



Biannual LEAP Newsletter | July 2025 | Issue No. 2

LEAP: Leaders for Equity, Advocacy, and Progress is PowHer®New York’s program to support the growth of emerging advocacy leaders in New York. LEAP brings a cohort of diverse young women and gender expansive people into community with experienced organizers and advocates, and provides opportunities for advocacy skill building, networking, and collective action.

A special thank you to our funders at the AmplifyHer Charitable Foundation whose continued support made it possible for us to create an environment for young women of color to be nurtured, develop skills and become transformative leaders as advocates, policymakers and community organizers.

Cohort 2 Opening Session



LEAP 2025 opening session, February 2025. Location - The Center

After the success of the initial pilot program in 2024, PowHer® New York launched its second cohort in winter 2025. The program remained committed to provide an environment of support, and exploration through experiential learning, peer networking, and engagement with expert speakers. LEAP refined the understanding of social change through three distinct tools or pillars that function interdependently: **advocacy, policy and community organizing**. Case studies were presented by **Advocacy in Action speakers**.

Session 1: Introductions to LEAP + Centering Self brought together the LEAP cohort to meet in person. Led by facilitator **Celina Trowell**, the cohort explored their relationships to community building and the connection between positionality/identity, structural oppression and advocacy.

Session 2: Advocacy for Policy and Social Change provided a deep dive into the Pay Equity Campaign led by PowHer®NY, and featured speakers **Beverly Neufeld**, President & Founder and NY City Councilwoman **Selvena Brooks-Powers**.

Session 3: Relationship Building Part 1 featured **Stevie Vargas**, campaign manager for The Children’s Agenda. The cohort learned about child care advocacy from the Empire State Campaign for Child Care (ESCCC), and was introduced to tools like power mapping and how to build relationships with key players.

Networking event: Thanks to **Dr. Maria D’Agostino** at John Jay College of Criminal Justice for hosting LEAP in their beautiful

conference room for the Networking event which brought together members of Cohorts 1 and 2.

Session 4: Communications to Create Impact focused on utilizing communications skills and storytelling to strengthen advocacy efforts. The session centered reproductive justice/maternal health advocacy. Led by **Sumana Chandra**, MPH, Cuny Graduate School of Public Health and Health Policy, Director of Communications and College Relations

Session 5: Relationship Building Part 2 focused on advocacy through building relationships with elected officials and staff, as well as navigating the internal structures of power in the City and State legislature. Co-led by **Nai’lah Amaru**, Electoral Policy and Advocacy Campaign Strategist & consultant.

Session 6: Community Engagement & Activation, the final program session focused on building skills in community organizing. It was led by labor leader and organizer **Bianca Cunningham**, Campaign Director for Bargaining for the Common Good. Her efforts led to nation-wide unionizing efforts of a telecommunications company.

LEAP Closing Ceremony

The 2025 LEAP cohort came together for a closing ceremony, where Special Projects were presented, reflecting the skills and connections they built over the 6 month program. Special thanks to **Deanne Braveman** of Mercury Public Affairs office in Manhattan for hosting the event.

Testimonials

Jessenia Rivera



“I want to take a moment to reflect on my journey through the LEAP program and the profound impact it has had on me both professionally and personally. Being accepted into this program was not just an opportunity. It was a turning point. As a tradeswoman, I have always been passionate about advocating for women in nontraditional fields. Through LEAP, I found a community of like-minded individuals who may not work in the trades or labor unions but

nonetheless we all shared a similar vision. I learned from our incredible lead facilitator Celina, who guided us with wisdom and encouragement. I also gained invaluable insights from Mary, Elsa, and all my peers in our cohort. Each session was a stepping stone, contributing to my growth in ways I never imagined. The coffee chats stand out in my memory. These were not just casual conversations. They were powerful discussions that ignited inspiration within me. We shared our challenges, our victories, and our dreams for the future. It was in these moments that I truly understood the strength of community and collaboration. This program has opened doors for me in various organizations I am a part of. I have learned not only to be a better advocate but also how to transition into organizing and building lasting connections. With each lesson, I not only gained knowledge but also the courage to elevate my voice and those of others. I graduated program knowing together, we can create a future where every woman feels empowered to thrive in any field she chooses.”

