

# The Value Proposition of the Northwest Women's Leadership Academy

Stephanie Lucash, Deputy City Manager, Kenmore

AN OVERVIEW OF THE 2024 CAPSTONE PROJECT – A PARTNERSHIP BETWEEN THE WCMA AND UW EVANS SCHOOL (THANK YOU TO GRAD STUDENTS ROSE TAYLOR, JOHANNA MILLER, AND MELISSA BARTOLETTI)



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## Background

- The Northwest Women's Leadership Academy (NWWLA) was founded in 2018
- Mission to increase the number of women in local government leadership positions in Washington State
- Sponsored by the Washington City/County Management Association (WCMA)
- 168 individuals across 5 cohorts have completed the Academy; Cohort 6, with 36 participants, is underway now and will conclude in spring 2025
- Believed the Academy was making a difference but it was time to measure progress and show the value and impact of the Academy through data
- In 2024, the WCMA President and Vice President partnered with three University of Washington graduate students to prove the value proposition of the Academy
  - Collected data
  - Gathered testimonials and stories
  - Received feedback to improve the program for future cohorts



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## Surveys



## Interviews



## Focus Groups



# Methods

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Figure 1: Cohorts 1-4 Response Rate

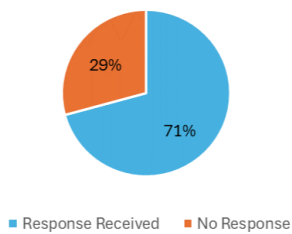
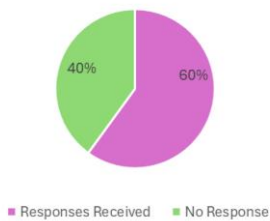


Figure 2: Cohort 5 Response Rate

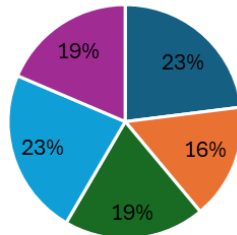


## Survey Overview

- Split into two surveys
  - One for Cohorts 1-4
  - One for Cohort 5
- Found updated contact info for almost all graduates
- Survey 1 sent out to 130 people from Cohorts 1-4
  - 92 responses received
  - Response rate of **70.8%**
- Survey 2 sent to 35 individuals in Cohort 5
  - 21 responses received
  - Response rate of **60%**
- Given two weeks to complete

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Overall Survey Responses



■ Cohort 1 (2018-2019) ■ Cohort 2 (2019-2021) ■ Cohort 3 (2021-2022)  
■ Cohort 4 (2022-2023) ■ Cohort 5 (2023-2024)

## Survey Responses

Responses were fairly evenly split between all five cohorts

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## Survey Questions

- Asked a mix of multiple choice, open response, and strongly agree to strongly disagree ratings questions
- Main themes and information collected:
  - Current/past job title, organization, and salary
  - What they gained from the Academy
  - Curriculum – most helpful and least helpful sessions
  - Networking and mentorship
  - Barriers to full Academy participation (time, money, life events, etc.)
  - Things that participants would change
  - Willingness to participate in interviews/focus groups
  - Interest in greater future involvement with the Academy

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# Interviews



Conducted 16 semi-structured interviews over Zoom or Microsoft Teams from those who agreed to participate from the survey



Interviews were recorded with the consent of the interviewee



Interviewees were selected based on their cohort, location, and input from the clients



Scheduled to take approximately 15-30 minutes



Recordings were transcribed and coded

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# Focus Groups



Conducted two focus groups over Microsoft Teams

- Focus Group 1 had 4 participants
- Focus Group 2 had 7 participants



Scheduled for approximately one hour



Focus groups were not recorded



Themes

- Primary Motivation for Joining the Program
- Statewide Involvement
- Level 1 vs Level 2 Curriculum

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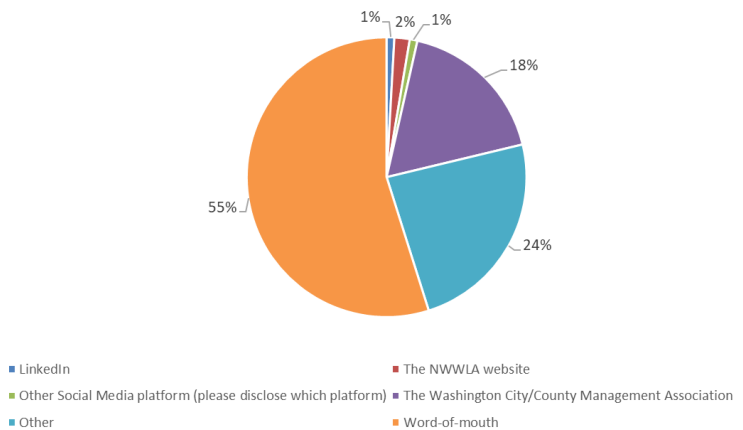
# Findings

