

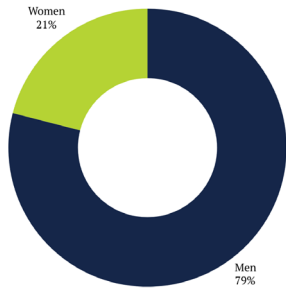


# Advancing Women in Tech, Law & Policy

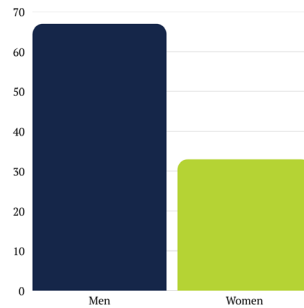
*An Action Guide*



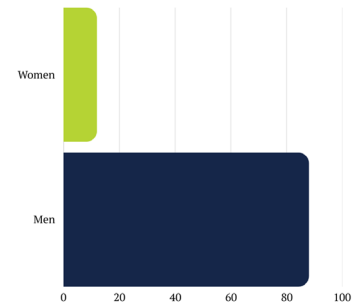
# Women in Tech and IP Law



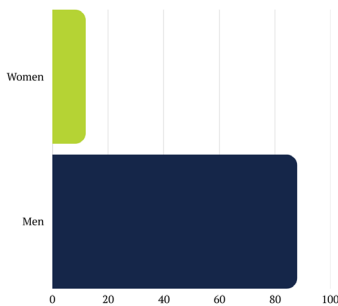
21% of US patent lawyers are women



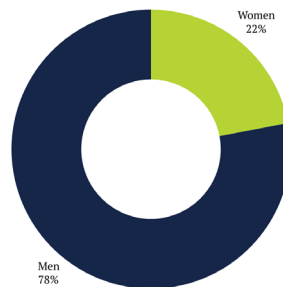
33% of US IP lawyers are women



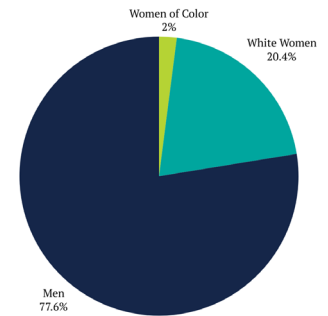
12% of PTAB attorney appearances include a woman



23% of global patent applications include a woman



22% of US patent applications include a woman



<2% USPTO-registered attorneys and agents are women of color

“Behind every great woman is another great woman.”

## Kate Hodges

Author, *I Know a Woman: The Inspiring Connections Between the Women Who Have Shaped Our World*

Sources: “[Patent Attorney Jobs Demographics](#), Zippia.com; “[Intellectual Property Lawyer Demographics](#), Zippia.com; [The Global Gender Gap in Innovation and Creativity](#), WIPO, 2023; “[Diversity in Patent Law](#),” Elaine Spector and Latia Brand, 2020; “[Ensuring Women and Diverse Candidates in the Patent Bar: We Must Address the Root of the Problem](#),” Elaine Spector, IPWatchdog.com, March 2021; [Women at the PTAB](#), PTAB Bar Association, January 2022; [Progress and Potential, 2020 update on U.S. women inventor- patentees](#), USPTO, July 2020.

**D**espite progress, women continue to represent a small fraction of those pursuing careers in technology and intellectual property law and policy. While gains by women have been made in participation, pay and promotions that unlock potential, advance careers and unleash innovation, few are found in top roles and barriers to parity persist.

In our current environment, it will take more than good intentions to drive diversity, equity and inclusion in tech and IP. It will take action.

The good news is positive change isn't reliant only on big bold moves. Incremental actions can, and usually do, power lasting, widespread change.

What can women do to cultivate workplaces and an industry where they're respected, rewarded and retained? Where gender and other forms of diversity support merit-based workplaces and positive business results? What can **you** do to drive transformation in your organization and your teams? Plenty. This Action Guide offers real-world tactics for advancing gender parity.

Thank you to our interviewees and all who generously shared their expertise for this report—your contributions are deeply appreciated.

