Pathways to Engaging Women in Mission Leadership
Turning Barriers into Opportunities

(Wendy Wilson – 5/28/20 Missio Nexus Webinar)

STRUCTURAL Issues:

1. Organizational Policies and Language

A. *Organizational language.* Re-consider your organizational communications: personnel and policy documents, mission/vision statements. Begin to change to gender-neutral language where appropriate (one, they, we, the staff member), or alternating gender pronouns (he/she, her/his, men/women) so that it feels more accessible to women and men both – when we actually mean both men and women!

B. *Job descriptions.* Are they written to attract both gifted men and women? What are our expectations regarding hours, travel, or meetings? Do we consider part-time, flex time, job sharing, or interim positions?

C. *Pay Structures.* Dual or split salaries can be a way that communicates value of both spouses when couples are recruited for service. Like it or not, paychecks communicate the value of our roles. When women don't get one, they undervalue their contribution to the organization. And it can put them at peril for other benefits in the future with no employment record.

D. *Benefits.* Creative solutions to benefits such as child-care, education, health care, or pensions may encourage women to participate more fully.

E. *Educational Requirements.* What are our expectations of women regarding pre-field and continuing education, required or encouraged training and development, so that women participate in gaining valued competences?

F. *Evaluation and Feedback processes.* Regular times of evaluation through life stages can help women stay envisioned and help transitions occur with changing interests and life stages.

2. Accessible Processes
Actively identifying and inviting women with leadership gifting to participate . . .are women on your list?

A. *Evaluate your current leadership recruiting profile.* Try to establish what your, perhaps unspoken, leadership profile is (including education or ministry experience) then evaluate how it might relate to gender assumptions. For example, if you require pastoral experience and draw from churches that only allow male pastors, women will be absent.

1. Existing Personnel - are we overlooking those not in visible roles?
   a. Women who enter our agencies in *support roles* and remain underutilized without avenues for recognition or growth.
   b. Women who serve *alongside their husbands or male teammates*, often fulfilling similar roles and doing similar work, but aren't officially recognized or invited into decision-making events based on their own contribution.
   c. Couples who are "recruited" into a defined leadership role that is actually for him without a meaningful role for her ("find your place.") What expectations were created?
   d. Women who are in stage of life transitions with no meaningful place to now offer their gifts.

2. Attracting New Talent - do we provide a meaningful place for new women?

a. Experienced, talented, mid-life women coming out of corporate leadership and careers, wanting to serve in roles that steward this gifting and experience,

b. Couples coming into missions ready to negotiate their partnership of shared home/ministry framework in marriage and child-raising. "More of her may mean less of him."

c. Parents are looking for organizations that will be a place where their daughters can grow up with role models and thrive as Kingdom partners across the spectrum.

B. *Evaluate your current recruiting networks, internal and external.* Where do you typically find your leaders? Where else might we look to find them?
1. Community involvements of our current staff. Do we know what our women are doing/leading informally?
2. Executive coaching and placement agencies
3. Women's professional networks
4. Volunteer networks
5. Your support constituency

C. *Evaluate your internal gift assessment and development avenues for all staff.*
1. Women often need to be sought after and affirmed that they are recognized with leadership gifting and potential. Too often women lack confidence or believe they shouldn't be functioning in leading roles of all types.
2. Consider what pathways currently exist or could possibly exist to move her from her current role into a leadership position.
3. Encourage couples to have regular times of re-evaluation and negotiation about who is needed more and where year to year (based on family needs, team/ministry needs.)
4. Seek a mentor for her or for a few women at a time to help them develop.
5. Identify and encourage skill acquisition. Put it in their budgets and job descriptions.

3. Organizational Readiness
Before we set a woman in a role in which women have never served before, preparing our organizations and teams for needed shifts can go a long way toward a smoother and more effective, systemic change over time.

A. *What and how strongly do our current staff feel about women in leadership*? Do a survey to see where your staff are on this issue - strongly agree/disagree? - somewhat agree/disagree? This information can give you a sense of how/who to best engage in a change process.

B. *Who is already on board?* Who are our people that could be brought productively into exploratory discussions?

C. *What are perceived barriers/threats?* What do current leaders think the barriers are and what do the women think the barriers are? Any disconnect may give us helpful information about what we need to address.

D. *Where do we already have common ground?* Is there already agreement on aspects of the issue that we can build on (i.e., we value women and can make better use of their giftedness?) Identify the theological underpinnings of your culture. Are there inconsistencies that arise from "unwritten rules?"

E. *How can we bring others on board?* What discussions can be planned with various groups of staff and volunteers? Intentional, productive interactions are crucial.

F. *Give regular, public affirmation*. Where can current leaders give public affirmation to women in identified ministry roles? Have gifted women in appropriate up-front roles at plenary meetings. Ask for their input about recognized, crucial issues.

G. *Identify where decisions are made.* Are there men-only meetings or events where decisions are made - formal or informal - even though women colleagues are not present? How might those need to change to include all decision-makers?

H. *Prepare for resistance*. What stakeholders may be uncomfortable with such a shift? How will you address it? What do you believe you will gain in the long-run? What are you willing to sacrifice? Are you ready to lose some staff (and gain others) as you move forward in this shift? *We chose who we will gain and lose by the decisions we make.*

I. *Have a clear statement and consistent practice of public support for her leadership.* Don't allow her to be a "lightening rod." Any concern among staff should be directed to her supervisors or those who asked her to take the role, not left to her to defend alone.

How will you begin to evaluate and address these areas of potential structural barriers to women in leadership? Making these necessary shifts will take intentionality and time. As more gifted women come into your leadership teams, you will bring more resources and perspective to all your organizational priorities, AND you will also unlock a great variety of gifts in all your women!

For Reflection: *On a scale of 1-10, how would you rate your organization's readiness to consider making organizational changes so women have greater opportunities for leadership development and access to leadership roles? What might 2 good next steps be for your organizational culture?*