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## Recruitment

- Most respondents learned about the Academy via word-of-mouth
- Supervisors or program alumni were the most common word-of-mouth sources
- Having a personal or professional connection encourage them to apply was very influential for several interviewees and focus group participants

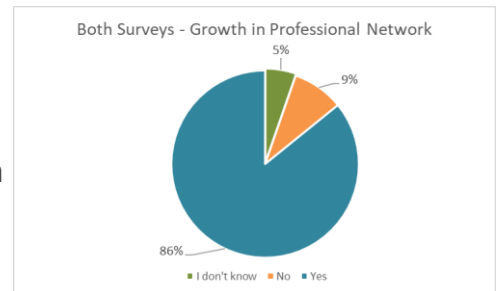
Both Surveys - How did you first hear about the NWWLA?



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# Networking

- Networking is one of the strongest benefits of NWWLA participation
- 86% of survey respondents saw their professional network grow
- Participants from outside the Puget Sound area did not feel they gained as much from the networking opportunities
- Many expressed a desire for more opportunities to stay connected with the program after graduation



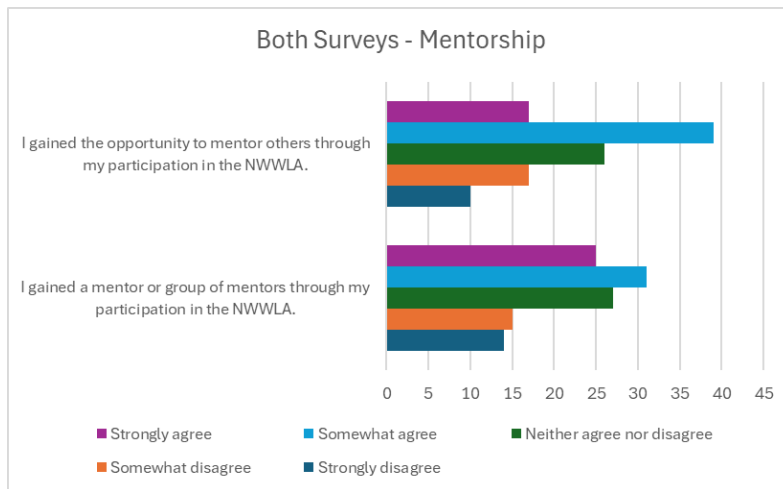
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# Academy Format

- The Academy is currently mostly online, with an initial overnight kickoff retreat in the fall and in-person graduation in the spring
- Online sessions take place on Friday mornings from October to March
- Consensus across all five cohorts is desire for more in-person networking opportunities
- Multiple interviewees suggested a mid-way point meet up
- Two interviewees thought it was more valuable to be able to have people from all over the state participate versus having more in-person events