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# Advancing Women in Technology, Law & Policy

Lack of exposure to the importance of intellectual property rights and innovation ecosystem. Gender bias in workplace cultures, career trajectories and pay. Unpredictable schedules and insufficient work-life integration. The contributing factors that keep women from entering, staying and advancing in tech and IP law and policy are multilayered and stubborn. **But they aren't insurmountable.**

If you want to play an active role in filling the pipeline with talented women and contributing to the advancement of women — including yourself — consider the following actions:



*Promote women's innovation, the value of intellectual property rights and how the system works.*

On social media, discussions outside of work, at college career days, at high-school mock trial competitions, educate young people about IP's role in innovation and how trademarks and IP rights work. "Never underestimate the power of suggestion," says Danielle Williams, managing partner, Charlotte, NC, and co-chair intellectual property group for Winston & Strawn. "I take every opportunity to tell young women they have a place here and to encourage them to observe, participate and engage. Inspiration to enter the field can come from anywhere. Are girls and young women seeing stories of innovation on social media? What can be done to ensure they see how they could be part of innovation in the future?"



*Participate in outreach programs that create opportunities for underrepresented groups in tech and IP.*

"Connecting with students early and demystifying the patent profession can spark interest," notes Elaine Spector, partner at Harrity & Harrity, which initiated the Patent Pathways program that brings together underrepresented law students, graduates with engineering and hard science degrees, career engineers and scientists, and corporate counsel and law firm attorneys to support entry into patent law. Support includes no-cost patent bar preparation, patent skills training, financial assistance, mentorship and other resources. "The goal is to transform accessibility to the patent bar by providing each participant with the tools needed to take and pass the patent bar exam and begin their career in patent law and to promote inclusion in the field," Spector said.



### *Take advantage of leadership opportunities in trade and professional organizations.*

Volunteer to run a committee or event. “You’ll not only build your own business-development skills, but you’ll be in a position to advocate for gender parity across the profession,” Spector says.



### *When given the opportunity to represent your organization on a panel, committee or other external event, insist to organizers that more than one woman take part.*

Also, take the opportunity to highlight issues of gender equity and inclusion.



### *When hiring or working with outside counsel, consider not only expertise and budget, but the firm’s commitment to gender and other forms of diversity.*

“Companies and clients are increasingly adding women and diverse-owned law firms to their outside counsel panels,” notes Karineh Khachatourian, managing partner at KXT Law. “It’s not about decreasing opportunities for majority firms but supporting women and diverse-owned law firms to better reflect the diverse perspectives and communities they serve. Companies want to work with firms that not only claim to value diversity, but actively demonstrate it through their ownership, hiring practices, team compositions and inclusion policies.

“While there has been some backlash against DEI initiatives, particularly in certain sectors, I expect the demand for diverse teams will persist because diversity in counsel is a key factor in delivering high-quality, effective legal strategies that drive success in the innovation space,” she continued.



### *Be a myth-buster.*

While not having a STEM degree may keep women from pursuing a career in innovation and IP law and policy, a STEM background isn’t required to succeed. “Since most juries and judges do not have STEM degrees the most important trait of an IP litigator is to be able to tell a story and explain the technology in a simple and understandable way,” Khachatourian says. “Some of the best IP litigators I know do not have technical degrees. Encouraging participation, regardless of educational background, is key to fostering innovation and inclusivity. Imagine how different the world would be if someone told Steve Jobs “No” because he did not have a technical degree.”



# Advancing Your Career and Driving Gender Parity

Gender bias in the workplace — exacerbated by other forms of discrimination for women of color — takes many forms and has caused women to leave their organizations or abandon the technology, IP law and policy profession completely.

While there has been progress in changing attitudes and policies that have held women back, only 6% of in-house ChIPs members and 14% of law firm members surveyed in 2024 rate their workplace as “very good” at creating career opportunities for them. Lack of management support, lack of flexible work options and unaddressed bias in favor of men are the top reasons ChIPs members say they would consider quitting their jobs.

