Closing Discussion Summary

Prioritizing the exciting ideas and promising practices offered during the Summit was the task of participants during their final two large-group discussions. Attendees divided into two groups—one to prioritize actionable strategies to drive the development and adoption of voluntary practices, and the second to prioritize strategies related to developing and supporting public policies and government programs.

Participants in the voluntary practice discussion identified the workplace practices about which they wanted more information or which they felt could be promoted as promising practices. Within the discussion, they also identified strategies to gather and share practices among stakeholders. Those engaged in the final policy discussion were tasked with identifying areas for public policy development or for the development of supporting research as well as to identify promising practices that could inform policy development. They were also asked to identify policy-related topics about which they desired more information.

<u>Top Priorities in Voluntary Practice Adoption or Education</u>
Over the course of the next year, it is imperative that those working on developing or supporting promising voluntary workplace programs or policies or who are providing research and information focus on the following key ideas:

1. Provide practical examples of solutions and user-friendly tools that employers of all sizes can use
2. Develop deliberate strategies that lead to culture-change

Provide practical examples of solutions and user-friendly tools that employers of all sizes can use

Discussion participants provided ideas about examples of promising practices to be pursued and ideas for user-friendly tools that can be utilized by employers of all sizes.
- Provide a centralized database for capturing and sharing promising practices including templates and samples of program materials as well as examples of metrics, survey, or other data capturing instruments and reports. This allows proponents as a group to capture and share what is known about promising practices and help them move the agenda forward. From this, they will have a shared understanding of the current state of knowledge and the efforts around a given practice.
- Study and spread practices that prevent the marginalization of workingwomen and other diverse groups of employees and enable them to become fully engaged in the workplace. When employees are fully engaged in their work, they are more productive and that positively effects the company's bottom-line. Such practices may include the adoption of flexible work polices, the development of affinity groups including women's networks, and the encouragement of mentoring by and of workingwomen and diverse groups.
- Provide venues for employees across industries, employers, researchers, and policymakers to learn about promising practices and receive ideas and templates for implementing them. This can include webinars or audio events, online tutorials, blogs or discussion groups, workshops, seminars and summits.
- Understand the needs of corporations to relate workplace practices to the bottom-line by providing easy access to the latest research and information that provides this perspective. Incorporate this information into a clearinghouse or other centralized database.
- Harness the power of technology to redesign work and use it to fuel more flexible, effective work options for both employers and employees. Share ideas and examples of technology that can support flexible equitable workplace. For example, employers who have already developed flexible programs make scheduling easier within a team environment. Is there a way to translate this software to make it user-friendly for small businesses?

Develop deliberate strategies that lead to culture-change

Discussion participants provided ideas about examples of strategies for creating culture-change to be pursued.

- Shift the paradigm from being about offering special populations of employees' accommodations or benefits to what needs to be done to effectively recruit, retain, and engage all employees. Court mainstream media attention for this new view by developing articles and op-eds and utilizing other mechanisms for encouraging public debate.
- Expand the discussion and the development of solutions around creating flexible, equitable workplaces to include the experiences of low-wage employees as well as those in high-wage, often white-collar industries. Current discussions often focus on employees in white-collar, professional industries but low-wage workers have as much or more need for flexible work options.
- "Do diversity." Employers need to understand how demographic and cultural differences that drive their employees' desires for flexibility are driven in part by the splintering of their identities. For many American workers, the impact of this new concept of diversity on their workplaces must be understood. Employers should be encouraged to adopt programs and policies that organize, educate, train, mentor, and provide outreach to diverse populations of employees. This can include the development of affinity groups (i.e. women's networks), the strategic inclusion of people of diverse backgrounds, such as people with disabilities on boards, teams and task forces, etc.
- Encourage employers to incentivize employees to participate in diverse practices by spotlighting teams that model equitable, flexible, and/or diverse practices or rewarding through bonuses or public recognition mentoring of and by diverse populations.
- Support cultural changes in society that increases the value of care giving. Improving the status of care giving and caregivers—including parents or family members of elderly or ill relatives. Increasing numbers of American workers will take on care giving roles over the coming decades. The impact on worker health, productivity, and availability have far-reaching implications for the economy.
- Persuade employers to provide mechanisms that allow employees more control over their work such as access to online blogs or discussion boards that allow teams to develop their own schedules.

Top Priorities in Public Policy Development and Education

Three top areas for policy action
Over the course of the next year, it is imperative that those working on developing policy or providing research and information to support the development of work-life policy focus upon ideas to:

1. Remove barriers to work-life effectiveness options
2. Develop metrics around measuring impacts of work-life effectiveness, equity, and diversity to build the case for change and measure impacts
3. Provide incentives for flexibility

Remove Barriers to Work-life Effectiveness

Discussion participants provided ideas about barriers that need to be addressed by public policy or government programs as well as suggestions for how to remove the barriers.

- Understand that work-life flexibility and work-life balance issues directly relate to the prevalence of workplace equity in organizations. Wage equity and workplace equity are key concerns for which policy or regulatory relief may be the primary stimulus to create systemic change.
- Develop a consortium of organizations that can help create a safe space for employers to learn about, make, or pass voluntary workplace policies that will make work-life and workplace flexibility options successful regardless of the size of the company. Encourage organizations that represent diverse worker, employer, and industry perspectives to work together to bring issues and potential solutions to the table for discussion and resolution. Educate the public, employees, and employers on what already exists in policy, regulation,

and voluntary practices regarding work-life, diversity, and workplace equity issues. Convene not only current champions of work-life effectiveness, diversity, and workplace equity, but also those in industries or organizations that are ready for change. Provide a forum to begin the broad-scale distribution of ideas and practices.