Jessenia Rivera Cohort 2 Alumna LEAP | [Connect with Jessenia on LinkedIn!](#)

Rank-and-File Member, IUOE Local 30 Communications Committee
Co-Chair, National Taskforce on Tradeswomen’s Issues

Thaiaisia Johnson



“The LEAP program helped me thoroughly understand how to intentionally advocate, organize community to build people power, and lobby for policy. Each session was very informative and better than the last. Session 5 was a master class on developing a campaign and utilizing communication tools. The information and tools shared in that session alone will prepare anyone who desires to change the community with all they need to know to actively get started. The members of my cohort truly gave me hope for the present and future. I am excited to exercise the community organizing and advocacy skills I developed to support the tenants in my program, PowHer®, and the Empire

State Child Care Campaign this upcoming legislative year. The LEAP program helped build my competence to confidently interact with our intimidating and complicated political system. It forces us to demand what we need or be neglected which can be discouraging. Fortunately, ‘LEAP provided me tools to keep up the good fight despite the turbulence experienced on the journey. It has been a privilege to learn in a program with such integrity. Celina was the perfect facilitator! She is a safe space and her teaching style calmed my nervous system. Her knowledge, wisdom, and experience made the content in every session comprehensive.”

Thaiaisia Johnson - New Destiny Housing Program Manager | [Connect with Thaiaisia!](#)

Sarah Bancone



“The LEAP Program has been a terrific experience for many reasons. First, I cannot speak highly enough of Celina Trowell, the program’s lead facilitator. Celina has extremely relevant, helpful knowledge as a local NYC advocate and community organizer with many years of experience.” LEAP is in touch with the cohorts’ need to meet other advocates by creating in-person, virtual, formal, and informal networking opportunities. Finally, LEAP has done a great job of

recognizing the cohort members' emotional needs in addition to technical advocacy skills by creating spaces to check-in and regulate our feelings about doing this vital work. Thank you to LEAP and PowHer® for your support in this program!”

Sarah Bancone, NYLAG Senior Paralegal - Member of PowHer® NY Equal Pay Committee

Ana B. Mendieta



“As someone who organizes and advocates for immigrants, the past six months have tested me deeply on both a personal and professional level. At times, participating in the cohort was emotionally heavy, as we created space to process the difficult realities unfolding around us. Yet it also offered a place to refocus—on our values, our power, and the concrete ways we can support our communities, no matter what is happening around us.

I’m proud of the growth I’ve experienced during this time and incredibly grateful for the connections I’ve built with the women in our cohort. I believe things happen when they’re meant to, and joining this program came at exactly the right moment. It reminded me that I’m not alone. Instead of falling into despair, I found myself moving forward with purpose, alongside others who are just as committed to advocacy and change.”

Ana B. Mendieta, Ed.D. Project Director, Blackstone Launchpad, Division of Advancement, Communications and External Relations | Bronx Community College | [Connect with Ana!](#)

Capstone Projects

Cohort members were asked to develop campaigns that would demonstrate skills and their understanding of key concepts. The assignment was to design and present a complete campaign strategy that highlighted the issues, challenges, goals, targets and strategy. Three capstone projects were presented at the closing session, and proudly fully reflected the learnings and growth of the individuals and teams.

Below you will find brief descriptions and links to the presentations:

“Equal Pay Campaign Pitch” Sarah Bancone and Nirmala Singh developed a campaign focused on pending New York City legislation on pay transparency and data reporting. They engaged the audience to promote the Black Women's Equal Pay social media blitz held on July 10th, and to take action to support the NYC proposed legislation.

[Presentation Link](#)

"Campaign to Reduce Wrongful ICE Detention: Know Your Rights" Ana Mendieta and Melissa Olivar developed a campaign based on the Babies in the Water parable, creatively reimagining the parable to reflect the realities of families and communities facing new, frightening immigration policies. They developed an outreach strategy to educate potential victims of ICE about their rights and what to do when face to face with immigration.

[Presentation Link](#)

“**Empire State Campaign for Childcare: Advocacy in Action**” campaign was developed by Jessenia Rivera, Stephanie Benjamin, Dee Davis and Thaisia Johnson. This communications campaign was based on interviews with three groups of women to learn about their specific needs for child care. The “targets” included low income women, survivors of intimate partner violence, and tradeswomen. Their campaign included recommendations to make childcare more accessible for these under-served groups.