Mentoring of early-career women by senior leaders can have a powerful impact on long-term retention and career growth, but too few women are stepping up to coach, mentor or sponsor other women. Nearly every ChIPs member (98%) surveyed last year said mentoring is beneficial to professional development and career trajectories. More than half (52% of in-house corporate members and 61% of law firm members) believe mentoring is “very beneficial.” The problem? More than two-thirds of in-house members and 49% of law firm members say they’ve had difficulty finding a mentor. The most effective source of mentoring has been within their own company (39% of in-house members) or law firms (53% of law-firm members).

There are many ways, big and small, you can make a measurable difference — whether your company or firm is in the initial stages of its diversity, equity and inclusion journey or is an acknowledged leader in nurturing female talent and closing the gender performance and pay gap. Consider these ways to grow your influence, nurture a more supportive environment for women and create career opportunities for women in your organization and on your team:



## *Actively mentor and sponsor at least one woman.*

And, campaign for investments in programs that support formal mentoring relationships.



## *Become involved in initiatives that advance women.*

Whether serving on a committee or through informal advocacy, individuals further an organization's progress.



## *Encourage participation in professional organizations and events.*

"When I look back on what I've accomplished so far," Williams says, "it was often someone extending an invitation to participate or suggesting I would have something valuable to contribute that opened doors or offered opportunities and experiences that helped me grow professionally."



## *Address biases in hiring, performance reviews and criteria for career advancement.*

Push for clear rubrics that mitigate bias. Call out unfair practices when they arise and work to build coalitions to drive accountability. Discuss career advancement opportunities for part-time roles. Address motherhood bias that stalls the careers of women who have children.



## *Champion flexible work arrangements, career tracks for part-time roles and job-sharing schedules at full pay for women on-ramping after parental leaves.*

“When I had my family, I had to fight for a flexible work schedule, and unfortunately, that decision took me off the partnership track at the firm I was working for then,” Spector says. “This is a reality so many women face, but it doesn’t have to be this way. Flexible work arrangements and career tracks that allow women to maintain their trajectory — even at part-time or lighter schedules — foster a more inclusive and equitable environment. Supporting women through key life stages helps retain talented women and ensures that firms have diverse leaders in top roles, which has been repeatedly shown to enhance decision-making, innovation and profitability. When firms provide on-ramping options at full pay and with partnership opportunities intact, they send a clear message: Talent, dedication and leadership potential aren’t tied to a one-size-fits-all schedule. Flexibility isn’t a concession; it’s an investment in the future of the firm and the profession.”



## *Model work-life integration, reasonable work hours and healthy habits.*

Billable-hour target pressure, long hours and unpredictable schedules are among the top reasons women leave law careers, according to the Leopard Solutions’ Women Leaving Law Report. Break the cycle by modeling healthy, sustainable work/life boundaries, giving “permission” for other women to do the same.



## *Nurture solid workplace relationships with women.*

Having a trusted community is essential for professional growth and navigating the unique challenges of being a woman leader in male-dominated professions, says Kiran Mann, president and CEO of M2M Business Solutions and a Forbes Councils member. A strong network can provide emotional support, shared wisdom, job opportunities, advocacy, accountability partners, perspective and feedback, and collective strength. “When women support each other, they create a ripple effect, paving the way for more inclusive workplaces and lifting the next generation of leaders,” she writes.





## *Cultivate male allyship.*

Building relationships with male colleagues is critical. “Honest conversations about gender equity and enlisting their support can lead to meaningful partnerships,” Spector notes. “I’ve experienced it in my career.”



## *Focus on eliminating double bias faced by women of color.*

Support colleagues of color by amplifying their voices, recommending them for opportunities and ensuring their contributions are recognized.



## *Advocate for programs that teach women to be effective leaders.*

Addressing women’s leadership challenges and competencies is [one of five proven ways to retain and develop talented women](#), according to the Center for Creative Leadership. Leadership development experiences should be offered in a number of formats, including virtual options, and allow women to put their day-to-day work responsibilities on hold to make time for their development.