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## Mentoring



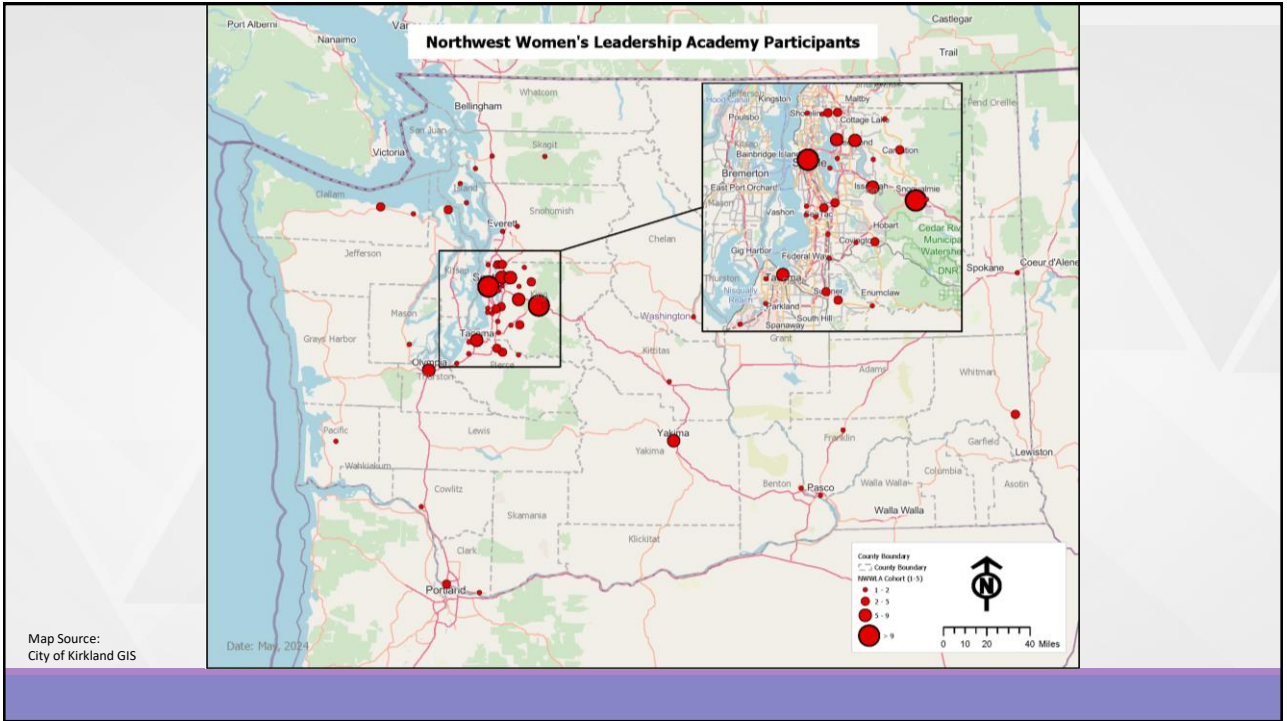
- Many survey respondents had positive outcomes gaining a mentor
- Mentoring was discussed by 6 of the 16 interview participants, most often in the context of expressing satisfaction with having mentored others during their time as a NWWLA participant
- The participants of one focus group discussed how they would have liked to have seen a more formal effort from the Academy to connect mentors with mentees

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## Statewide Participation

- 14 out of 113, or 12.3%, survey respondents worked for an organization outside of the Central Puget Sound region
- Respondents voiced concerns about the program not feeling accessible to those living in Eastern/Central WA
- Sentiments of it feeling difficult to network when you're located outside of the Central Puget Sound region
- The barrier of having to travel far was brought up in five surveys, four interviews, and one of the focus groups

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## Small Groups

- Cohorts 2-5 had a small group as part of their Academy experience
- Some of the closest connections forged by Academy participants were made through the small groups
- However, many participants expressed a wish for more opportunities to connect with the other cohort members as well
- Some also expressed that they wished the members of their small groups were from a similar geographic region as them
- The surveys indicate that participants graduate with the intention of staying connected with their small group members, but start to fail to do so over time

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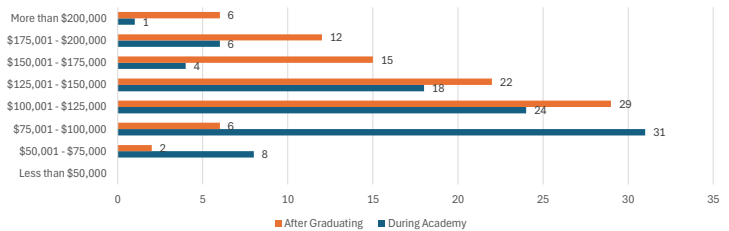
- 51% of respondents had received a promotion since graduating from the Academy
- More than 1/3 of respondents reported an increase in salary post-Academy