[Presentation Link](#)

Advisor’s Corner: LEAP Advisory Group



“ At a time when it is often easier to conform, the PowHer team has established an institution and training environment dedicated to supporting young women who value freedom, equity, and integrity. Despite the program's relatively recent inception, the team consistently selects outstanding, dedicated, and innovative women. I am pleased to support PowHer and its graduates as they continue this timely and important work”. **Laura Harding, Esq.**, Social Impact Leader and Organizational Strategist

A Note from President & Founder



For years, the PowHer®NY team envisioned a project that would support young women's leadership and spread the word about inclusive gender justice. Thanks to the Amplify Her Foundation who invested in our vision, we were finally able to develop and launch LEAP! The response confirmed what we believed: young women, especially women of color, want and need a nurturing, stimulating space to grow their leadership skills. Like all of PowHer®NY’s work, this was a team effort by Celina Trowell, LEAP facilitator and organizer extraordinaire, with Elsa Weisinger, PowHer®NY Associate and Board President Mary Luke, and boosted by speakers and advisors who shared their wisdom and enthusiasm for the project. To all our cohort members, thank you for being part of PowHer®NY’s work and vision for a more equitable world. We are so impressed with you and your dedication to community, and we can't wait to see where your leadership journey takes you! **Bev Neufeld**, CEO and Founder, PowHer®NY.

A Special Thank You from Your Facilitator



Dear LEAP 2 Cohort,

Congratulations from the LEAP program to all of your accomplishments as dynamic leaders over the last several months. In many ways it feels just like yesterday that I recall meeting you all in interviews, bundled in coats and scarves. Some of you were shy, others uncertain, many were curious.

As the time went on and the seasons changed, we eventually traded our coats and scarves for blossoms and sunshine, and I had the joy of watching you trade shyness for confidence, uncertainty for discovery and self-investigation, and turn curiosity into creativity and innovation. I could not be more proud and humbled at the opportunity to witness and be a catalyst for your journey.

Thanks to each and every one of you for the knowledge, commitment and fortitude you brought into this program. There is no doubt in my mind that you all came into LEAP as natural born leaders. My hope is that the program has equipped you with a starter pack of tools, resources, and a network of peers and experts to continue to fortify your advocacy journey. With new confidence, I encourage you to make positive changes in the communities that you advocate for and serve.

As we officially close out this cohort, I want to thank the PowHer®New York team for having me as facilitator, and extend a special thank you to Elsa Weisinger who was an amazing partner through this entire process and who is an emerging powerhouse leader in every way. Additional gratitude and appreciation to the members of the Advisory Group members for your feedback, guidance and support.

Finally, I want to encourage you all to keep in touch with your peers and the PowHer®NY network. We are here for you and want to support your journeys through mentorships, recommendation letters, job leads, etc. Please reach out and stay connected with your amazing peers, the speakers, and of course myself ([I'm on LinkedIn!](#))

Celina Trowell, LEAP Facilitator

Building Community

Cohort 1 alumni show up to network and celebrate with Cohort 2



Closing Ceremony at Mercury Public Affairs
Office in New York City



Networking event at John Jay College
of Criminal Justice

Special thanks to the LEAP Advisory Group:

LaShawn Allen Muhammad, Central Brooklyn Economic Development Corporation
Deanne Braveman, Esq. Mercury Public Affairs
Jacqueline Ebanks, Nonprofit New York
Laura Harding, Esq., Social Impact Leader, Organizational Strategist
Professor Chaumtoli Huq, Esq, CUNY School of Law
Anita Teekah, Esq. Latino Justice
Deana Yu, Mayor’s Office of Economic Opportunity

We sincerely appreciate the support of the **Amplify Her Charitable Foundation** team, led by Marti Speranza Wong, Founder, Executive Director and President; Laura Risimini, Director of Grants, and Nicole Jakabscin, Program Manager.

Thank You!



Amplify Her & PowHer®NY team at the Equal Pay Day Rally, New York City Hall, March 2024

PowHer®New York (PowHer®NY) is a non-partisan, not-for-profit organization working to accelerate economic equality for New York women. Our inclusive statewide Network of 100+ organizations and dedicated individuals collaborate on a shared agenda which includes pay equity, caregiving, reproductive and housing justice, ending gender-based violence, and other critical issues impacting the lives of women and girls. Find us online at www.powherny.org or @PowHerNY. Contact Beverly Neufeld, President at info@PowHerNY.org