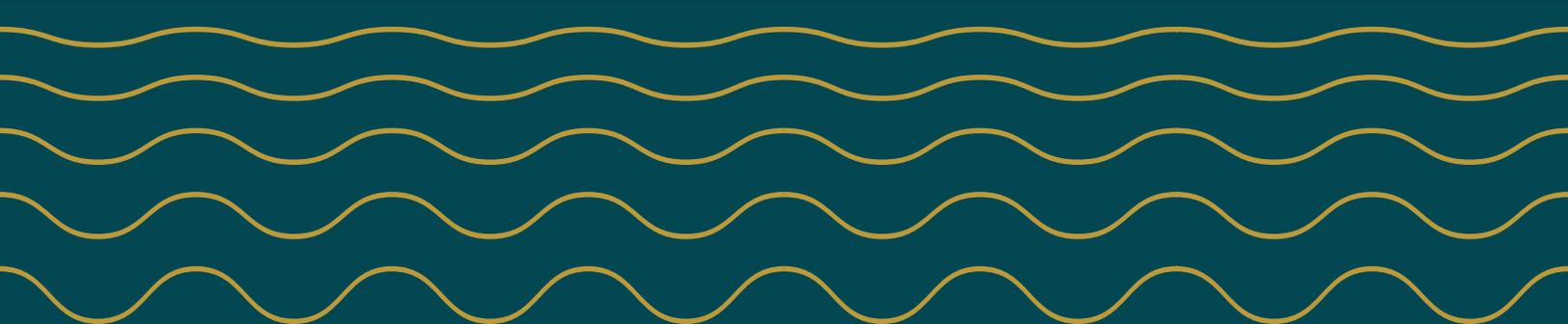


# Black Moms

Challenges and Potential



# Welcome Letter:

## from The Mom Project's Rooted Group

I didn't realize just how important it was to me, to belong, to be seen and heard - in my personal life, and especially in the workplace, where I give so much of myself - until May of 2020, when George Floyd was murdered by police in Minneapolis, and protests erupted all over the country, reigniting a movement to bring to light racial injustices that have prevailed far too long in America. As I struggled with grief, my then employer expected business as usual - for my day, and that of my fellow Black co-workers, to just go on, as if this very real, very traumatizing thing wasn't happening. It was beyond tough. And it was the first time I, a Black woman in Corporate America, who thought I'd perfected wearing my mask and the art of powering through, could not hide my fears. What kind of world was I raising my son in?

A few weeks later, I found myself interviewing at The Mom Project, and I remember vividly how honest my answers to interview questions around what I was looking for were. My view of what I wanted in the workplace had changed. I wanted to be somewhere where I could make a difference - for myself, my family, women, women of color, people of color.

And I'm so glad I'm here. During onboarding, I immediately signed up for the African-American Employee Resource Group, but I had no idea how it would change my life, personally and professionally. I was welcomed with open arms. I joined every meeting and felt incredibly moved by having a safe space, a support system, and a community to share the good and hard times with. Although I don't quite remember how leadership of this group fell into my lap, I do know that my co-chair Vonn and I were fiercely committed to driving participation, getting others involved, advocating for our peers, escalating concerns to leadership, and leading intentional and educational activities for ourselves and for the company. I even found community amongst leaders of other ERGs. And I wholly believe that in doing so I have thrived, and every day am becoming a better version of me.

I know now that this sense of belonging, support and psychological safety is fuel that can drive change, empower marginalized communities, help us navigate inequities and biases, and hopefully one day eliminate them. It starts with us, in those small spaces and groups, connecting with others, recognizing the brilliance in each other, and supporting one another. And for this reason I don't take this opportunity or my responsibilities lightly. Is it more work? Yes. Does it make the burdens we as Black moms and Black people in the workplace, carry any less exhausting? No. But somehow knowing we have a community and seeing the outpouring of support from allies at The Mom Project makes me feel like we are doing our part to create the workforce our ancestors dreamed of and I am helping open doors for my son and daughter.

