



The American  
Institute  
of Architects

# Diversity in the Profession of Architecture

Executive Summary 2016



## Acknowledgments

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American Institute of Architecture Students (AIAS)  
Coalition of Community College Architecture Programs (CCCAP)  
Equity by Design Committee

Views of individual survey participants included in this report  
do not necessarily reflect those of the American Institute of Architects.

## Foreword



**Elizabeth Chu Richter, FAIA**  
2015 AIA President

Architecture ties our communities and each of us to the other. Architecture touches everything—health, wellness, education, history, culture, and beauty. It reflects who we are. To grow a robust and valued profession prepared to serve the needs of people young and old, rich and poor—all hungry for better communities, better infrastructure, and better lives—our profession requires talents as diverse as life itself.

In a world where technology seems to be the driving force in how we act and react, maintaining the human touch has never been more important. We need architects, creative men and women whose training is complemented by interpersonal skills, emotional intelligence, and judgment—skills only possible when we are in touch, deeply in touch with everyone who is and who should be served by design thinking. To be that kind of profession, we must be a mirror of the rich human tapestry we serve. Empathy and judgment are key.

Where do we stand today? Is our profession as diverse as the many lives we touch? When we gaze in the mirror, what is the reflection that looks back at us?

There is plenty of anecdotal information that suggests there has been progress in building a more diverse and inclusive profession. Yet, the information is just that—anecdotal.

We need data, not anecdotes. We need reliable, quantifiable, and verifiable data. Without it, we cannot gain a credible picture of how far we've come in the past 10 years. Why the past 10 years? Because it was nearly a decade ago that we last conducted a comprehensive survey under the leadership of the AIA's Diversity Committee and Demographic Data Task Force.

A lot has happened since then that demands a clear, unambiguous snapshot of who is entering the profession, who does and does not prosper, and why. In short, as we move forward to develop the programs and actions that have as their goal a more diverse, inclusive profession, we need an updated baseline. Without it, without a clear sense of the direction we must take to move forward, we risk our credibility as a profession relevant to the needs of all people.

Finding a reliable, quantifiable benchmark has to be the work of organizations whose training and reputation have been earned in the highly demanding field of data gathering and analysis. By retaining Shugoll Research, the AIA has partnered in this endeavor with the very best.

If we are successful in applying thoughtfully and with purpose the information surfaced by this study, perhaps a decade from now my successor will be writing a foreword to a glowing report describing a profession that welcomes everyone with the talent and passion to make a positive difference in their communities. We will be better for it, as well as those whose lives are touched by our work—which means everyone.



**Elizabeth Chu Richter, FAIA**  
2015 AIA President

## Background and objectives

### Introduction

**Industry data show that, while improving, women and people of color are underrepresented in the field of architecture.** In 2015, industry membership organizations worked together to create a study examining what architects believe is causing this underrepresentation, how significant they feel it is, and offering suggestions of what could be done to address it. The result was the study, *Diversity in the Profession of Architecture*.

### Goals and Objectives

**The Diversity in the Profession of Architecture survey examines the impact of basic demographics such as race, ethnicity, and gender on success in the field.** The survey focus is to investigate the careers of diverse architects beginning in college, how firm culture affects their career objectives, and what type of practices minority architects are working in.

As suggested in the 2005 AIA Diversity Survey, **the 2015 survey includes collaboration with collateral organizations** to help create a more dynamic picture of both the path and practice of architecture. The main collateral organizations are the **National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, the Association of Collegiate Schools of Architecture, the National Architectural Accrediting Board, the National Organization of Minority Architects, the Coalition of Community College Architecture Programs, and the American Institute of Architecture Students.**

This project contains three separate phases:

Phase I – Assess the quantity and relative value of information and knowledge residing within the AIA and its “collateral organizations,” related professional organizations, and other stakeholders that collect data on the profession or have an interest in such information.

Phase II – Collect, synthesize, and analyze the data from the sources identified, and extend the research through targeted data collection methods to: 1) complete the information needs as identified in the Phase I gap analysis; and 2) further understand the demographics of the profession.

Phase III – Using the information from Phases I and II, the report will be provided to the Equity in Architecture Commission to develop recommendations for a comprehensive data collection and analysis system to track the diversity of the profession. The recommendations should reflect the resources of the various organizations and should be both as comprehensive and easy to implement as possible.

At the 2015 AIA Convention, the American Institute of Architects created the Equity in Architecture Commission, a blue-ribbon panel of leading architects, educators, and diversity experts to investigate diversity and inclusion in the profession. **A key task of the Equity in Architecture Commission will be to apply the data and findings from the recent 2015 AIA Diversity in the Profession of Architecture survey.**

“Diversity and inclusion is a priority of the AIA. We have made progress but not fast enough. The world around us is changing much faster and we can do better,” said 2015 AIA President Elizabeth Chu Richter, FAIA. “We have a great opportunity now to look at how to achieve the equity, diversity, and inclusion in AIA member firms through a creative means and provide a framework for the profession to act faster and better to meet a growing demand for architects.”

## Background and objectives

### Methodology

The 2015 study, Diversity in the Profession of Architecture, was an inclusive effort driven by practitioners.

Members of the aforementioned collateral organizations planned the study, reviewed and edited the survey questionnaire, and provided member contact information to complete the survey.

