring panelists: Lurie Daniel Favors, Esq., Interim Executive Director, Center for Law and Social Justice, Medgar Evers College, CUNY; Ana L. Oliveira, President and CEO, New York Women’s Foundation; and Dr. Sarah Sayeed, Chair and Executive Director, NYC Civic Engagement Commission. The panel assessed the systemic barriers to civic engagement and how all sectors can collaborate to ensure a more just and equitable city in which all women are civically engaged.

The report—which aggregates two years of research and data from WCC’s internal strategic planning process (listening tour, landscape analysis, literature review,) and developmental evaluation (research, survey, focus groups)—illuminates that some women in New York City are actively engaged in their communities, but they face barriers to full participation, which are exacerbated for low-income women of color. Barriers include the burden of work and care,

gendered and cultural stereotypes surrounding civic engagement, political exclusion, and voter suppression. These barriers persist in a context shaped by systemic racism, sexism, and classism. WCC believes improving women's civic engagement is key to building a participatory democracy.

The data shows that expanding civic engagement among women is more important than ever. In New York State, only 18 out of 63 (28%) of state senators are women and only five (8%) are women of color. As of April 2021, women occupy only 14 out of 51 (27%) of New York City Council seats, and 12 (24%) are women of color. In the upcoming 2021 City Council election, only five women are likely to remain in office due to term limits, possibly reducing the already low level of women's representation.

"We are proud to release our report on civic engagement as we are in the midst of early voting for critical municipal elections in New York City," says **Carole J. Wacey, President & CEO and Deborah Martin Owens, Board Chair of Women Creating Change**. "Everyone should have the knowledge, resources, and connections to advocate for themselves, their families, and their community. This will lead to stronger communities, an improved quality of life, and a better democracy where every voice is truly heard—especially those who have been historically excluded from civic life. This publication aims to serve as a catalyst for various sectors to collaborate and increase civic engagement."

The report's policy offers recommendations for various sectors:

- **Nonprofits (including WCC) and community organizations** should account for time, energy, and financial constraints in civic education programs and engagement opportunities; provide culturally specific and widely accessible materials; incorporate an expansive definition of civic engagement; build mutually supportive partnerships; and foster more opportunities for women to build relationships and leadership skills.
- **Government** should expand voting access and rights; improve the city's election infrastructure and voter data analysis; ensure a fair and accurate U.S. Census and redistricting process; end policing practices like "kettling" that deliberately entrap protestors; increase funding for, and coordination of, civic learning opportunities for families and adults; and give community boards a greater voice.
- **Foundations and the private sector** should direct more resources to organizations implementing inclusive civic engagement programming, those that conduct work through an intersectional lens, organizations of color and multi-year initiatives; and CBOs focused on movement-building.

"As someone who has served at nearly all levels of government, I know the challenges and roadblocks that come with engaging in civic life and the difficulties women face when they run for office," said **Lieutenant Governor Kathy Hochul**. "With partners like Women Creating Change, New York State is working to support women and provide resources to encourage every New Yorker, especially historically underserved communities, to engage with civic life and make their voices heard."

"This report comes at a critical time as we are being challenged by the rising trend of state legislation that restricts voting access, especially for communities of color," says **Ana L. Oliveira, President & CEO of The New York Women's Foundation**. "We learned from our last national

election that women play a pivotal role in civic engagement, helping to shape and strengthen our democracy. We understand that women are part of the solution, and investing in their leadership is necessary. When women thrive, their families and communities also thrive.”

“It is an honor to join Women Creating Change for this crucial conversation about expanding women’s civic engagement in New York City. There is so much that can be done to make the democratic process and opportunities for civic engagement more accessible. WCC’s Blueprint for Women’s Civic Engagement in New York City lays out the barriers, opportunities, and strategies for creating a more just and equitable democracy; and it can be foundational for the leaders and organizations who will be carrying this work forward,” said **Dr. Sarah Sayeed, Chair & Executive Director of the New York City Civic Engagement Commission.**

“Historically, women of color have been civically engaged by necessity. They recognized early that mobilizing for change was the only way to shift power and access to resources,” said **Lurie Daniel Favors Esq., Interim Executive Director, Center for Law and Social Justice at Medgar Evers College.** “It is incumbent upon us to heed their wisdom and actively work to strengthen our communities and families by voting, engaging with government, advocacy, and action. Our participation is the only way to ensure that we have a seat at decision-making tables.”

“Women and women of color were disproportionately affected by the pandemic, because it was the kind of crisis that caused structural systems to buckle - from education, to public health, from daycare to the workplace,” said **Vivian Lee, Award-winning TV journalist.** “The result was a myriad of burdens placed on women’s shoulders. This will be a timely conversation about civically engaging more women so that they are counted, heard, and appreciated in public and private spheres as never before.”

WCC is indebted to countless women activists, writers, thinkers, and scholars, particularly Black, Brown, immigrant, and LGBTQ women, and gender nonconforming and non-binary individuals. This report builds upon lessons learned from the women, past and present, who found ways to be civically engaged despite the barriers. WCC is grateful to Kimberlé Crenshaw and Cathy Cohen, whose work directly inspired and shaped the development of this publication, and to the elected officials, nonprofit leaders, and partners who shared their valuable insights to inform this report.

About Women Creating Change:

Women Creating Change, formerly Women’s City Club of New York, was founded in 1915 as a nonprofit, non-partisan, activist organization dedicated to advancing the rights of women to shape the future of New York City. Today, Women Creating Change is an inclusive community that partners with people and organizations with a focus on underserved women to develop and strengthen the skills and resources needed to effectively identify the issues that matter to them most and advocate for themselves and New York’s diverse communities. Its vision is that all women have the power to be changemakers to create a more equitable New York City.

Learn more: www.wccny.org and [Wikipedia](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Women_Creating_Change)

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