Sincerely,

Tera Hudson

Director of Lifecycle Marketing | Rooted Co-chair



***“Communication is key. Being able to empathize and be understanding is going to go a very long way. When we’re doing ‘the work’, it’s important to understand that everybody has a story.”***

Women’s labor market participation has increased markedly as they re-enter the workforce post pandemic. But for Black women, these gains have been relatively unsteady, and many organizations continue to struggle to attract and retain this valuable segment of the workforce.

In this report, Werklabs explores the personal and professional drivers of Black moms’ access to economic opportunity and organizational satisfaction. For Black moms, home life and work life are intertwined in distinct and important ways. By highlighting the unique experiences of professional Black moms, this report provides a roadmap for organizations to better support this critical demographic.

Werklabs’ conversations with Black moms underscored the importance of cultivating authentic understanding of their experiences, both personally and professionally. Many reported struggling to be taken seriously in the workplace, feeling like they had to work harder than their non-Black colleagues to reach the same level of success, or feeling pressured to tone themselves down.

Black moms are looking for organizations that understand, support, and value them. In this report, Werklabs aims to improve understanding of the unique experiences and challenges Black moms experience as they balance family and career, ultimately helping organizations identify the best ways to retain this valuable part of the workforce.

Sincerely,  
Pam Cohen, PhD  
Chief Research & Analytics Officer  
*Werklabs & The Mom Project*

Georgia Anderson-Nilsson, PhD  
Senior Manager  
*Werklabs & The Mom Project*



# Methodology & Demographics

This report synthesizes the findings from both in-depth qualitative interviews and a large-scale quantitative survey. Werklabs conducted a series of 20-30 minute, 1:1 interviews in June 2022 with 18 Black moms. Werklabs uses an open-ended, semi-structured approach in conducting these interviews, which means that while the topic areas of intended interest are covered, the conversations are intentionally broad so that participants can discuss whatever matters most to them. This enables key themes to emerge organically, reducing potential interviewer bias.

The findings from these interviews helped inform the creation of the Nuances of Motherhood survey, which was fielded in September 2022 which garnered over 3400 responses and included 311 respondents who self-identified as Black or African American. In the survey, Werklabs asked respondents questions aimed at understanding the nuances of their personal and professional experiences as mothers, with a larger view toward identifying what organizations can do to create supportive work environments.

A rigorous quantitative analysis of survey results was then performed to evaluate the measurement model and assess which questionnaire items best “fit together.” This enabled Werklabs to (1) understand how both personal and professional factors impact respondents’ overall **access to opportunity**, and (2) define predictors of **organizational satisfaction** that ultimately impact outcomes such as retention and productivity.

The Nuances of Motherhood was fielded to The Mom Project Community and gathered more than 3400 responses, including 311 respondents who self-identified as Black or African-American.



42% are between 25-34 years of age.



73% have 1-2 children, while the remaining 27% have 3+ children.



73% are employed full-time, part-time, or on a contingent basis.



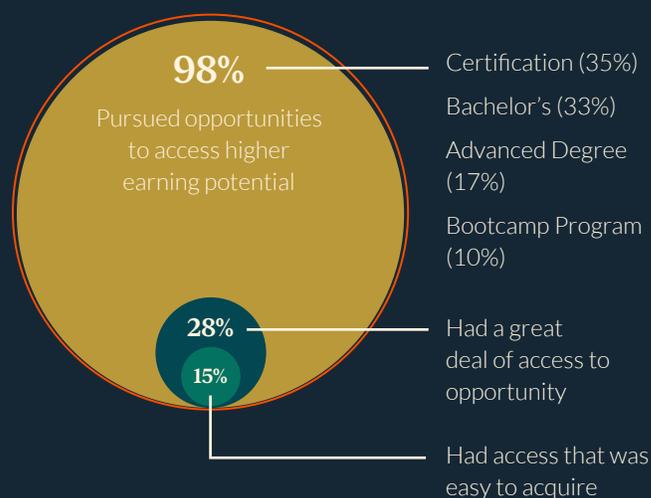
# Access to Opportunity

5 drivers in order of impact on Black moms' access to opportunity

Werklabs identified five factors, both personal and professional, that impact women's access to opportunity. Overall, Black moms report slightly lower levels than non-Black moms in terms of both **amount** of opportunity and **ease of access** to opportunity. While 28% of Black moms feel they have had a great deal of access to opportunity, only 15% report that this access has been easy to acquire - and 28% say it has not been at all easy.