- Understand that policy or regulatory solutions need to be scalable based on the size of the organization—small, medium, and large employers have different access to resources that can either inhibit or accentuate the impact of the policy. Policy should help create a level-playing field among employers and provide floors rather than ceilings to the types of programs and supports that they offer.

- Encourage industry-level discussions about work-life issues and their solutions including promising voluntary practices and public policy ideas.

- Support initiatives that provide training to managers to enable them to better manage workers in flexible, diverse, equitable workplace environments. This may include supporting the development of curriculum for MBA programs as well as workplace or certificate programs.

- Encourage initiatives or policy that enables dialogue between employers and employees about flexibility or other work-life issues. A model to consider is the United Kingdom's "soft-touch" right-to-ask law[70].

- Increase the emphasis on health care prevention for employees that can help decrease the use and costs of insurance.

- Support the creation of mechanisms that make it easier for employers to offer their part-time workers benefits as well as career opportunities. For example, how can policy play a role in letting employers ensure proportional benefits to part-timers such that the percentage of hours worked equals the percentage of benefits received.

- Review existing legislation or constitutional amendments that impact workplace equity or flexibility issues (i.e. The 1965 Civil Rights Act, The 1970 Equal Pay Act) with an eye towards updating or expanding them. Revitalize interest in pending work-life and workplace equity legislation and "get it moving." Encourage the use of consensus-based policy dialogue and engagement that involves employers, employees, researchers, and policymakers equally in the development of policy, public-private partnerships or government programs that support win-win solutions to work-life challenges. Engage all stakeholders in developing and passing work-life legislation.

Develop Metrics

Discussion participants provided ideas for metrics that could be collected to help policymakers, employers, workingwomen, and men better understand what is currently happening in workplaces as well as to track the effects of change efforts and public policy implementation. They also suggested sources from which those metrics could be collected.

- Develop metrics that can help get the message across to corporate America about the need for and the benefits of work-life, diversity, and workplace equity programs.

- Government can play a vital role in providing clarity around what needs to be measured and how and by being a centralized collection and dissemination-point for data. The Bureau of Labor Statistics, Department of Labor, Census Bureau, and other government agencies need to be supported in collecting and disseminating data that provide an accurate picture of the workplace.

- Work with existing organizations including university centers, nonprofits, and government agencies to help define what needs to be measured, to advance the rationale for data collection, and to provide support to employers as they undertake this process. These same entities can be enabled to take all data that has been studied to date to form a metric sample that can be utilized by private industry to help them develop their own metrics.

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[70] Levin-Epstein, Jodie. "How to Exercise Flexible Work: Take Steps with a Soft-Touch Law." 2005. <www.clasp.org/publications/work_life_brf3.pdf> ; Also see: Hegewisch, Ariane. "Employers and European Flexible Working Rights." WorkLifeLaw Issue Brief. 2005. <http://www.uchastings.edu/site_files/WLL/european_issue_brief_printversion.pdf>

- Develop demonstration or pilot projects that work with human resource divisions within a sample of employers to help them collect data that measures their own effectiveness in reaching out to their employees. Provide models of metrics, data collection, and reporting to encourage human resource departments to participate. Consider the development of a public messaging campaign encouraging the adoption of such metrics.
- Consider undertaking the development, collection, and reporting of metrics that measure work-life effectiveness, workplace equity, and diversity as a public-private partnership that should not only include employers, employees, research organizations, and government but specifically is inclusive of employers of all sizes and government agencies from local, state, and federal jurisdictions.

Provide Incentives for Flexibility

Discussion participants offered ideas about what might be incentives for employers to design more flexible workplaces as well as suggestions about how to implement incentive programs.

- Understand that there are two schools of thought on how workplace flexibility can be incorporated into America's workplaces—by either legislating employer mandates that require them to design more flexible workplaces or by encouraging the voluntary adoption of practices. These two views about who is ultimately responsible for enabling the large-scale implementation of workplace flexibility are fairly divergent, which can be inhibiting to real change. While efforts to encourage voluntary adoption of promising practices should continue, there were those at the 2006 NES who observed that the voluntary adoption of flexible or equitable workplace practices had stalled and that some policy solutions needed to be considered to un-jam the process of adoption. It was also felt that such policies would be more successful if they also provided incentives to employers.
- Focus on a broader perspective towards enabling the design of flexible workplaces. Develop a role for third party groups to play (i.e. nonprofits such as BPW Foundation) to become mediators and to bridge the two divergent schools of thought.
- Review existing legislation or constitutional amendments with an eye towards updating or expanding them; revitalize interest in pending work-life and workplace equity legislation and "get it moving." Encourage the use of consensus-based policy dialogue and engagement that involves employers, employees, researchers and policymakers equally in the development of policy, public-private partnerships, or government programs that support win-win solutions to work-life challenges. Engage all stakeholders in developing and passing work-life legislation.
- Continue to support and develop government programs that encourage the voluntary adoption of promising practices such as those that encourage companies to mentor other companies in best practices.
- Consider an alternative to federal programs and policies and support state-level initiatives that educate state governments on examples of existing work-life flexibility policies and that encourage the state-by-state adoption of policies and programs that enable workplace flexibility.
- Encourage initiatives or policy that encourages dialogue between employers and employees about flexibility or other work-life issues. A model to consider is the United Kingdom's soft-touch right-to-ask law.
- Work with employers to develop an understanding of what incentives will most likely enable them to design more flexible workplaces. For example, how can policy help employers deal with cost-related issues such as wage replacement, management training, tracking, or implementation expenses. Adapt public policy to fit the needs and resources of different size employers.
- Develop a consortium of organizations that helps to create a safe space for employers to learn about, create, or pass along voluntary workplace policies that make work-life and workplace flexibility options successful regardless of the size of the company. (See more above in *Removing Barriers to Work-Life*.)