The 2015 study was conducted online and is a follow-up to a previous study from 2005. To participate, respondents were required to either:

- Have a degree in architecture
- Be pursuing a degree in architecture
- Have started an architectural degree but didn't finish
- Have worked in the field of architecture at some time
- Had planned to pursue a degree in architecture but didn't enter the field

The goal was to include both architects and students as well as those currently in the field and those who had dropped out of the field.

**A total of 75,976 email invitations were sent** and data were collected from January 5 through January 27, 2015. By the survey cutoff date, 7,522 surveys had been completed. **Women and people of color were oversampled to increase their participation and ensure the survey reflected their views. Therefore, the profile of study participants will not match the profile of the field.**

Participation in the survey by segment (among those who specified a response to gender or race) was as follows:

- Men: 4,223
- Women: 3,117
- Whites: 5,763
- People of color: 1,518

Prior to the 2015 survey, several steps were completed to prepare the final questionnaire:

- Collateral organizations participated in a day-long Diversity Workshop to brainstorm on key topics the survey should include.
- Four two-hour focus groups were conducted with high school seniors and college freshmen and sophomores who are in the early stages of career decision-making, to explore their awareness and perceptions of the profession.

- Twenty-four 30-minute in-depth telephone interviews were conducted with women or people of color who were AIA or collateral organization members. These allowed women and people of color to talk about the issues of underrepresentation by gender and race in the field in an open-ended manner, using their own words. This helped the study team design questions and identify possible solutions to the challenge of gender and racial underrepresentation for testing in the quantitative study.

Topics covered in the in-depth interviews were:

- Reasons for entering the field
- Barriers to diversity in architecture and architecture schools
- Ways to work together to help diverse populations succeed in architecture as a career

Potential solutions to gender and race underrepresentation tested in the survey were generated by architects themselves during the in-depth interviews with women and people of color.

# Representation by gender and race

## Key findings

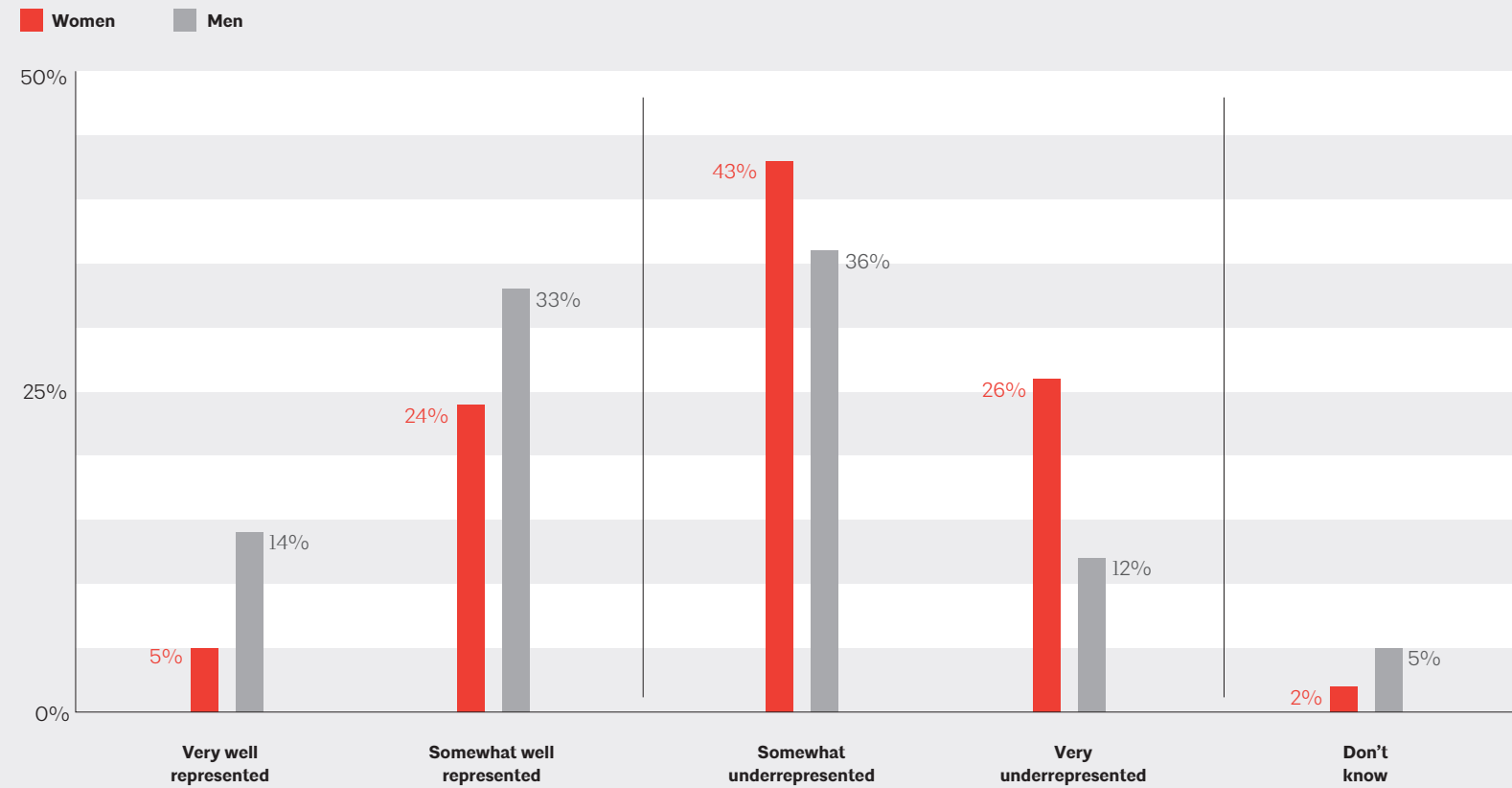
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While there is agreement on the perceived underrepresentation of people of color in the industry, recognition of the underrepresentation of women is not as definitive.

