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**NHWI**

**Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP):  
Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Session Report  
for the Lakes Region of New Hampshire**

Gilford, 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 both 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 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 will work toward that goal by hosting Contemporary Gender Equality Listening Sessions in various geographic locations around the State. The Listening Sessions will be 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. The first round of Listening Session participants will come primarily from the existing networks of GAP members and are expected to be primarily women, however the method can be adapted to reach other networks and populations, including men.

## About the Authors:

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## Executive Summary

Throughout the fall of 2011, the New Hampshire Women’s Initiative (NHWI) Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) is conducting geographically diverse listening sessions across the state with content centered on “Contemporary Gender Equality”: gender equality issues as they relates to young NH women and men.

The listening sessions are designed to include a small group of women from each region to discuss broadly how the women's movement has, or hasn't, changed. 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 what younger women (and men) identify as important gender equality issues so the NHWI can develop programs and policies to support those areas.

The Lakes Region GAP Listening Session is one of seven initial sessions happening across the state. The other regions include: the Seacoast, North Country, Merrimack Valley, Nashua, Monadnock Region, and the Upper Valley.

The preliminary results from the Lakes Region Session reflect an avid interest in the following topics: fairness in the workplace, reducing violence against women, reduction of domestic violence, and perceptions of the role of women in the home and workplace.

## Introduction and Background

The Lakes Region of NH contains mixture of urban and rural communities with a strong tourism industry. According to census data, 90% of the residents of Grafton County have high school diploma. 88.9% of the residents of Belknap County have high school diplomas.

The location for the Lakes Region GAP listening session is at the home of Ashley Frame, the group’s facilitator.

## 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 designed like focus groups where a facilitator and note-taker work together to gain insight into participant’s thoughts and feelings about contemporary gender equality issues facing young women and men in NH.

Prior to conducting the listening sessions, each facilitator and note-taker was provided a facilitation packet that details instructions for conducting an effective focus group. This includes instructions for the specific roles of the facilitator and note-taker, the length of the session and how to draft the report after the listening session.

## Location

The Lakes Region Listening Session was conducted in the home of Ashley Frame in Gilford, NH.

## Participant Background

Three female participants ranging in age from 26-32 joined the listening session. All of the participants are white, and all have attained a Bachelor's degree or higher.

Each participant is involved with women's issues in the Lakes Region either through direct employment or through personal interest. Important subject matters covered by their collective work include, but are not limited to, domestic violence, education, women's health, and advocacy.

All of the participants report living in the Lakes Region.

## Lakes Region Listening Session Format

The listening session was relatively informal. Each participant had an unspecified amount of time to answer each question, and the conversation bounced around amicably. The session, like the others, was designed to last two hours including introductions, participant feedback, a participant exercise, and concluding remarks.

The Lakes Region Listening Session was conducted using an agenda and script provided in the facilitation packet (Appendix A: Listening Session Script). The session began at 2:30pm with introductions of the facilitator, note-taker and the participants. The participants introduced themselves by first name, occupation, age, and town of residence. There were some snacks and coffee provided.

Once the introductions concluded, a series of four questions were asked of the participants (a closing exercise was used for the last question). This process began with general questions, designed to get the conversation started. Throughout the process, the participants seemed to warm up to the questions. Their answers became more detailed and thoughtful. As there were relatively few participants, some of whom were familiar with each other, the talk was friendly but focused.

Toward the end of the session, a participation 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 black sharpie; they wrote their top three issues, one per Post-it note and then they put the Post-its up on a white board in the room. Then each person placed a red dot sticker on their top issue - which wasn't necessarily an issue that they originally wrote. Please see 'Question 4: The Post-It exercise!' for the results of this exercise. Interestingly, though reproductive rights didn't really emerge as a topic in the question and answer period, it did come up during the Post-it note exercise.

Lastly, each participant was asked to fill out a participant information sheet which details their age, occupation, zip code and contact information if they would like to remain apprised of NHWI work. We are pleased to report that each participant wishes to remain informed of the NHWI efforts.