## Promotions and Salary Increases

Survey 1 - Promotion Rate Attributed to Academy



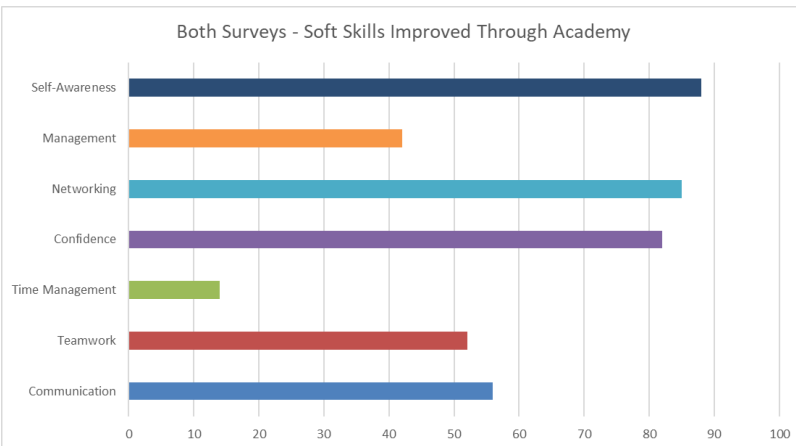
Survey 1 - Salary Comparison During and Post Academy



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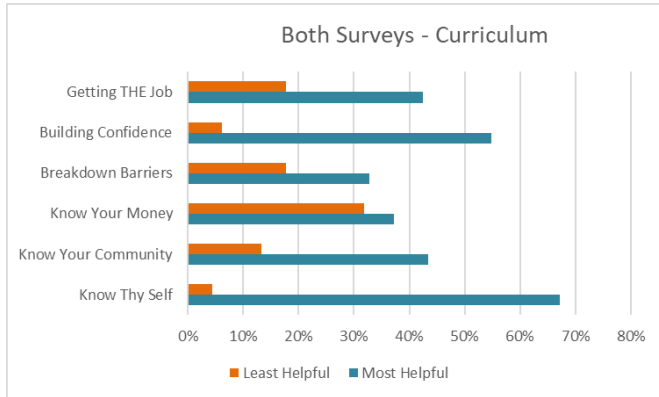
## Self Awareness, Networking, and Confidence

Both Surveys - Soft Skills Improved Through Academy



Respondents shared that self-awareness, networking, and confidence were the top soft skills improved through their Academy experience

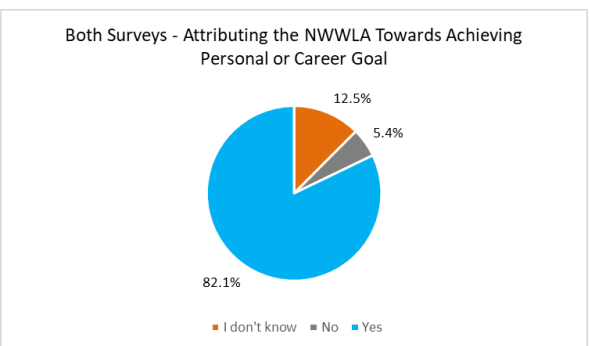
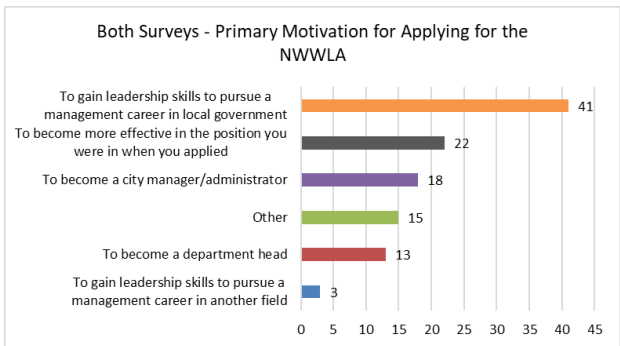
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# Curriculum

Know Thy Self and Building Confidence were reported as the most helpful sessions

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# Motivation and Achieving Goals

- 41 respondents were motivated to gain leadership skills to pursue a management position
- 82% of respondents reported the NWWLA helped them achieve a personal or career goal

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# Testimonials

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"With renewed confidence, I embarked on a journey to lead and support my team through challenging and uncertain times. I found that by leveraging my strengths, I could inspire others to excel and overcome obstacles."