In qualitative interviews, Black moms describe resources, tools, and education as barriers to accessing opportunities. They note an absence of exposure as well as a lack of generational wealth as means to unlock these factors. And, for those that are showing up and putting in the work, they often feel it takes more effort for them to establish their value and open new opportunities than for their non-Black peers. Some feel the need to invest in costly degrees that are difficult to pay for and pay off, which in turn limits their financial potential post degree and their ability to help their children access similar opportunities.

Despite these challenges, Black moms report that they are determined to accomplish their full potential. The vast majority have pursued opportunities to access greater economic earning potential.



# 5 Key Drivers

## 1.

### Professional Challenges

For Black moms, professional challenges have the strongest impact on access to opportunity. These include challenges such as having the time to build a professional network, pursuing growth and career advancement, and being excluded or overlooked for opportunities.

Many Black women discuss feeling that they are more likely to be perceived as 'having an attitude' or 'being difficult' no matter what they say or how they say it. As a result, there is sometimes a feeling of needing to tone down their presence and downplay their accomplishments.

“

*I've found myself in situations where I felt like I had to dull my shine... 'Oh, I've got this really great idea. But I don't know if I should share it.' Or 'oh, I think that management should know X, Y and Z but I'm afraid to be labeled as the black sheep.'"*

-Interviewed participant

---

Most Black moms say they find the following challenging:



Pursuing growth & career advancement (82%)



Proving yourself in the workplace among colleagues (60%)



Exclusion, missing out at work, or being overlooked for opportunities (68%)



Speaking up or having a voice in the workplace (58%)

---



# 2.

## Family Support

Family support is a critical aspect supporting greater access to economic opportunity. This means receiving support from others, including partners, siblings, parents, and friends, in navigating childcare and household duties.

Whether it's having a partner who shoulders childcare duties as needed, a parent who babysits during class or takes on daycare pick-up, or a friend who can be counted on to step in for last minute support, family support opens up the time and mental space for moms to pursue opportunities and unlock greater potential.

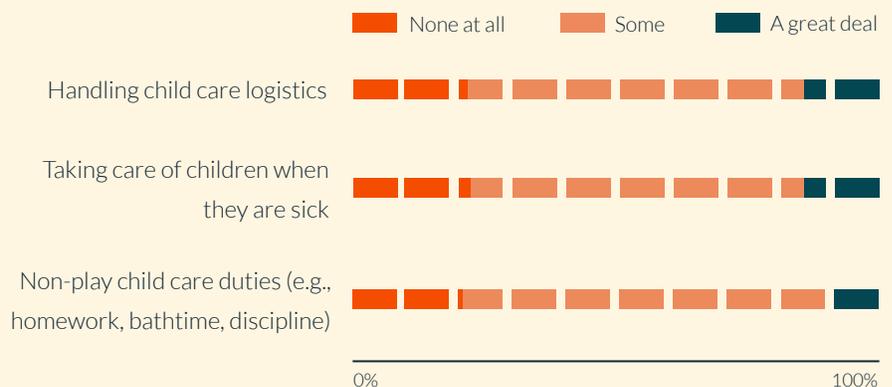
Even with family support, interviewed Black moms often describe facing trade-offs between their careers and their partner's career, as well as difficulty finding enough time in the day to devote to professional development alongside family responsibilities.

“

*My partner is present and helping, but his job also requires him to go into the office three days out of the week. We have looked at the cost of childcare and it is very expensive... Both of us are hoping to get a higher paying job so that we can do more for our daughter and not necessarily have to give our careers away.”*

-Interviewed participant

The majority of Black moms report they receive support in each of the following to some extent but not a great deal:



# 3.

## Financial Stressors

“

*I struggle with the student loan debt that I've acquired. As I'm paying these loans off and my kids are enrolling in school, I realize they're acquiring this debt. [I ask myself] 'Okay, how do you do this?'*

-Interviewed participant



Financial stressors significantly constrain access to economic opportunity for many moms. This includes budgeting and household finances, concerns around paying for child care, and worries surrounding job stability. One mom noted, *“The hardest challenge was sorting out finding, paying for and the hours served by childcare. Paying for childcare can take any extra money that you would make for working additional hours so you can*

*end up with less than you started!”* Quality child care continues to be hard to find and high cost for those with younger aged kids.