## Representation by gender

Women strongly believe that there is not gender equity in the industry, but men are divided on the issue—half believe women are underrepresented and half perceive them to be well represented.

**Figure 1: Perceived representation of women in the field of architecture**

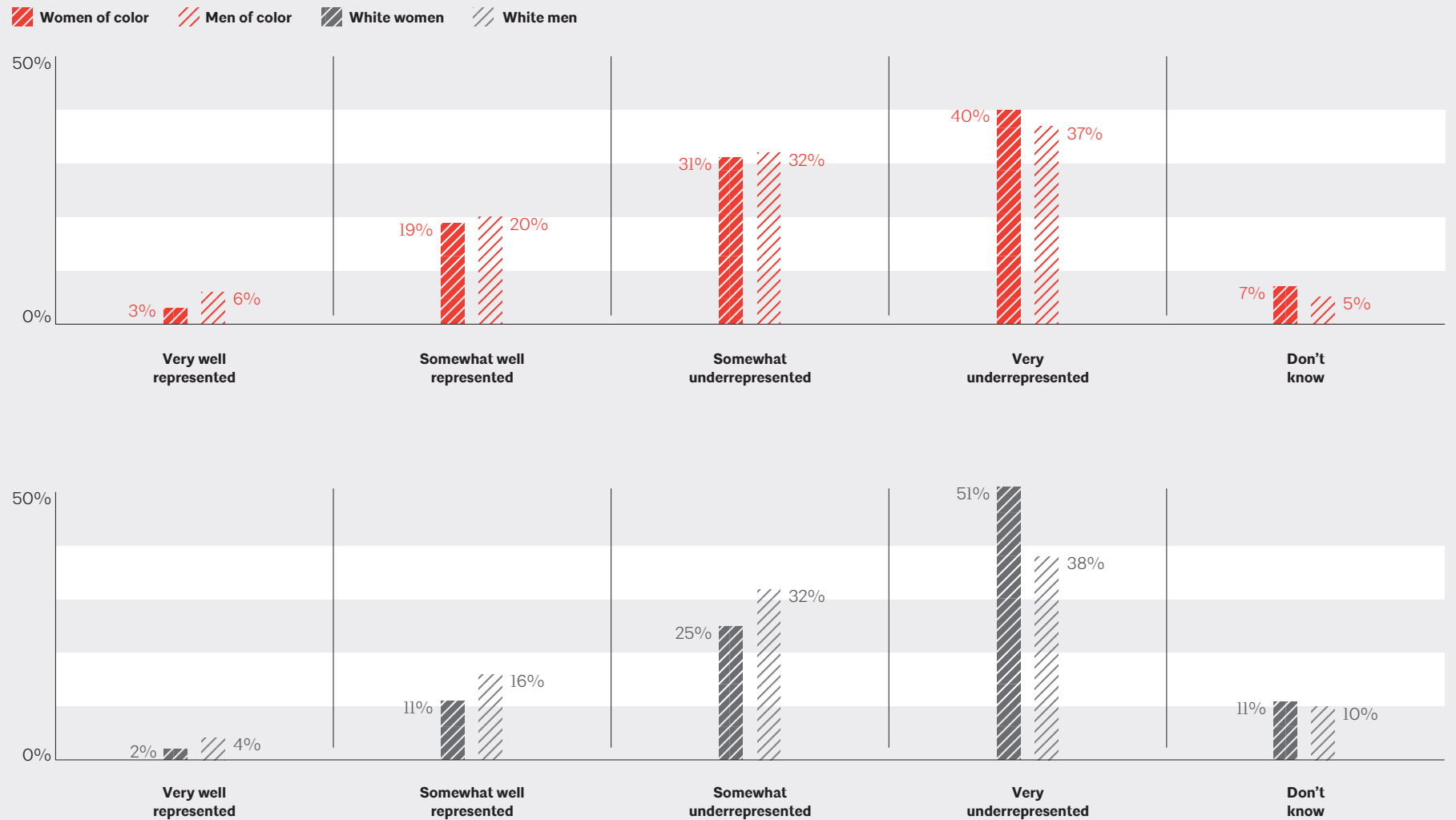


## Representation by race

Unlike with gender, both whites and people of color clearly agree that people of color are under-represented in the industry.

Based on these two sets of findings, architects, industry leaders, and member associations could support a strategy for attracting people of color to the profession. As for bolstering representation of women architects in the industry, a strong commitment and strategy will be required to overcome possible resistance from those that don't believe it to be an issue.

