

Fall 2011

NHWI

Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):  
Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Session Report  
for Concord, NH – November 30, 2011

Rath, Young and Pignatelli, PC \* Concord, New Hampshire  
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## About the New Hampshire's Women's Initiative (NHWI):

The New Hampshire Women's Initiative (NHWI) is a new non-profit organization dedicated to continuing the legacy of success of our merging partners: the Commission on the Status of Women, the Women's Lobby and Alliance, and the Women's Policy Institute. The NHWI mission is to advance social, economic, and political opportunity and equality for women in New Hampshire.

The NHWI has a unique governance structure. Its board is supported by both a Founding Mothers' Panel, comprised of the founders of the merging partners, and a Gender Ambassadors Panel, a group of young women leaders who are interested in better understanding and re-framing the dialogue around gender equality issues in New Hampshire. This multi-generational sphere of influence will help the NHWI leverage the rich history and accomplishment surrounding women's issues in New Hampshire and at the same time craft a new path forward for gender equality born out of contemporary thinking and needs.

## About the Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):

The goal of the Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) is to support the mission of the NHWI by informing its research, outreach, and advocacy with a better understanding of the gender equality issues that younger women and men identify as important to them. GAP members work toward that goal by hosting Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Sessions in various geographic locations around the State. The Listening Sessions are facilitated focus groups consisting of six to ten participants engaged in a formal discussion for up to ninety minutes using pre-determined questions. Results will be documented and shared with the NHWI Board.

## About the Authors:

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## Executive Summary

Throughout the fall of 2011, the GAP conducted listening sessions around New Hampshire with content centered on “Contemporary Gender Equality”; how, if at all, gender equality issues resonate with younger NH women and men. The listening sessions are designed to include small groups of women or men from a variety of geographic regions. Based on the observation that women in a younger age demographic often don’t relate to the second-wave feminist movement of the 1960s-1990s, the goal of the listening sessions is to tease out which gender equality issues younger women and men identify as important. The results of the listening sessions will help NHWI can develop its research, outreach, and advocacy.

The Concord GAP Listening Session is one of seven initial sessions happening across the state. The other regions included in this first round of listening sessions were the Seacoast, the North Country, the Upper Valley, Manchester, the Monadnock Region, and the Lakes Region. The Concord GAP Listening Session took place on November 30, 2011, at a local law firm.

The Concord GAP Listening Session featured participation by eight women ranging in age from 26 to 35, all of whom either live or work in Concord. Sarah Mattson facilitated the Listening Session and Gina Rotondi took notes. An NHWI Board member observed much of the Listening Session.

The primary issues that participants raised during the listening sessions were as follows: differential valuing of traditionally feminine characteristics in the workplace, depending on the nature of the work and whether the field was traditionally dominated by men; lack of government and workplace support for parenting; and the deficit of affordable, accessible, quality child care in New Hampshire. When asked to identify discrete issues for the NHWI to consider, participants most frequently mentioned child care and women’s health.

The results of the Concord GAP Listening Session are a preliminary look at the issues a small group of younger women from Concord area identify as important to them. The NHWI’s research, outreach, and advocacy will be shaped by the six other initial listening sessions, as well as subsequent listening sessions designed to reach different populations (for example, listening sessions hosted by Founding Mothers’ Panel).

## Introduction and Background

The city of Concord, New Hampshire is located in the central region of the Granite State, often referred to as the Merrimack (River) Valley. It is the state capital, although not the state's most populous city, and the county seat of Merrimack County. According to the United States Census 2010<sup>1</sup>, Concord has a population of 42,695, which is roughly evenly distributed between men and women. Concord residents are predominantly white. Approximately 21 percent are children.

Additional Census data<sup>2</sup> reveals that 91 percent of Concord residents age 25 and older have high school diplomas, while 37 percent have a bachelor's degree or higher. Both of these rates exceed statewide averages. Women-owned firms make up 26 percent of Concord businesses. Mean household income in Concord is \$66,961.<sup>3</sup>

The Concord GAP Listening Session was conducted on November 30, 2011, from 6:00 to 8:00 PM.

## Methods:

Gaining insight into a community with the use of focus groups is a commonly-used approach to qualitative research. Qualitative research is a systematic approach to understanding human thoughts, behaviors and motivations through thoughtful survey design, observation and inquiry.

The GAP Listening Sessions are focus groups in which a facilitator and note-taker work together to gain insight into participants' thoughts, feelings, and ideas about contemporary gender equality issues.

Prior to conducting a listening session, each facilitator and note-taker receives a facilitation packet that details instructions for conducting an effective focus group. The packet includes instructions for the specific roles of the facilitator and note-taker, how to draft a report after the listening session, and of course the specific questions required to be posed to participants.