Many interviewed Black moms say they are working to break poverty cycles and create better lives with more opportunities for their children. They note that they aren't starting with any prior helpful resources or tools. They note that they aren't starting with the resources and tools, requiring them to invest in themselves to reach for opportunities, often resulting in debt and difficult tradeoffs in providing for their families.

Many Black moms say they find the following **extremely** challenging:



Quality child care cost (50%)



Budget & household finances (46%)



Quality child care search (48%)



Job stability (42%)



# 4.

## Goals & Priorities

Goals and priorities are an impactful, positive driver of access to economic opportunity for Black moms. This includes the extent to which moms prioritize striving for a better life for their children, teaching their children to navigate inequities and biases, and providing financial stability to their children. One mom said, *“I want to raise my kids as kind, generous people, who have the ability to stand up for what’s right or wrong, and the ability to sustain themselves.”*

As moms, Black women fill a lot of roles, stretching themselves to provide care and support for their children. Time is limited and there is a lot to do for any mom, but the challenges compound in cases where the women have added responsibility such as existing health conditions, or when women do not have support systems. In qualitative interviews, Black moms of older children often note that, while they don’t need to make it to daycare pick-up, they still need to be present in support of their older or grown children. Top of mind for them is often teaching older children to navigate inequities and biases.

“

*I haven’t worked for 4 years and I’ve recently been trying to look for at-home work to help my husband with the bills so he can get that load off his shoulders since he does also help with our boys. I want to do the same for him and not be financially stressed.”*

-Interviewed participant



80% of Black moms say they consider creating a better life with more opportunity for their children an **extremely** important goal.



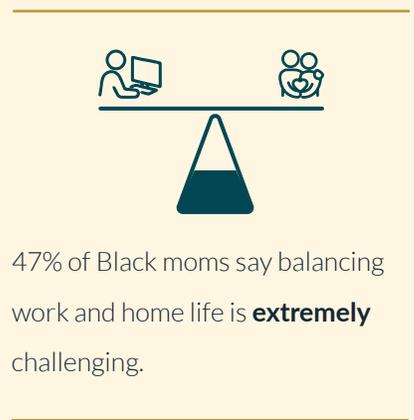
# 5.

## Personal Challenges

Personal challenges like finding time to take care of physical and mental health, pursuing hobbies, and asking for help constrain moms' ability to access and pursue economic opportunity. When faced with constant trade-offs between work, family, professional growth, and mental health, many Black

moms feel the need to prioritize their personal well-being before they can pursue opportunities for economic advancement.

Interviewed Black moms describe feeling that existing assumptions and narratives set expectations and impact interactions and outcomes. They discuss constant reminders of their strength as black women, always reinforcing an impossible standard that keeps them doing more for those around them with little benefit for themselves. Many also say they feel a hesitancy to ask for help or take time for themselves.



“

*The work-life balance is really real- the balance between work, motherhood and self-care time. It's busy for moms to have to participate in the activities of the children while still having enough energy to maintain the house and a full-time job.”*

-Interviewed participant



# Key Outcome

## Career Pivots

Access to economic opportunity has tangible implications for moms when it comes to unlocking economic earning potential. Greater access to economic opportunity is positively associated with having pursued a career pivot such as reskilling or changing career paths. When moms face fewer trade-offs between career and family, they are better positioned to pursue opportunities that help them realize their full potential.



3 out of 4 Black moms report having **pursued a career pivot**. The **top three reasons Black moms cite for pursuing a career pivot** are finding 1) greater economic opportunity, 2) greater flexibility in work, and 3) more enjoyable work.



# Organizational Satisfaction

7 drivers in order of impact on Black moms' organizational satisfaction



# 7 Key Drivers

## 1. Leadership

A sense of trust in organizational leadership is paramount to Black moms' workplace satisfaction. This means trusting that leadership genuinely cares about employee well-being, communicates transparently, and compensates employees fairly. A critical aspect of this driver is leadership that acts in ways that demonstrate support for and understanding of employee needs.