## Summary of Findings:

The Summary of Findings is organized by each 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 their first names to protect their privacy.

**QUESTION #1: What made you come today?**

Participant	COMMENT	MY OBSERVATION
1	Not a topic she thinks about a lot and interested for the opportunity to think about issues.	All participants expressed interest/enthusiasm for having the session.
2	Excited that something is happening in region.	
3	Thinks about gender all the time because works in domestic violence; interested in thinking about the issues personally (as opposed to professionally).	
4	Interested in thinking outside the scope of day-to-day activities.	

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

Participant	COMMENT	MY OBSERVATION
1	There's the concept of equal rights, which has been a political trend, but it's less clear whether that has practical impact -- women and their children are often economically disadvantaged.	
4	Gender inequality can play out in interpersonal relationships -- e.g., expected roles and division of labor (which isn't necessarily bad but is worth observing).	
1	There can be a stigma attached to the idea of choosing to raise children (the concept of "just a stay at home mom"). This often plays out between women.	

3	In response to query about how domestic violence is relevant: when the threat of violence is present, equal choice and equal voice disappear.	Participant 1 pointed out that we seem to accept that there is a threat of violence and develop strategies for responding, rather than refusing to accept that the threat should exist. Participant 3 discussed the concept of a “rape culture” in which women are taught many strategies for protecting themselves while there is less education to men about how to prevent themselves from employing violence.
2	Having been raised by a single mother, she observed people blaming her mother for being a single mother while single fathers are often praised. There are different expectations for men than women with respect to dating and relationships.	
4	As a single woman, you often confront pressure -- why aren't you attached, what's wrong with you that you're not married, etc.; while nobody questions single status for a man.	
1	There's also social pressure to have a family, and it's considered odd when you want to make a different choice.	
4	There's still varying acceptance of different traits - “latent sexism” -- it's thought to be odd for a man to not like football. We also see sexism in advertising. She wondered if sexism in advertising is called out more now than in the past or if it's still simply accepted.	This generated a discussion about how Facebook took a long time to take down offensive pages making fun of rape and domestic violence.
1	There is a fear of being too militant because you don't want to alienate people -- there are many derogatory labels. This is a	

	challenge because many of the contemporary issues are subtle and multi-faceted. It's also much harder to coalesce women behind an idea such as changing attitudes vs. an idea such as getting the right to vote. It's harder to measure progress as well.	
3	Discussing gender can elicit strong reactions. If you talk about violence generally, it's easy to generate opposition, but if you talk about gender-based violence, it becomes more political.	

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

Participant	COMMENT	MY OBSERVATION
1	There's one male educator in her school -- and he's the principal. She has a friend who is a nurse and her colleagues are predominantly female. Although there are female CEOs, etc., it's considered surprising and a big deal. It's demonstrative of underlying gender inequality.	Sarah rose the term "pink ghetto" -- as women more frequently hold occupations, they become lower paying.
2	Described the experience of her mother -- whose mother was disappointed when she went from a lower-paying job working for a doctor to a better-paying job at a bank because working for the doctor had more legitimacy.	



3	She relayed a recent experience at a citywide human services meeting. This meeting included a much higher percentage of men than typical for her professional experience. The men, particularly older men, were very dominating throughout the conversation.	Participant 1 responded that women seem to have to work harder to get respect. Participant 4 shared an experience sitting on a statewide task-force. She is the only younger person and felt comfortable speaking up -- and people seemed really surprised that she was willing and able to contribute.
4	There are interesting issues around appearance -- being attractive can help achievement.	Participant 3 pointed out that being too attractive can cause people to perceive you in a different way -- e.g. "You've read that book?" to an attractive woman.
3	Pointed out that even in very progressive families, there can be undercurrents of gender inequality, such as different holiday gifts for girls and boys.	
1	Gender equality doesn't necessarily mean sameness -- a parent who sincerely intends to raise male children and female children identically may still routinely observe gender-based behaviors.	