**Figure 2: Perceived representation of people of color in the field of architecture**





# Reported challenges to career advancement

## Key findings

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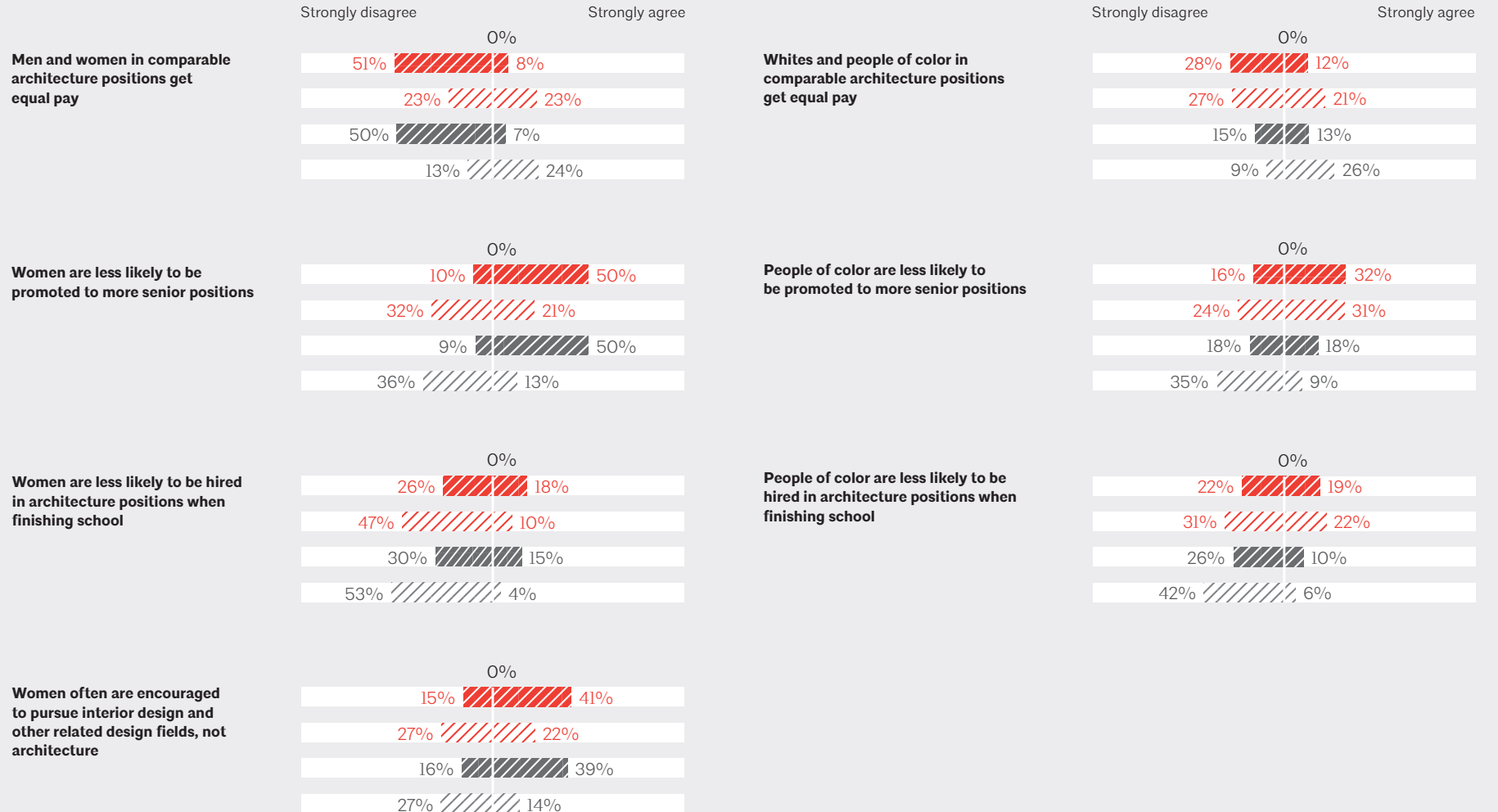
There are some attitudinal differences by gender and race on challenges faced by women and people of color in the industry.

## Reported challenges to career advancement

Both women and people of color say (much more often than men and whites) that they are less likely to be promoted to more senior positions. Gender and race are also obstacles to equal pay for comparable positions, but this is particularly so for women. Women, more than men, also feel that they are not likely to get equal pay in comparable positions and are often encouraged to pursue interior design and other design fields rather than architecture. These are cultural issues in the field that might be addressed by industry leadership. Women and people of color also somewhat believe that they are less likely to receive job offers when completing school.

**Figure 3: Perception of career opportunities in architecture**

▨ Women of color  
 ▧ Men of color  
 ▩ White women  
 ▪ White men



Percentages represent response of 6 or 7 or 1 or 2 on a 7-point scale where 7 equals "Strongly Agree" and 1 equals "Strongly Disagree." Only the scale endpoints, 1 and 7, have a verbal description.

# Work–life balance impact on representation of women

## Key findings

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Work-life balance was identified as a main reason women are underrepresented in the industry. However, changes in this area could benefit the field as a whole.

## Work-life balance impact on representation of women

The top three reasons noted for underrepresentation of women in the profession (according to those that reported women were underrepresented) were:

- Concern about work-life balance
- Long work hours that makes starting a family difficult and thereby encourage some women to leave the field.
- Lack of flexibility to work remotely, job share, or work flexible hours