Black women often observe a disconnect in organizations where leaders at the high end of the pay scale who are established in their careers are making decisions, but are out of touch with the basic and aspirational needs and realities of their employee base.

“

*As a mother I've felt fully supported with my management team with time off I needed to take and transitioning back to the office. I've been fortunate enough to have leaders who have had children so they understand that taking time off to go to the doctor [for example] is not a choice. You have to go.*

-Interviewed participant

Among Black moms with high levels of satisfaction with their organizational leaders (above 8 on a 1-10 scale), workplace satisfaction is more than 130% higher compared to those with lower leadership scores (under 4 on a 1-10 scale).



# 2.

## Benefits

A competitive, comprehensive benefits package is a critical aspect of organizational satisfaction. Important benefits most often mentioned include paid parental leave, paid time off, and affordable healthcare.

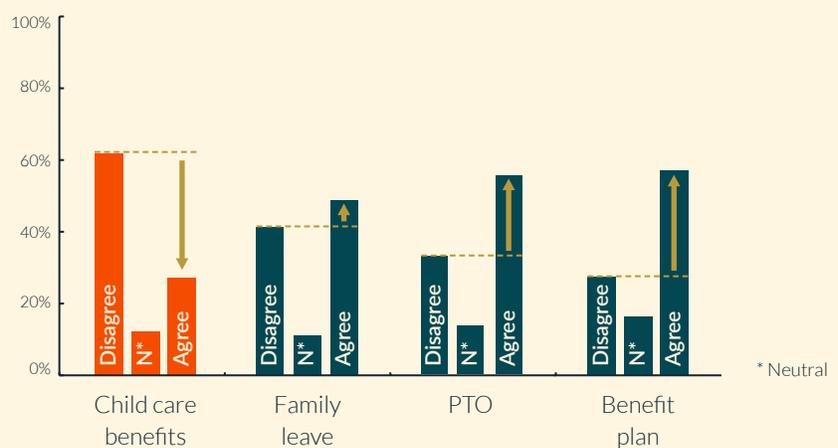
For Black moms, benefits are an essential part of workplace support. When competitive benefits are absent, it's significantly more difficult for employees to provide and care for their families. The importance of benefits is amplified for Black working moms that have all the pressures of motherhood as well as additional barriers to resources and opportunities. And, it's equally important to foster an environment that both encourages and allows for use of benefits, particularly time off.

“

*I think that setting flexible time policies that allow people to feel comfortable, for example if your kid is sick, allow you to not feel stressed out about having to take time off because you have either a bucket of time or unlimited time to pull from that you can use for that.”*

-Interviewed participant

According to surveyed Black moms, their organization provides competitive:



# 3.

## Managers

Managers play an important part in driving organizational satisfaction. The more employees feel their managers value their ideas, genuinely care about their well-being, are open to questions and concerns, communicate well, and provide useful feedback, the more satisfied they are in their roles. One mom noted, *“My manager deeply cares, and she has a desire to see us young mothers prosper in every aspect of our lives.”*

One of the important success factors Black moms describe is having an advocate within their organizations, often a manager or supervisor. Having somebody who believes in them, provides them with opportunities, and supports their growth and development can be critical for success. For organizations, ensuring that all employees have access to career support and mentorship opportunities is an important way to support Black women employees.

“

*In my career...it was always someone who saw my value, took a chance, gave me an opportunity, sponsored me and spoke about me in rooms that I wasn't even in and didn't know that I was even being spoken about.”*

-Interviewed participant

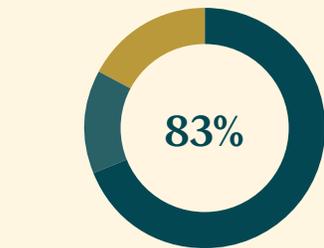


# 4.

## Accountability

For Black moms, working for an organization that not only values diversity and inclusion but also acts in ways that actually support those principles is an important driver of workplace satisfaction. This means providing clear structures and policies to report discrimination, actively supporting Employee Resource Groups (ERGs), and taking other actions that demonstrate an authentic

commitment to inclusion. One mom stated, *“The policies and desire are there from the organizational perspective, however they continue to hire the same type of people.”*



A majority of surveyed Black moms are not part of an ERG (83%), mainly because their organization does not offer one (69%).