## Location

The Concord GAP Listening Session was held at the law offices of Rath, Young and Pignatelli, PC. This location was selected because of its central location on Main Street in downtown Concord. The Listening Session took place in the firm's large and comfortable board room.

## Participant Background

Eight women participated in the Concord GAP Listening Session. They ranged in age from 26 to 35. All

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<sup>1</sup> Data available at <http://2010.census.gov/2010census/popmap/ipmtext.php?fl=33>.

<sup>2</sup> Data available at <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/33/3314200.html>

<sup>3</sup> Data available at [http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?\\_bm=y&-geo\\_id=16000US3314200&-qr\\_name=ACS\\_2009\\_5YR\\_G00\\_DP5YR3&-ds\\_name=ACS\\_2009\\_5YR\\_G00\\_&-lang=en&-redoLog=false&-sse=on](http://factfinder.census.gov/servlet/ADPTable?_bm=y&-geo_id=16000US3314200&-qr_name=ACS_2009_5YR_G00_DP5YR3&-ds_name=ACS_2009_5YR_G00_&-lang=en&-redoLog=false&-sse=on).

participants are white. The authors observe that all completed post-secondary education, and several have completed graduate studies. All participants live or work (or both) in Concord. They work in primarily professional fields. Five of the eight participants have young children. An NHWI Board member also observed the bulk of the session.

### Concord GAP Listening Session Format

The GAP listening sessions follow a traditional focus group format that includes a two to three minute allotment of time per question, per person. Each session is designed to last two hours including introductions, participant feedback, a participant exercise, and concluding remarks.

The Concord GAP Listening Session was conducted using this format and a script provided in the facilitation packet (see Appendix A: Listening Session Script). The session began promptly at 6:00 PM with introductions of the facilitator, note-taker, and participants. The participants introduced themselves by first name, occupation, age, and town of residence.

Once the introductions concluded, the facilitator asked the participants four questions (with the last question in the form of a brainstorming exercise). This process began with “easier” questions as a means to develop trust and then proceeded to increasingly sensitive questions as the session progressed. Please see the ‘Summary of Findings’ section of this report for the results.

Toward the end of the session, a brainstorming exercise was conducted as a means to extract the top issues that the participants would like to see the NHWI pursue. Each participant received 3 standard yellow Post-it notes and a pen. Each participant wrote down her top three issues, one per Post-it note, and stuck the Post-Its to a wall in the room. With the help of the group, the facilitator organized the Post-Its into topical groupings. Each participant then placed a red dot sticker on her top issue - which wasn’t necessarily an issue that she had written herself. Please see ‘Question 4: The Post-It Exercise!’ for the results of this exercise.

Each participant was asked to fill out a participant information sheet which detailed her age, occupation, and zip code, and asked her to provide contact information if she wanted to remain apprised of NHWI work. The session ended promptly at 8:00 PM.

### Summary of Findings:

The Summary of Findings is organized by question asked at the Listening Session. Synthesis of material will occur at a later date when all of the listening sessions have been conducted. Please note that participants are identified only by a number to protect privacy.

### QUESTION #1: What brought you here tonight?

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
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8	A female supervisor once told me how great it had been that her office sent her work to do in bed after delivering a baby; I recognized that such a scenario wasn't great for me.	
7	Lack of child care is a national epidemic and worse here in Concord than other places. I was shocked to learn that the child care centers in Concord close at 5:30. That doesn't work for my two-career household.	

## QUESTION #2: How do you define gender equality?

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
4	Female behavior isn't respected as much as male behavior is in some professional settings, specifically the medical field. There's a paradigm of male authority.	
3	Qualities of aggression, being able to play games, and manipulation are more valued in my workplace than coordination and building teams. It would be great to figure out how to get people to value more feminine qualities.	
5	Boys and girls learn very differently.	
6	Fair doesn't always mean equal. Female and male teachers in public schools are different, and teachers sometimes take that into account when placing their students for the next year.	
1	Professional success is becoming about jockeying with men and adopting their masculine qualities rather than embracing what comes naturally to women.	
7	Women are sometimes encouraged to stay away from what comes naturally to them – for example, a female colleague was told to be “charming but not too girly.”	
8	Some of what we're talking about is a vestige of fields being heavily dominated by men.	
3	This can sometimes manifest as fierce competition between the few women in male-dominated professions.	
1	Women are often the harshest critics of other women.	
2	In the non-profit sector, the field looks female-	