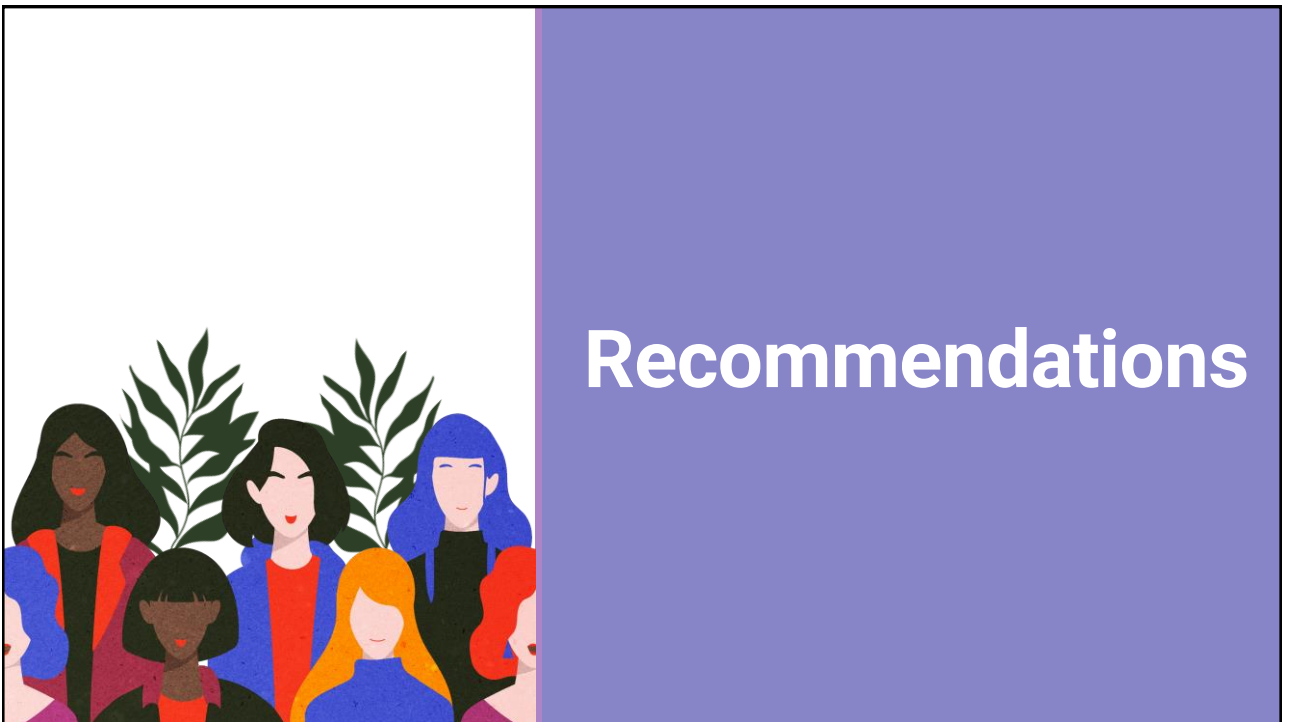
-*Johanna Bailey (Cohort 1)*

"This experience has given me the confidence to go for different jobs, positions, or career paths that I wouldn't have otherwise thought were possible."

-*Aubry Bright (Cohort 3)*

"Too often we hesitate, not knowing if we have the skills and ability to do that next job. The Academy not only provides an opportunity to learn what that next step can entail, but also connects you with amazing public service professionals leaders that provide you a broader perspective and hands-on tips to implement in your career today."

-*Jen Davis Hayes (Cohort 3)*



# Priority Recommendations



## Systematically create mentor/mentee pairings between the current cohort members and past graduates

Ensures that mentors and mentees are good matches in terms of experience levels, geographic location, and career paths



## Host Lunch and Learn events to promote the Academy

Advertise on the NWWLA website, social media, and the AWC newsletters



## Split the academy into two tracks

One for those seeking the "top job"  
One for those seeking a managerial or director position

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# Additional Recommendations



## Explore a paid alumni membership

Include a job board for members to share postings while building a budget to host more events



## Construct the small groups diversely

Ensure there are no groups with people from the same organization to allow members to diversify their networks



## Host alumni engagement events

Structure like the retreats and rotate the location around Washington State



## Create a more robust website

Include an overview of the curriculum, upcoming events, and testimonials

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# Exciting Opportunity!

## ***Building Resilient Local Governments Certificate Program***

- Partnership between University of Washington Evans School and Washington City/County Management Association
- First cohort will launch in January 2025
- Designed to equip local government officials with the knowledge, skills, and tools to build organizational resilience and respond to increasingly complex challenges
- All AWC members are eligible to participate - both elected officials and staff**
- Standalone graduate certificate or can transfer credits to a Master of Public Administration degree
- Applications being accepted now – final deadline is December 30<sup>th</sup>  
<https://evans.uw.edu/programs/graduate-certificate-programs/building-resilient-local-governments/>



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# Questions

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