“

*Black women whom I've seen in these [top] leadership positions, have had to do to bring 100% more to the table.”*

-Interviewed participant

Interviewed Black moms describe a feeling that organizations often hire diverse leadership in order to check a box, rather than as part of a genuine commitment to diversity and inclusion. On top of that, many feel that Black women have to work harder than others to prove themselves, especially to advance and succeed in leadership positions.



# 5.

## Flexibility

Flexibility in work is an important aspect of organizational satisfaction for all surveyed moms. Flexible work schedules and locations can significantly alleviate common child care challenges like coordinating daycare or school transportation logistics, taking care of sick children, and simply spending more time at home. Flexibility also means being able to step away from work throughout the day. One interviewed mom said, *“It’s not easy darting between being a mom and work. Sometimes I’m caught up in the middle to make a choice between work and family. I wish work could be a little flexible to give room for moms to balance work life, family and health.”*

Flexible hours are particularly important in enabling employees to gain experience and pursue professional development opportunities on a schedule that works with family obligations.

“

*It’s hard because mom is the default parent and it’s hard to work around the one already providing. Even if you obtain a degree, you then need experience. Experience is hard to get at night.”*

-Interviewed participant



**Only 21%** of Black moms **strongly agree** that they are able to work the number of hours needed to get the job done, rather than a set number of hours each day.

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# 6.

## Employee Resource Groups (ERGs)

Employee Resource Groups (ERGs) can provide spaces for connectivity around shared experiences and create opportunities to find common ground throughout an organization. Connections formed through these groups add levels of support and understanding to the workplace.

However, the experience can be diminished if the organization puts pressure on ERG members to represent their group, or for employees who feel less comfortable in group settings.

“

*Companies might have committees or different things specifically for people of color or black people, but sometimes I am hesitant to join because I don't want to get into having to be the spokesperson of why something is bad when we all should know why [it's] bad.”*

-Interviewed participant

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The vast majority - nearly 70% - of surveyed Black moms are not only not ERG members, their organization doesn't offer ERGs at all. Of those who are currently ERG members at their organizations,



# 7.

## Representation

Representation is not only about the extent to which employees perceive diversity in their managers, leaders, and teams. It is also about the degree to which organizations are viewed as inviting for diverse backgrounds. In interviews, Black moms often describe finding themselves as the only Black woman in a meeting, or on a team. Just showing up can be hard when there is no one else around that looks or relates to them, and the responsibility is on them to adjust, figure out how to navigate in these environments, and recover from any adversity they face.

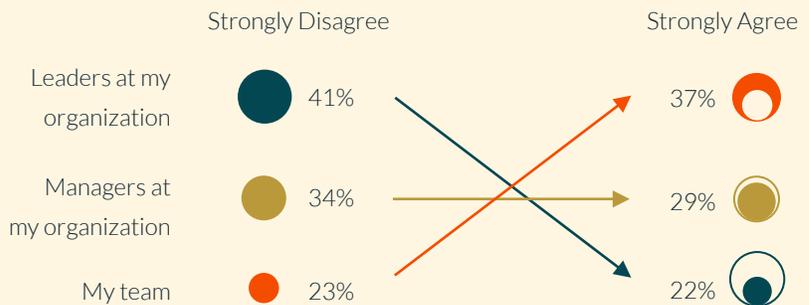
Some acknowledge that while diversity exists in their organizations, it tends to be spread out and is largely concentrated in lower levels of the organization chart. Several note that they do the work themselves to advance DE&I efforts internally because it's important to them. For a few, diversity at an organizational level is very limited in thinking and practice. In addition, many working Black moms say they feel a tremendous responsibility to go above and beyond to prove themselves and represent in a way that will open doors for other Black women.