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	dominated but CEOs are almost always male.	
6	There are genuinely female-dominated professions, like elementary education. This may be because feminine qualities like nurturing are more valued there.	
4	At home, women are much more often relied upon to organize child care. Women make sure everything is organized. This is similar to the paradigm of the secretary making sure everything is organized for the higher-up male.	There was agreement around the table about the point about women organizing all of the child care.
5	Women both caring for children and working outside the home has almost given women more responsibility in total – I didn't ask for that!	
6	Equality means having the choice to do what you want to do. I value stay-at-home mothers and would like the freedom to make that choice. Even if some women fought against that, equality means having the choice.	There was audible agreement about this.
5	My mother worked in a corporate job and sometimes I wish it had been different. I know I don't want my job to define me as a person.	
2	I stay at home part-time and I always find myself doing extra work at home. I know that if I go back full-time, I will be looked at differently.	
4	Maternity leaves are incredibly short.	There was audible agreement about this.
4	It's hard to have continuity in your profession if you decide to have a family. You have to step out at times.	
8	I think it's a false choice that you can't work and have a family. It's possible to do both, but people don't believe it and don't value it. It would be nice if people would value the choice to do both.	
7	It's also very good for family dynamics for men to take paternity leave.	
6	My employer only offers two weeks' paternity leave to fathers – it's sad.	A participant wondered what would happen if the family had two fathers. Another observed that shorter leave for men is probably based on breastfeeding.
8	Gender equality would be a time when gender doesn't matter. I'm not sure we can get to that place, or if we even want to.	



Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
4	Equality would be if certain feminine qualities were valued more – but I’m not sure what those are.	
Observer	For me, the hardest times have not been competing with men because you know what the rules are. The hardest is knowing how to be accepted for my choices by other women – I feel embarrassed when other women hear my nanny talking to me about where the laundry is. Equality may be the absence of judging each other based on the choices we make and paths we can take.	
8	Equality would be if I never feel like I have to wear a skirt suit and heels (as opposed to a pant suit) for a particular professional obligation! There is an emphasis on appearance for women that doesn’t exist for men.	Another participant observed that she never feels comfortable wearing a skirt to work. Another said that she notices striking differences between boys’ and girls’ clothes when shopping for her child. Another observed that she was surprised to find out that a male colleague even cared about his appearance.

### QUESTION #3: How have you, in NH, experienced gender equality or gender inequality?

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
4	Bathroom lines.	
8	One of my colleagues had to fight for a lock on her office door that would allow her to pump.	
7	At my job, there is a room specifically for pumping.	
6	At my job, a woman had to pump in an abandoned closet.	
5	My husband studied early childhood education. He simply couldn’t get hired and had to change careers.	
8	When I had complications with my pregnancy, my husband was really not allowed to participate in his care at the hospital.	
6	In female-dominated professions like elementary education, sometimes there is a hiring preference for men because there are so few of them.	
6	I feel equal with my husband in terms of	There was some agreement about

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	domestic roles.	this point and participants shared various anecdotes about women doing traditionally men's jobs and vice versa. However, another participant pointed out that being a woman can sometimes mean that men volunteer more readily to help you with something. This sparked a discussion about people's parents' gender roles, which, generally, were much more traditional – the discussion focused on wives as caretakers of their husbands.
8	Gender equality could mean not equating hard work exclusively with long hours in the office.	

#### QUESTION #4: The Post-It Exercise!

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
Brainstorming by group – issues identified	<p>Women's health</p> <p>More money for education</p> <p>More money for social services in NH</p> <p>Outreach for breastfeeding/pumping rights</p> <p>More comfort felt for breastfeeding in public</p> <p>Affordable, dependable, accessible child care</p> <p>Economics of supporting a family – inability to have what our parents had</p> <p>Choices for labor/delivery, e.g. insurance coverage for midwives</p>	
Issues on Post-Its	<p>Longer paid maternity leave (one dot)</p> <p>Paternity leave/flexible work schedules commensurate with what women are entitled to</p>	

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	<p>Public education around breastfeeding/acceptance of nursing in public</p> <p>Breastfeeding in public and awareness of being a mother</p> <p>Women’s health awareness and advocacy</p> <p>Women’s health</p> <p>Women’s health</p> <p>Women’s health</p> <p>More money for social services (income and sales tax)</p> <p>Child care (one dot)</p> <p>Legislative or other efforts to incentivize better daycare – more, more affordable, more flexible, better quality</p> <p>Affordable child care</p> <p>Quality, affordable child care</p> <p>Child care options – affordability and availability (one dot)</p> <p>Education opportunities</p> <p>More empowering job opportunities</p> <p>Affordable choices</p> <p>Balancing a career with children and family (two dots)</p> <p>Support for working parents (recognition that quality of work is not tied to long hours)</p> <p>Continuing and doing more collecting and publicizing data re: salaries of men and women in similar jobs</p>	

Participant	Comment	Note-Taker Observation
	Workplace equality  Affordable, accessible (health) insurance (two dots)  Affordable health care options  Health care	

**Limitations:**

The participants in this Listening Session are members of the facilitator’s and note-taker’s personal and professional networks. They were not selected for invitation using any criteria other than that. Thus, a selection bias was inherent in this group.