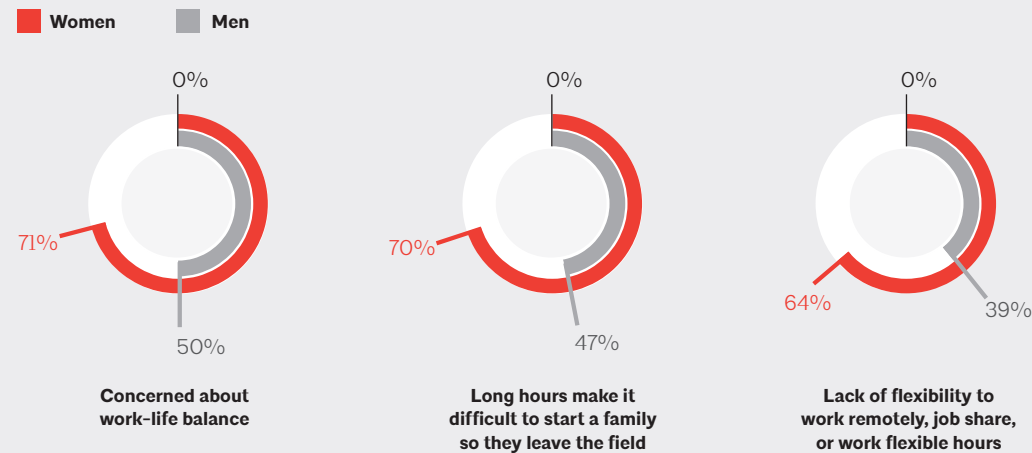
Correspondingly, the leading strategies that both men and women in the field believe could attract and retain more women directly address these issues. The most-noted strategies include:

- Promoting a change in office culture that allows better work-life balance
- Increasing job flexibility (including the option to work remotely, job share, or work flexible hours)

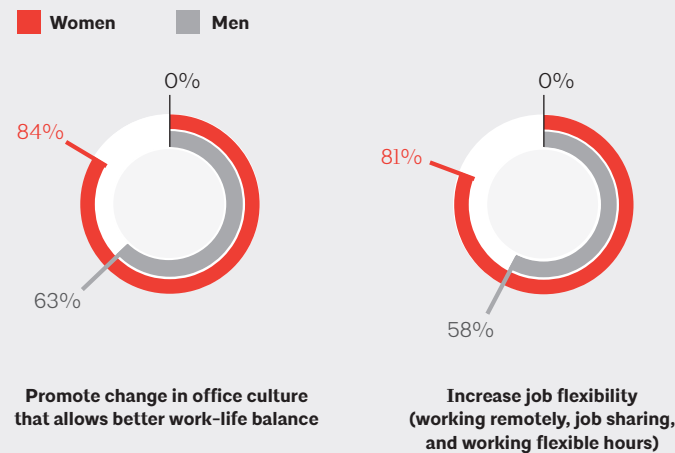
It is notable that all architects (regardless of gender or race) consider work-life balance important, and many have low satisfaction with their ability to achieve it. The majority of architects feel that managing work-life balance is more difficult for them compared with other professionals and wish for greater job flexibility in the industry.

This is one of the most important areas where architects, industry leaders, and membership associations could lead an effort to change the professional culture. Not only would it address one of the primary concerns of women in the industry, but also it would benefit the field as a whole.

**Figure 4: Perceived factors contributing to an underrepresentation of women in the field of architecture**



**Figure 5: Effective ways of attracting and retaining women in the field**



# Other impacts on representation of women

## Key findings

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There are several other often-mentioned hypotheses for underrepresentation of women in architecture as well as strategies to retain and attract them.

## Other impacts on representation of women

In addition to work-life balance, other often-mentioned hypotheses for underrepresentation of women in architecture include:

- Women not being given significant opportunities upon returning to the industry after having left to start a family
- Lack of women role models
- Lower pay and less likelihood of being promoted than men
- Difficulties catching up with technology changes upon returning to the industry after having left to start a family

Architects feel they could retain current female architects and attract future ones to the field if firms, industry leaders, membership associations, and schools of architecture would work together to support a variety of other strategies such as:

- Develop a mentorship program for women in firms.
- Offer credentials for architects who wish to return to the profession after taking an extended leave of absence.
- Provide clear written criteria for promotion.
- Offer industry-funded college scholarships for women interested in studying architecture.
- Attract more women professors to teach in accredited architecture programs.

Figure 6: Perceived factors contributing to an underrepresentation of women in the field of architecture