“

*It's hard to be a black woman because representation is not there. When you don't have representation, you have a heavier crown because you take on the responsibility of being the bridge so that that representation can potentially come in later.”*

-Interviewed participant

**Black Moms' Perceptions of Diversity (in the order of highest to lowest %)**



# Key Outcomes

## Recommendation, Retention, and Productivity

Through predictive modeling, Werklabs developed an Organizational Satisfaction Index. Participants were asked to rate (1) their overall satisfaction with their current organization, (2) their likelihood of recommending their current employer as a great place to work, (3) their likelihood of remaining with their current employer, and (4) their productivity expectations. Thus, Werklabs is able to link the various drivers identified in this report to a variety of important outcomes.

**Why does this matter?** Werklabs' predictive modeling shows that employers who invest in key aspects of organizational satisfaction will see employees who stay longer, are more productive, and are more likely to recommend their organizations to fellow professionals.

The results of this report also demonstrate the particular importance of these key drivers of organizational satisfaction for Black moms. Organizations that make investments in the areas detailed in this report will be better positioned to recruit, retain, and support this crucial segment of the workforce.



# Conclusion

Particularly for moms, home life and work life are deeply intertwined. The ability to pursue opportunities that unlock greater economic potential is supported and constrained by the many responsibilities of parenthood and family. Black moms feel a particular pressure to be many things at once: to open doors for other Black women, to create and sustain opportunities for their children, to avoid playing into negative stereotypes, to ensure they are given full credit for their work, to be recognized and heard. For many, the power of an advocate within their organizations - of being believed in and supported - has provided critical career support.

When employers understand this, and implement policies and practices that meet moms where they are, they will see employees who are more productive, more loyal, and more likely to bring talented colleagues to their organizations.

Although family responsibilities are often viewed as a detriment to career development, this report emphasizes that parenthood is in fact a positive driver of greater economic opportunity for Black moms. Family support, as well as goals and priorities related to motherhood, drive Black moms to pursue opportunities and build the lives they want for themselves and their children.

## Want to learn more?

Visit us at [Werklabs.com](https://www.werklabs.com).

Have questions? Email [insights@](mailto:insights@werklabs.com)

[werklabs.com](https://www.werklabs.com)

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# Predictive Models

Werklabs' Nuances of Motherhood survey results formed the basis for an ongoing predictive model that identifies (1) the personal and professional factors that most impact respondents' access to opportunity; and (2) professionals' feelings and experiences related to workplace satisfaction. Then, through measurement and predictive analytics, the model defines the current and expected effect of a change in any of these characteristics on critical performance outcomes

Thus, Werklabs is able to measure how these characteristics change both in definition and importance as well as how they impact bottom line performance. This will allow employers to understand where to invest resources to generate the biggest returns on employee engagement and essential performance outcomes.

In future applications, this model can be adapted and customized by companies to create models segmented by industry, function, and role.



# Access to Opportunity: Model & Glossary

**Scores:** Current experiences on a 100-point scale

**Impact:** Expected effect of 1-point change in outcome score

**Outcome:** Opportunity Access Index and Performance Outcomes



\* An impact of 0 does not indicate a lack of importance, but rather that incremental changes to that driver are unlikely to have a further impact on the outcome. This is usually due to that driver being relatively stable/expected in comparison to other drivers, and helps orient where changes should be focused.

## Key Drivers

**Family Support:** the degree to which moms receive support from others in various aspects of child care and household responsibilities (e.g., handling child care logistics, preparing meals, and taking care of children when they are sick)

**Time & Pace:** moms' level of difficulty with workplace challenges, including pursuing growth and career advancement, dealing with exclusion and a lack of voice in the workplace, networking, and job searching

**Goals & Priorities:** the degree to which moms consider creating a better life with more opportunity for their children, teaching their children to navigate inequities and biases, and providing financial stability for their children to be goals they possess as a mom

**Financial Stressors:** the extent to which moms are concerned about paying for child care, budgeting and household finances, and job stability

**Personal Challenges:** moms' level of difficulty with challenges including prioritizing mental health, feeling pressured to do it all, feeling the need to always be strong and resilient, and asking for help and support from others

## Opportunity Access Index

(1) The amount of opportunity respondents have had access to in order to positively impact their economic earning potential and (2) the ease with which respondents have been able to access opportunity to positively impact economic earning potential