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

Participants were asked to write down their top three gender inequality/equality issues.	<p>These were the issues identified:</p> <p>Examining, hiring, and compensation trends</p> <p>Women in the media - e.g. Michelle Obama being praised for fashion, and Hillary Clinton being criticized for wearing a pantsuit</p>	
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	<p>Reproductive freedoms</p> <p>Socioeconomic status - more jobs are open to men, e.g. construction and landscaping and other seasonal jobs; women with children are limited because they're expected to have total responsibility of the children</p> <p>Educating men about women's issues instead of pushing them into silence</p> <p>Lack of unified cause to rally majority</p> <p>Economic disparity</p> <p>Victim-blaming -- blaming rape victims for being out alone or dressing a certain way</p> <p>Violence and the threat of violence</p>	
Continued	<p>Gender stereotypes - limited opportunity to be fully self-actualized</p> <p>Reproductive rights</p> <p>Domestic and sexual violence</p> <p>Affordability and accessibility of quality child care</p> <p>Not enough involvement of/mobilization of men</p> <p>Economic inequality</p>	
The group elected to consolidate the responses that were very similar prior to placing red dots	<p>These were the resulting groups:</p> <p>Reproductive freedoms</p> <p>Domestic and sexual violence</p> <p>Economic disparities</p> <p>Involvement/mobilization of men</p>	<p>Dots:</p> <p>Economic inequality</p> <p>Gender stereotypes (2)</p> <p>Reproductive</p>

	Lack of unified cause Women in the media Victim-blaming Child care Gender stereotypes	freedoms (2)
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### Closing remarks from participants:

The general feeling at the end of the session was appreciation at being asked to participate and positivity about the continued work of the NHWI.

### Limitations:

The methods designed by the GAP members to conduct the statewide listening sessions were well thought and academically sound. While the GAP members worked hard to minimize the effects of bias on the thoughts and opinions of the participants, limitations to these methods still remain.

The session was characterized by the similar ages and experiences of the women present.

The timeframe for the listening sessions proved sufficient. Though the number of participants was small, the intimacy allowed for each participant to flesh out her ideas and speak when ideas came to mind. The informality of the session was ideal for the size, though a larger variety of work experience and age would perhaps have been more indicative of the region.

Many of the participants either currently, or in the past, have worked directly with a women’s based organization, which means they are already well versed in gender related issues. This serves to influence their thoughts and opinions because it primes them to discuss issues that they are exposed to at their employment or volunteer efforts.

Lastly, each participant was selected based on a connection to the facilitator. The facilitator used her own network of professionals to find participants for the listening session.

### Conclusion:

The results of the first New Hampshire Women’s Initiative (NHWI) Gender Ambassadors Panel (GAP) Listening Session are promising. They reveal a community of women ready to engage in the meaningful work necessary to close the gender equality gap in New Hampshire. It also reveals a complex and dynamic environment in which this work will be accomplished.

Top concerns identified by the participants include protecting reproductive freedoms and preventing/raising awareness about economic inequalities. Though these issues earned "red dots," the group was sensitive to many other issues: reducing domestic and sexual violence, representation of women in the media, social perceptions of motherhood, and involvement and mobilization of men.

Each participant expressed an interest in continued involvement and knew other women who would also contribute.

To engage younger women in New Hampshire, NHWI can begin to think about ways to involve young people in New Hampshire using college networks to engage young women and men in addressing the issues outlined above. Using the energy and enthusiasm of the existing GAP listening session participants, the NHWI can begin to reach out through the academic community since each region has a college or university affiliation.

## 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**

## **Works Cited**

US Census Bureau. (2005 - 2009). *State and County Quick Facts*. Retrieved December 14, 2011, from Grafton County and Belknap County <http://quickfacts.census.gov/qfd/states/33/33009.html>