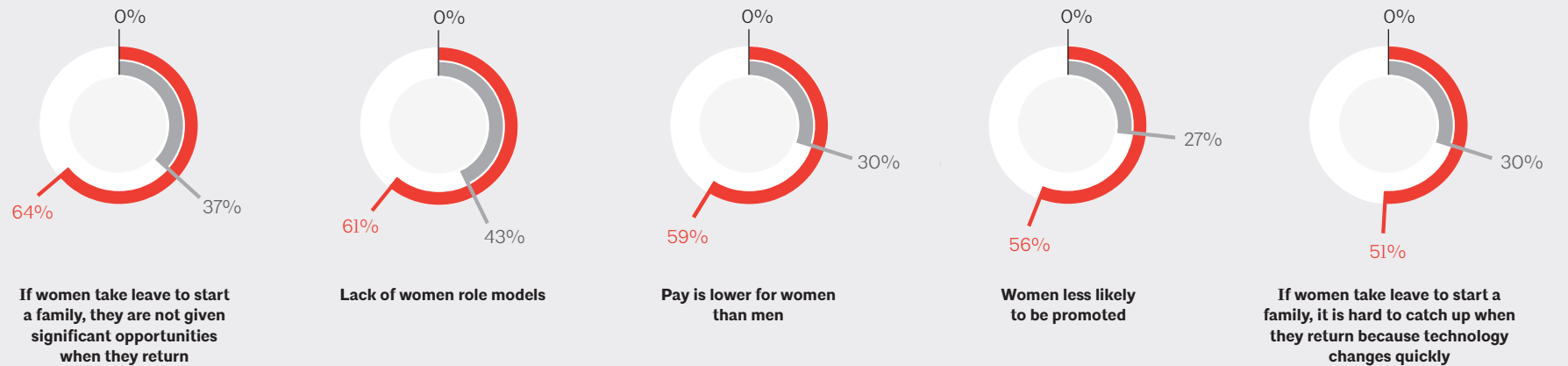
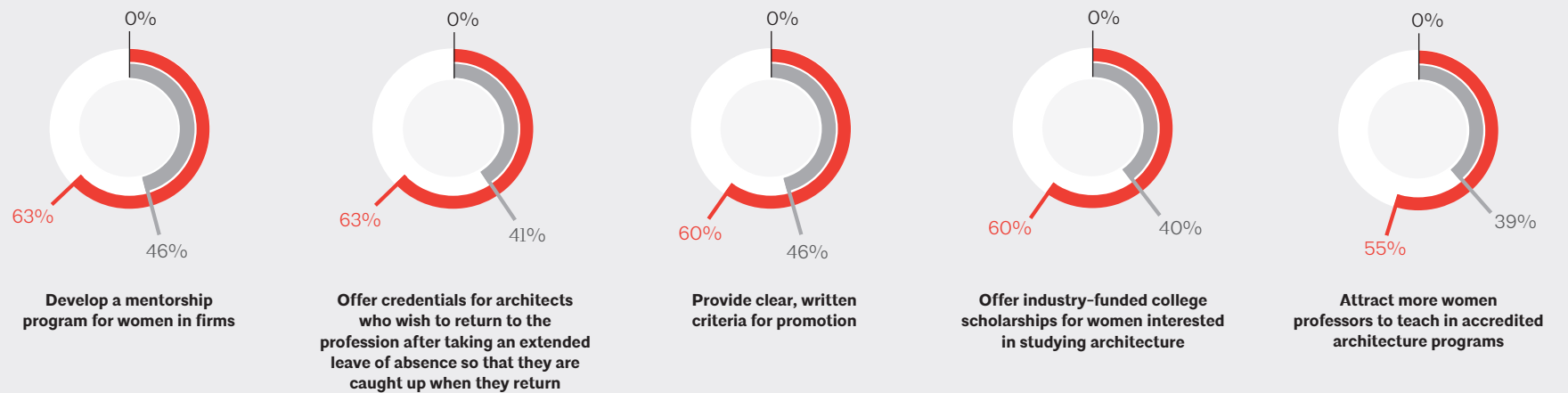


Figure 7: Effective ways of attracting and retaining women in the field



# Factors impacting representation of minorities

## Key findings

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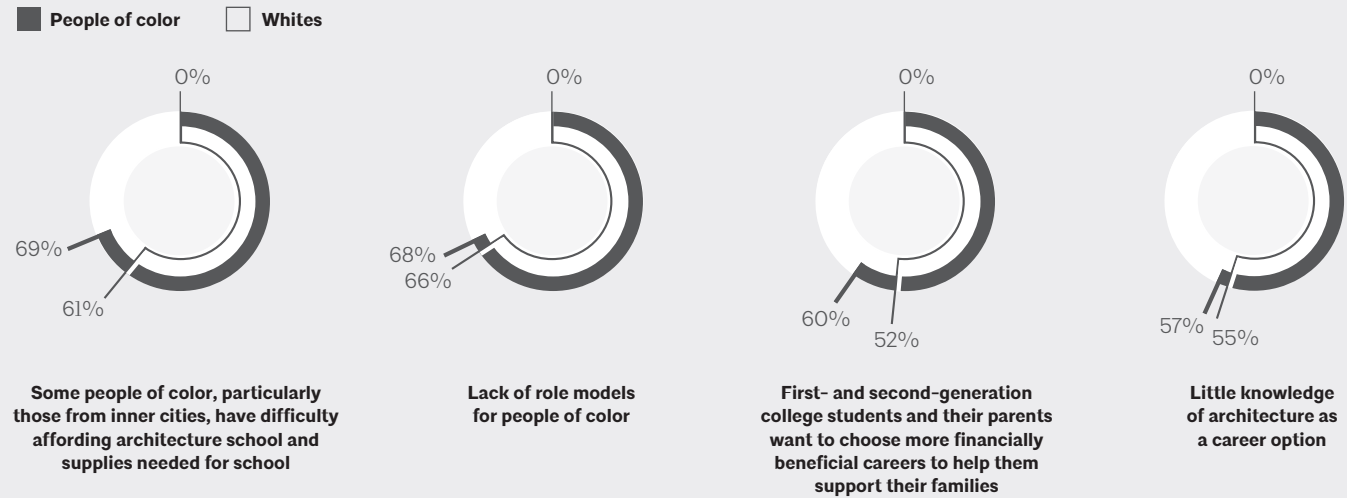
Architects suggest several likely reasons for the lack of minority representation in the field and ways to address them.

## Factors impacting representation of minorities

Perceived reasons for the underrepresentation of people of color include:

- People of color, especially those from inner cities, may have difficulty affording the costs associated with a degree in architecture.
- There are few role models for people of color in architecture.
- To help support their families, first- and second-generation college students and their parents may be predisposed towards other careers with greater earning potential.
- Minority students have little knowledge of architecture as a career option.

**Figure 8: Perceived factors contributing to an underrepresentation of people of color in the field of architecture**





## Strategies to address underrepresentation

Architects feel they could retain current people of color in the field and attract new ones if the field adopted the following strategies:

- Offer industry-funded college scholarships for people of color to study architecture.
- Increase community outreach into middle and high schools by university architectural programs.
- Attract more professors of color to teach in accredited architecture programs.
- Expand industry support for the National Organization of Minority Architects (NOMA).
- Provide clear, written criteria for promotion.
- Develop a mentorship program for people of color in firms.
- Create a support system for people of color at architecture schools.

