

Keeping Doors Open: Girls, STEM & Their Future Careers

What Employers Can Do



When it comes to STEM, we have a long way to go to balance the equation for girls' and women's participation. Girls continue to receive messages that STEM isn't for them and may be closing the door on STEM careers as early as Grade 8. As a result, girls could be limiting their career potential and pathways, particularly as the economy and workplace evolves. And as a society, we could be missing out on generations of future innovators and problem-solvers.

Girl Guides of Canada set out to explore what the pathways to STEM careers and skills look like for girls under 18, and how this relates to girls' preparedness for the future of work.

We learned that girls might be prematurely closing doors to STEM for three main reasons:

1. Girls continue to receive messages that STEM isn't for them. Influences from parents, peers, teachers, media, and society at large continue to subtly – and not so subtly – tell girls that they shouldn't (or can't) be interested or succeed in STEM subjects.

2. Girls may not be aware of the steps they need to take to open certain doors. In many cases, girls need to start making decisions as young as age 13 that can impact their ability to pursue STEM fields in the future. But they might not be equipped with enough information to make informed decisions at this early age.

3. Girls may not realize many of the doors even exist. There are a wide variety of STEM fields and entry points into those careers, many of which girls may not be aware of. We know that girls are often interested in careers that help people, make the world a better place, and that allow them to be creative, but often aren't aware this is possible through STEM.



WHAT CAN YOU DO?

How can you empower girls to keep their options open to even get into the STEM pipeline, and not prematurely close doors? There are steps corporations and employers can take to support girls to make informed and empowered choices for their futures.

Be a role model and mentor

- **Tap into your talent pool:** Enable women STEM employees to be role models for the next generation by supporting their volunteering and mentorship. Feature a diversity of women in advertisements and recruitment materials.
- **Mentor and sponsor:** Through programs, internships, or summer jobs, start to introduce and integrate girls into the social, technical, and professional networks that they will need to succeed. Commit to mentoring and sponsoring girls so they can access opportunities for growth.
- **Connect with K-12 schools:** If you're an employer within a local community, consider doing outreach to local K-12 schools to present students with real-life role models in STEM careers.

Support programs for girls in STEM

- **Make the investment:** Invest in programs for girls in STEM, especially hands-on programming that is inclusive, accessible, and gives girls specific tools and skills. Celebrate and award girls studying STEM through awards and scholarships, and consider offering scholarships for innovation, not just academic excellence.

Foster an inclusive and safe culture

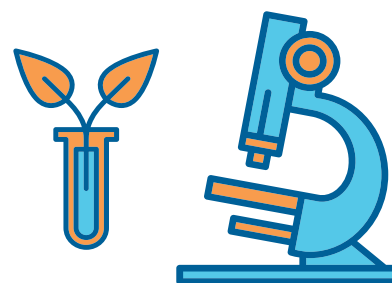
- **Make work safe:** Foster an inclusive and safe culture for girls and young women who work for you. For example, ensure you have policies in place so that your workplace is free from harassing behaviours for all employees, including the most vulnerable. Monitor the environment regularly for toxic behaviour.

Use your power and influence

- **Shift the conversation:** Use your power and influence to shift the public conversation, working in partnership with organizations who are leading the charge.
- **Contribute to policy change:** Be at the table talking about education and career pathways to drive change at the policy level.

Tap into girls' motivations

- **Messaging:** In your outreach materials and programs, connect STEM to important causes that girls can connect to, and demonstrate how STEM careers are creative and respond to real-world challenges.
- **Create new role models:** If you're in the industry, develop video games and toys that have female protagonists and appeal to girls.



GIRL GUIDES OF CANADA

Girl Guides of Canada–Guides du Canada (GGC) empowers every girl in Guiding to discover herself and be everything she wants to be. In Guiding, girls from 5-17 meet with girls their own age in a safe, supportive and inclusive space to explore what matters to them. Guiding is where girls take the lead, put their ideas into action and jump into a range of empowering activities – all with the support of women mentors committed to positively impacting girls’ lives.

Girl Guides offers programming options ranging from cybersecurity activities and science experiments to exploring career options and discussions on feminism and gender inequality. We focus on equipping girls with twenty-first century skills that are transferrable to other areas of their life, such as building problem-solving skills through the engineering process, or hypothesizing through forensic-science inspired investigations. This programming is delivered in a safe, all-girl space that is designed to address the roadblocks and stigmas girls might encounter elsewhere in their lives. Girls in Guiding develop the skills to confidently navigate the world and grab hold of every opportunity that comes their way – now and in the future.

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Full report available online at girlguides.ca/girlsinSTEM

For inquiries, contact advocacy@girlguides.ca

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