## Key Outcome

**Career Pivots:** whether or not moms have pursued a career pivot such as reskilling or changing career paths

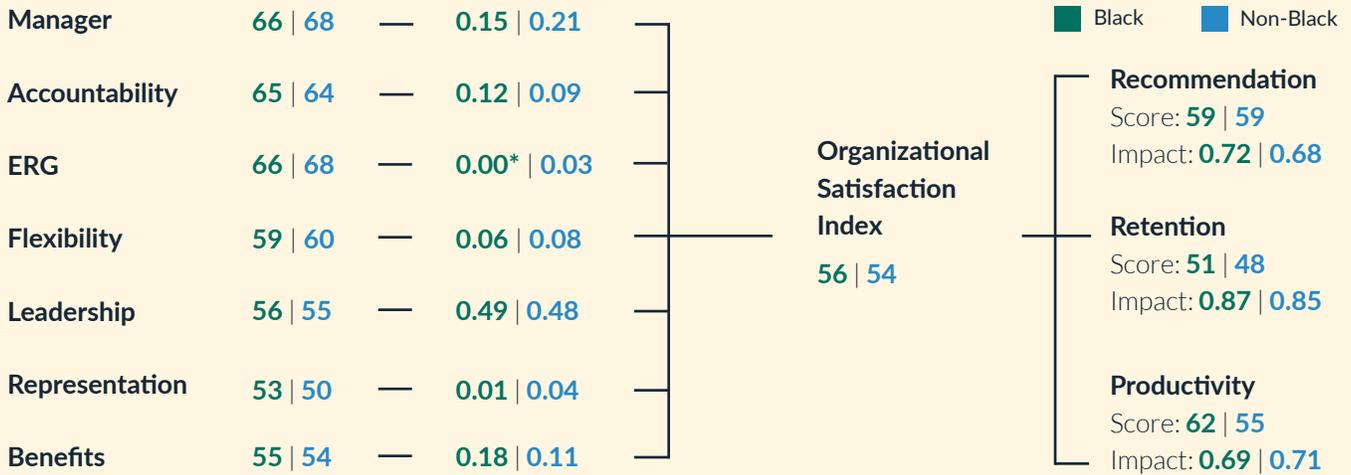


# Organizational Satisfaction: Model & Glossary

**Scores:** Current experiences on a 100-point scale

**Impact:** Expected effect of 1-point change in outcome score

**Outcome:** Organizational Satisfaction Index and Performance Outcomes



\* An impact of 0 does not indicate a lack of importance, but rather that incremental changes to that driver are unlikely to have a further impact on the outcome. This is usually due to that driver being relatively stable/expected in comparison to other drivers, and helps orient where changes should be focused.

## Key Drivers

**Leadership:** the degree to which moms receive support from others in various aspects of child care and household duties

**Employee Resource Groups:** the existence of employee resource groups that are supported by organizational leaders, provide helpful resources, foster a sense of belonging, and create opportunities for connection with other employees

**Managers:** the degree to which employees believe their managers genuinely care about their wellbeing, provide timely and useful feedback, value their ideas, communicate regularly, and are available for questions and concerns

**Flexibility:** employees' ability to work the number of hours needed to get the job done without a set number of hours, to work at times of the day of their choice, to work remotely, and to step away from work throughout the day as needed

**Representation:** the degree to which employees (1) see their teams, managers, and leaders as diverse, and (2) believe their organizations are inviting for people from diverse backgrounds to join

**Benefits:** the extent to which organizations provide competitive benefits (e.g., PTO, retirement plans, paid family leave)

**Accountability:** the extent to which employees believe their organizations are committed to being inclusive and equitable places to work, do not tolerate discrimination, and create clear structures and policies to report discrimination or harassment

## Organization Satisfaction Index

(1) Overall satisfaction with workplace experience, (2) the extent to which workplace experience compares to expectations, and (3) how workplace experience compares to ideal

## Outcomes

**Recommendation:** the likelihood of employees recommending their employer as a great place to work

**Retention:** the likelihood of remaining at their current employer in one year and three years' time

**Productivity:** the likelihood of employees being more productive in the next quarter and next year