**Figure 9: Effective ways of attracting and retaining people of color in the field**



# Building the pipeline through schools

## Key findings

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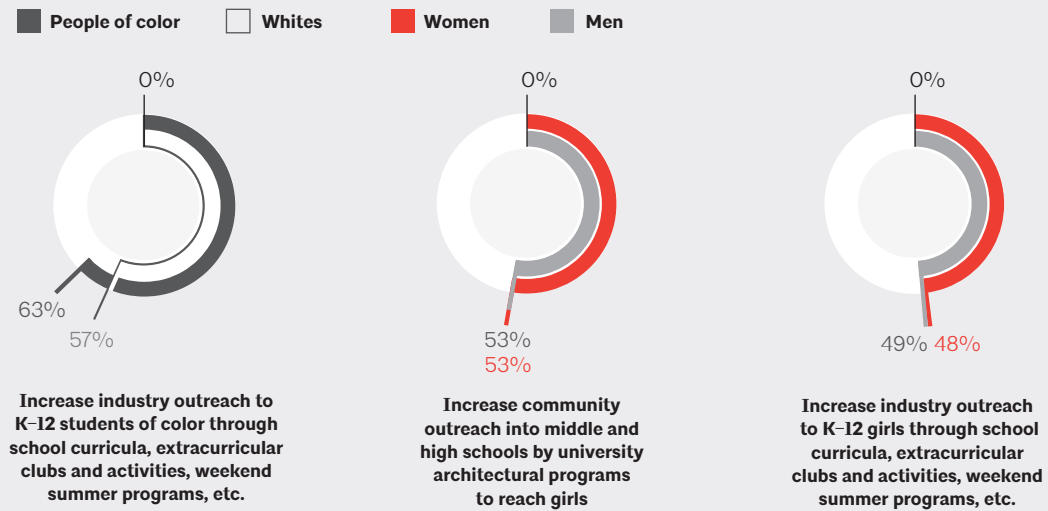
To attract more women and minorities to the field, architects recommend exposing more students in middle and high school to architecture—what it means to be an architect and how to launch a career.

## Building the pipeline through schools

The importance of this strategy is supported by findings in the expanded full report. Many current architects grew interested in the profession while in school, recognizing at the time that their skills in math, science, or drawing matched the job requirements well. Others attended a class that sparked an interest in architecture. School interventions are additionally appropriate because architects believe that most middle and high schools students don't know what an architect does, how to become an architect, or the admission requirements to study architecture.

These strategies include industry outreach to K-12 students through curriculum and extracurriculars, and outreach to middle and high schools by university architectural programs.

**Figure 10: Effective ways of attracting and retaining women and people of color in the field**



# Reasons for leaving the field

## Key findings

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Uninfluenced by gender or race, about one in five architects have left the field at some point. Architects who return after having left the industry face new challenges.

## Reasons for leaving the field

Men and women, as well as whites and people of color, share many reasons for leaving the field of architecture. Some lose their jobs due to layoffs or termination, but more often they seek better opportunities elsewhere.

There are some variations along gender lines. One of the most important reasons that women give for leaving the field is dissatisfaction with work-life balance, while men are less likely to say the same. Many more women than men also leave to start a family or leave because they need to care for a child at home. However, these percentages may be impacted by the high percentage of women respondents who are in the younger age demographic when women would be most likely to start a family and/or take on child-rearing responsibilities. Men, on the other hand, are far more likely to leave their jobs in architecture in order to pursue a more lucrative career.

People of color give some reasons more often than whites: They are dissatisfied with their professional growth and they aren't recognized for the work they do. Men of color also leave more than white men because they perceive that their salaries are not commensurate with the workload, their pay is not equal to others in their position, and they are unable to achieve work-life balance.

Figure II: Reasons for leaving the field of architecture



Percentages represent response of 6 or 7 on a 7-point scale where 7 equals "Extremely Important" and 1 equals "Not at All Important." Only the scale endpoints, 1 and 7, have a verbal description.

# Job satisfaction findings

## Key findings

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Overall, job satisfaction in the industry is, at best, moderate—with lower satisfaction for women and people of color.