## *Refine your business-development skills, especially if you’re an attorney working in a law firm.*

“Client development is key to advancement, regardless of gender or race,” Spector says. “Securing clients is a clear track to partnership.”



*Encourage women to take ownership of their career growth by seeking leadership roles that build resilience and confidence.*

Cecilia Ziniti, CEO and founder of GC AI advises, “Don’t stay in your swim lane — you’re in a pool. What can you do to be a leader? How can you add value? You don’t need people’s permission to go for a job or to create your own career path.”



*If you lead a team, assign high-profile, career-advancing work to women.*

The gender and racial disparity in access to high-profile, career-enhancing work has been widely overlooked, according to Rachel M. Korn, Asma Ghani and Joan C. Williams of the Equality Action Center for the University of California’s College of Law. Citing their research across industries in the [Harvard Business Review](#), they note 81% to 85% of white men report fair access to desirable assignments, while just 50% of women of color, including 43% of Black women, do.

“Bias is like compound interest — even small amounts add up over time to be career-defining,” they say.



# Navigating Double Bias as a Woman of Color

Women of color continue to be underrepresented in technology and IP for many overlapping, complex reasons, but society's double bias against women and people of color permeates them all. The bias, even if unconscious, affects every aspect of workplace experience, from hiring decisions, leadership development opportunities, career advancement and retention of talented women.

Bias in workplace policies, interactions and an organization's unspoken "rules" keep women of color from staying and succeeding, according to [\*Pinning down the Jellyfish: The Workplace Experiences of Women in Tech\*](#), a study by the University of California's [Center for WorkLife Law](#) in partnership with the Kapor Center and the Center for Gender and Equity in Science and Technology. Surveying 211 women, including 167 women of color, 26 men and 8 trans/non-binary, genderqueer and gender nonconforming individuals, the Center of WorkLife Law found these five types of bias are experienced by women of color more, sometimes dramatically more, compared to white women:

- Prove-it-again bias: Having to prove themselves repeatedly to receive the same kind of respect and recognition for their work.
- Tightrope bias: Walking a tightrope as they face expectations that they be deferential rather than ambitious and authoritative. Example: Women of color were more likely to report being interrupted and to get negative reactions to justified anger.
- Maternal Wall bias: Women of color experience are perceived as less competitive and committed post-children at a higher level than white women.
- Tug-of-War bias: Biased environments led to conflicts among women of color, who were more likely to report they worried if they supported another member of their group it would be construed as favoritism.
- Distinct experiences of negative racial or ethnic stereotypes.

To attract, retain and advance women of color, organizations must address systemic biases in the same way they would other challenging business problems, through evidence-based, metrics-driven actions, according to the study, which outlined "bias interrupters" — adjustments in hiring,

work opportunities, performance evaluations, workplace meetings and workplace flexibility. Effective tactics include limiting “friends of friends” referral hiring, not assuming women of color can take on DEI work on top of their other roles, tweaking performance evaluation forms to separate personal style from skills, being mindful of “stolen ideas” during meetings and eliminating the “flexibility stigma” based on someone’s in-office schedule.

## *My Experience as a Woman of Color in IP Law*

*A Black female ChIPs member, who has worked as an attorney for three decades, shares her insights and experiences:*

**W**hen I started my career, women were instrumental in opening doors and offering opportunities. If they hadn’t, I’d probably not still be in this field.

For a time, I was included, given opportunities and moved up. I attribute that to having a good mentor who had a seat at the table and advocated for me. When she retired, my situation changed. Without a good mentor and sponsor, it’s been difficult to feel secure.

Today, even though I am a part-owner of a diverse law firm, I feel I’m not given the same level of respect as the men, and at times white women and other women of color who are not Black. For example, I’ll send an email about something that needs to be addressed, but nothing will happen. A man will later bring up the same issue at a meeting and action is taken.