All of the participants in this Listening Session are white. They are also a highly-educated group, with several having completed graduate studies. They work primarily in professional fields. Five of the 8 participants have young children. These characteristics may have influenced the particular issues that were most salient to this group of Listening Session participants.

Although most participants knew at least one other woman in the room, to the facilitator and note-taker’s knowledge, none of them knew everyone else. Participants may have felt more or less comfortable sharing thoughts and ideas in this setting than one in which they were more intimately familiar with all of the other participants, or in which nobody knew anyone else.

**Conclusion:**

The Concord GAP Listening Session revealed deep interest by the group in several issues. The participants had a rich discussion about the ways in which different professions value traditionally feminine characteristics and the role this has in hiring and advancement. The participants also raised concerns about the challenges of managing both a career and parenting, including the lack of governmental and employer supports for working parents and the lack of value society places on “doing both.” Finally, the participants have marked concern about New Hampshire’s lack of child care that is affordable, accessible, and high-quality. Participants raised this issue during the Listening Session discussion and identified it with high frequency during the Post-It exercise.

The authors thank the participants for their willingness to engage in this process and the other GAP members for their work in developing the facilitation packet.

## Appendix A: Listening Session Script

### I. Welcome and Introductions

- Thank participants for coming
- Distribute participant information sheets (and agendas if using)
- Introduce facilitator and note taker
- Overview of New Hampshire Women’s Initiative
  - The New Hampshire Women’s Initiative is a new non-profit organization
  - A unification of:
    - The Commission on the Status of Women
    - The Women’s Lobby and Alliance
    - The Women’s Policy Institute
  - ***NHWI Mission: To advance social, economic and political opportunity and equality for women in New Hampshire.***
  - Has a Board of Directors and two advisory panels
    - Founding Mothers
    - Gender Ambassadors Panel
- Objective of Listening Sessions & GAP
  - Gender Ambassadors Panel will support the mission of the NHWI through researching and better understanding the gender equality issues that younger women and men identify as important to them.
  - Members of GAP will host a series of Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Sessions in various geographic locations around the State.
- Introduction of participants: *First name, age, town, occupation*

### II. Overview of the Process

- Description of plan for Listening Session by facilitator
- How discussion will be documented during the Session
- How a report will be prepared after the Session
- Assurance of confidentiality (inform participants that any report will only identify participants by age, zip code, and industry/occupation)

#### I. Establishment of Ground Rules

- Ground rules encourage active and honest participation and a safe discussion environment.
- If a participant violates a ground rule, they will be politely reminded of the ground rule.

- If a participant continues to violate a ground rule, they will be asked to leave the group.

### **Ground Rules (The 5 A's)**

#### **Participants of this group...**

- Agree to maintain confidentiality
- Agree that there are no “right or wrong” answers to the questions
- Agree to speak honestly based on our own experiences
- Agree that only one person will speak at a time
- Agree to respond to one another politely and respectfully

## **II. Discussion of Contemporary Gender Equality**

1) What made you interested in attending today’s listening session on gender equality?

2) How do you define the term gender equality?

What does gender equality mean to you?

What does gender equality not mean to you?

What issues or subjects do you think about when you think of gender equality?

3) In New Hampshire, have you experienced or observed gender equality or inequality?

## **III. Post-it Note Exercise**

What issues relating to gender equality do you think are most important for the New Hampshire Women’s Initiative to address?

**(Each participant receives 3 standard yellow Post-it notes and a black sharpie; they must write their top three issues, one per Post-it note. Ask them to put the Post-its up on a white board or wall. Then each person gets one red dot. They must place their red dot on their top issue, which doesn’t have to be one of the ones they originally wrote.)**

*\* Facilitator must collect the Post-its and return to the GAP Committee when complete*

#### **IV. Wrap-up**

- Do you have any other thoughts or ideas that you really want to share about gender equality in NH?
- Thank you to participants by facilitator
- Collect participant information sheets; distribute NHWI information sheets

#### **V. Adjourn**