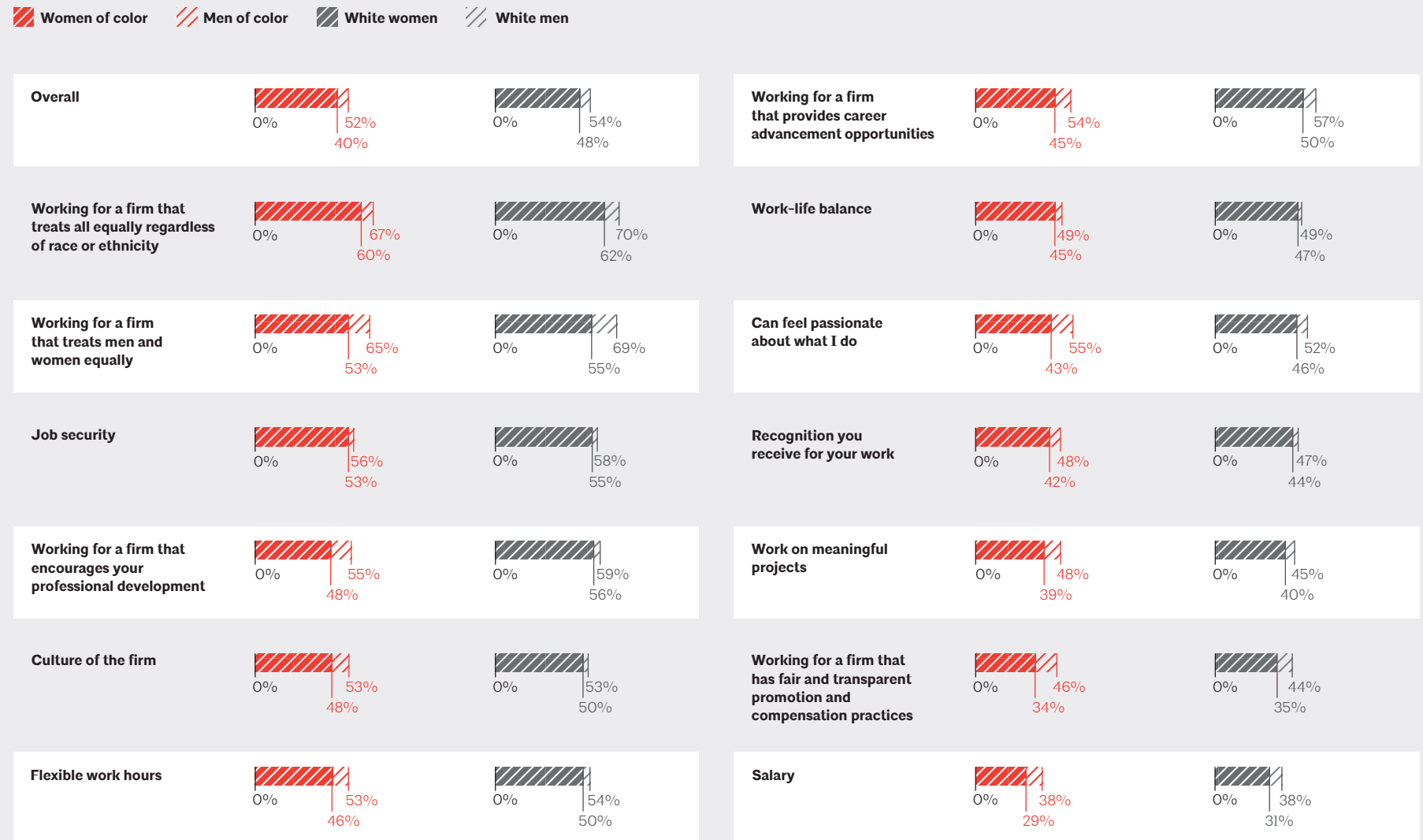
## Job satisfaction findings

Job satisfaction in the field is moderate: About half of respondents report high satisfaction with their jobs overall, though few are highly unsatisfied. Less than half of all architects are satisfied with their work-life balance, with the recognition they receive for work accomplished, or with the frequency of working on meaningful projects. Satisfaction is lowest on salary and fairness and transparency of their employers' promotion and compensation practices.

Satisfaction is highest among males, with white men and men of color reporting higher satisfaction compared to white women and women of color. Women (both white and non-white) rate their job satisfaction lower than men in many areas, including salary, career advancement opportunities, and gender equality on the job. Women also are not satisfied that their employers' promotion and compensation practices are fair and transparent.

Women of color and men of color are less satisfied than white women and white men, respectively, with career advancement opportunities and working for a firm that encourages their professional development. The difference in job satisfaction across these areas tends to be smaller between people of color and whites than women and men.

Figure 12: Percentage with high job satisfaction overall and in selected areas



Percentages represent response of 6 or 7 or 1 or 2 on a 7-point scale where 7 equals "Extremely Satisfied" and 1 equals "Not at All Satisfied." Only the scale endpoints, 1 and 7, have a verbal description.

# Appendix



## Selected respondent demographics

	Total	Women	Men	People of color	White
<b>Working region</b>	<b>n=7467</b>	<b>n=3094</b>	<b>n=4203</b>	<b>n=1564</b>	<b>n=5734</b>
Northeast	23%	24%	22%	21%	23%
South	30%	29%	29%	33%	29%
Midwest	20%	18%	22%	12%	22%
West	25%	26%	24%	28%	24%
Work outside the U.S.	2%	3%	3%	6%	2%
<b>Firm owner*</b>	<b>n=5889</b>	<b>n=2631</b>	<b>n=3387</b>	<b>n=1169</b>	<b>n=4565</b>
Woman-owned	16%	24%	10%	14%	16%
Minority-owned	10%	8%	11%	26%	6%
None of these	78%	72%	82%	67%	81%
<b>Age</b>	<b>n=7452</b>	<b>n=3109</b>	<b>n=4206</b>	<b>n=1574</b>	<b>n=5747</b>
Under 25	12%	15%	9%	14%	11%
25-34	36%	45%	30%	37%	37%
35-44	20%	19%	21%	24%	19%
45-54	13%	11%	14%	12%	13%
55-64	13%	8%	16%	8%	13%
65-74	5%	2%	8%	4%	6%
75 or older	1%	0%	2%	1%	1%
Mean	39.7	35.5	42.8	37.5	40.1

\* Percentages may not add up to 100% because multiple answers were accepted.

Note: The number of respondents by gender and race in this table may be lower than the totals reported in the methodology. This is because some respondents did not answer all demographic questions.