*When I had my first child as I was finishing law school, people even questioned if I should be taking the bar.*

White women and women of color have been supportive of each other and have worked together for change. But there have been times in the workplace where I’ve felt white women haven’t experienced the same level of bias and aren’t comfortable feeling they are being treated differently or don’t know what to do to create change.

I thought bringing more women into the firm would be more helpful in changing the culture than it has been. Women are still not making the same salaries as men. We're not given the same consideration for career opportunities or are often put in competition with each other. There seems to be a sentiment that 'we need a woman of color on this team' and if there's one, there's no need for another.

Like many women, I've experienced maternal bias. I've been bypassed for assignments that call for travel or litigation support because assumptions about my availability are made. When I had my first child as I was finishing law school, people even questioned if I should be taking the bar.

When I did travel, I'd often run up against racial and cultural stereotypes. When this happened overseas, I could understand some of the curiosity and inappropriate questions that were asked. I didn't feel offended. I was learning about a new culture too. But when colleagues in your office in the U.S. perpetuate stereotypes, they know better.

I feel in general women, and especially women of color, are tested more often and held to a higher standard. Early in my career, a white male partner retired and I was given the opportunity to manage a portion of an existing client's work. Another white male with seniority wanted the business. Previously, the managing committee would not get involved in these types of business decisions, but I was told to talk to him and try to negotiate a resolution. Initially, I agreed to share the work with him. But when I realized the cases entailed very few hours, which I could handle, I told him I'd share future cases as the hours picked up. He went to the committee to challenge this. I was told they wouldn't tell me what to do, but if I didn't give him cases, I 'wouldn't be happy with the outcome.' My stance put me on the chopping block and when there were layoffs not too long after this, I was let go.

In another instance, later in my career, an outside counsel, who was a woman, came to me with new business in my technology practice area. A male attorney came to me and said he should get credit for the business, because he had exchanged emails with the woman in the past. When I stood my ground about who should be given credit for this incoming business, he accused me of being a bully. I felt there was unconscious bias and racial stereotypes at play and as a woman of color I was expected to acquiesce.

**Sometimes, bias feels deliberate."**

# Ready-to-Act Self-Assessment

Are you prepared to act this week, this month, this year to make a difference in the industry, in your organization and on your team? We offer this self-assessment to help you get started.

- Am I supporting women in tech and IP by offering to make introductions, share resources or give feedback on their ideas or projects?
- Am I confident women are valued and heard in my organization?
- Am I familiar with my company or firm's policies to advance diversity, equity and inclusion and the ways (or whether) they're being practiced?
- Do I know what percentage of women in my company or firm are in leadership roles?
- As a manager, have I reviewed my team's compensation data to ensure pay equity across gender and race? Are my performance reviews of team members free of bias? Are my hiring preferences free of gender, motherhood and other biases?
- Have I reflected on my own gender and other biases and potential for unconscious biases?
- Am I mindful that my workplace experience is not the same as the experiences of my colleagues of a different race or culture?
- How do I talk about women colleagues who aren't in the room?
- When the opportunity arises, do I use my influence to advocate for a woman for an open role inside or outside my team or organization?
- Have I advocated for — or made room for — flexible work arrangements?
- Have I encouraged women in my organization to raise their hand for assignments, roles or responsibilities that may otherwise go to a man?
- Am I formally mentoring a woman in my organization?
- Have I nurtured business relationships with my male colleagues and discussed gender equity in our organization with them?
- Have I questioned the diversity of outside teams and firms I work with?
- Have I done one act to support women today?
- What will I commit to doing this year to move the needle toward gender equity on my team, in my company or firm, or in technology and IP law and policy?

These resources were referenced or used as background: [Inclusion and Innovation: Retaining and Advancing Women in Tech, Law and Policy](#), ChIPs Network; [Pinning Down the Jellyfish: The Workplace Experiences of Women of Color in Tech](#), The Center for WorkLife Law, UCSF Hastings Law; [The Women's Leadership Initiative Report and Best Practices Report](#), International Trademark Association.



*We're here to **celebrate,**  
**connect,** and **commit.***

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