How to find sponsors who’ll accelerate your career

Lean In Circle Discussion Guide for Latinas
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Meeting agenda

approx 90 mins

Member updates
15 mins

Watch video
8 mins

Icebreaker
10 mins

Activities

- Activity 1: Increase your odds of having effective sponsors
- Activity 2: Overcome affinity bias

One Action
3 mins

For Circles with only 60 mins, here are suggestions to shorten this agenda:

- Encourage members to watch the video in advance
- Spend 15 minutes on activity 1 and activity 2

The stock photography used in this guide is courtesy of Getty Images.
Member updates

Go around your Circle and share personal updates. As a general rule, personal updates should be brief and focus on big changes and important decisions in your life. (It’s OK not to have one every month!) If you have a One Action update, share that with your Circle.

Watch video

Icebreaker

Take a few minutes to think about the following questions. Then, go around the room and share your answers (1 minute each).

● Has sponsorship helped you in your career? If so, how?

“If you’re a Latina and you aspire to that next step in your career, if there’s another person who has achieved that, that you have a similarity to, whether it’s cultural, race, or ethnicity, you should consider reaching out to that person, because they could become a mentor or a sponsor. But if you don’t see anyone like that, look for others. Who believes in you? Who would be willing to take the time to help you?”

Anna Dapelo-Garcia, executive, healthcare industry, Lean In Network Leader, California, USA (she/her)
Read aloud as a group: As we’ve just heard, sponsors are crucial for everyone’s career advancement. But for Latinas, sponsors have an even higher value, because having a sponsor is linked to a bigger pay bump for Latinas than for almost any other group.\(^1\)

However, it can be harder for us to find sponsors than it is for most other groups.\(^2\) As Latinas, we need to overcome two challenges in finding sponsors: statistical odds and affinity bias.

You’re less likely than colleagues who are white men to be part of an old boys’ network, so you need to find other ways to be visible to potential sponsors. You can do this by making yourself known to more senior-level people in your network. To make the best use of your time, reach out to people you know who are already potential sponsors. This could include any senior leader you’ve worked and got along well with, someone who is already a mentor, or someone who has already advocated for you.

If you don’t know many (or any) potential sponsors, consider going to more events specifically to find sponsors, including networking events and conferences, and make the most of events you attend during the normal course of business. Choose events strategically based on who else will be there.

Write it down (10 minutes): Make three lists.

1. Potential sponsors, including current mentors and people who have already advocated for you
2. Events where you can network, noting any senior leaders you plan to talk to at these events
3. Your existing sponsors

These three lists capture your pool of potential sponsors.

In pairs: Review your lists and brainstorm contexts where you can meet new sponsors.

Discuss as a group (15 minutes): Share stories about how you’ve met potential sponsors in the past. Has anyone in the group met a sponsor through a networking event? Or converted a mentor into a sponsor?
Read aloud: White men tend to be naturally drawn to advocate for other white men due to affinity bias, meaning that they perceive other white men as similar and familiar. This creates a problem for us when it comes to finding sponsors, since in most organizations, senior leaders (i.e., potential sponsors) are still mostly white men.

As Latinas, we need to think strategically to make affinity bias work in our favor. This ultimately involves building authentic relationships with our sponsors. But it starts by showing potential sponsors, including white men at senior levels, that we share interests and experiences with them and are able to support their professional goals.

Whenever you’re meeting a potential sponsor, research them in advance so you can start conversation topics about mutual interests—or better still, so you can share useful information or offer your professional help.

Write it down (5 minutes): Annotate your three lists from Activity 1 with any ideas you have for connecting with the people named on the lists. These notes can include types of help you can offer them, ways to show an informed interest in their work, or conversation starters that speak to mutual goals and interests.

Discuss as a group (20 minutes):

1. How have you connected with potential sponsors in the past? Have you offered help, strategically made your accomplishments visible to them, or connected over shared interests?

2. Talk through ways you can overcome affinity bias and gain sponsorship from senior leaders who don’t share your identity, including white men.
This week, take a few minutes to commit to either:

- reaching out to a potential sponsor to offer help as an initial step in fostering the relationship or
- reaching out to a current sponsor to renew the relationship or make a specific request to help you in your career

“I still remember when I came to the U.S., looking for that first opportunity. I was looking for someone to give me a chance. I found this woman who had just launched her coaching firm. I approached her and I said, ‘Just give me a chance. I want to help.’ And she believed in me. She gave me that chance.”

Laura Espriu, director of HR, digital media company, Lean In Network Leader, Washington, USA (she/her/ella)

Endnotes
1 Teresa Perez, “Sponsors: Valuable Allies Not Everyone Has,” Payscale.com (July 31, 2019).