



Alliance for Girls' 5th Annual Conference: *Together We Rise* Top Five Takeaways



On Tuesday, May 23, 2017, more than 400 girls' champions, including electeds, directors of girls' organizations and students, from across the country convened in Oakland for a day of learning and solidarity. Attendees hailed from the San Francisco Bay Area and Southern California, Florida, Maryland, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Tennessee and Washington, DC.

The conference was a success! 95% of attendees agreed or strongly agreed that what they learned at the conference will help them be a stronger champion for girls in their organizations and in their lives, and 98% agreed or strongly agreed that they are glad they attended the conference.

Top 5 takeaways from the day below.

1. Girls are the experts of their own experiences.

As Kalisha Dessources, Director of the National Collaborative of Young Women's Initiatives, said in her morning keynote, girls' advocates are brilliant, passionate, well-trained and well-educated, but they are not the experts. Girls are the experts of their own lived experiences and know what they need best. As girls' advocates, our job is to sit down, hush up and let the girls speak. Their needs and wants may not align with ours, and that's okay. Our job is to aid them and provide the resources they need to rise. GirlTalk speakers Kiah

Killens and Mikaela Galvis-Venegas were clear examples of this, who shared their respective stories and spoke to their leadership in creating spaces for girls of color and protecting the rights of Native Americans at Standing Rock, respectively.

2. "Nothing about us without us."

As expressed in the panel, "Gender Justice: Inclusive Movement Building," and throughout the conference, racial justice, disability justice, gender justice, immigrant rights and LGBTQ rights are inextricably connected, and we cannot succeed in achieving equity for one without fighting for equity for all. Girls and women from these populations are the experts of their experiences and their voices need to be amplified. Start by creating a space where we can think about these issues. Actively outreach to girls and women from marginalized communities and invite them to share their entire stories (without tokenizing them). Create an environment, which includes making spaces accessible, in which they can be their full selves. Include them in planning sessions and find out where the gaps are. The process may be messy and we may not have all the answers initially, but we have to start somewhere.

3. Incorporate practices that facilitate healing opportunities for girls and for leaders.

As leaders, we are often focused on the external: actions, products and quantifiable successes. However, we must address what comes up internally for us before we can move forward in our lives, particularly for those of us who have experienced trauma. In the session, "Reimagining Leadership: Starting with Ourselves," participants explored tools to manage self-care and well-being. Start by creating conditions that allow you to be present - relax and settle the mind, taking note of all your thoughts. Choose the thoughts that serve you and let go of those that don't. Practice self-compassion - be kind to yourself and your thoughts and have the desire to eliminate suffering. Create your own maintenance plan that addresses the following:

- What am I like when I'm well?
- What are my daily to-do's? What are my optional to-do's?
- What are my triggers? What are early warning signs?
- Identify supporters who know these warning signs and have a detailed plan of action that includes what medications you can or can't take.

Use these tools to teach girls how to direct their own self-care and well-being.

4. Passing pro-girl policies and legislation involves 1) encouraging more girls and young women to organize and meet with local officials, 2) utilizing creative strategies to engage the community and electeds and 3) electing more women of color to office.

The dramatic underrepresentation of women in political leadership has serious consequences for girls and women, and for society at large. Speakers during “The Future is Female: Women in Public Policy” panel outlined strategies for passing and defending pro-girl policies.

- Connect girls and young women to organizations like [IGNITE](#) (and share [this video](#)). Encourage them to organize and meet with local representatives (in city council, the local school board, etc.) to share their personal stories and talk about issues that matter to them. Electeds are interested in hearing from young people.
- Use creative strategies to engage the community and electeds:
 - Above all, organize. Organize a group to meet with officials and get involved in organizations that have larger policy goals (like [Stronger California](#)).
 - Find interesting allies - well-known figures and even comedians!
 - Call your representatives and write letters of support.
 - Use research and statistics to prove why an issue matters locally.
 - Use polls and petitions to show public support.
 - Promote via local newspapers, social media, and viral videos.
- Women of color are more likely to support pro-girl policies, but only represent 4% of those in Congress. When they do run, they face challenges in the primaries more than anyone else. Support their candidacies early on by declaring your support (as organizations) and/or giving to their campaigns.

In the words of Aimee Allison of Democracy in Color, it's time for us to envision and think broadly about what “She the People” would look like!

5. Cultural strategy is essential to any social movement.

In Eloveate CEO Anasa Troutman's afternoon session, "Culture Shift: Using Art to Transform," she pointed out that there is no social movement that does not have a corresponding cultural movement - songs, books, art, etc. Cultural strategy (i.e. strategically integrating art) is essential to any social movement. If you want to shift public policy and community practices, you have to shift community values by changing the hearts and minds of people. Conversely, if you change culture without changing core values, it will revert back. Some strategies:

- **Starting conversations:** People who were previously not open to an idea often see a film or read a book that touches them. That is your window of time to start a conversation with them.
- **Interrupting a dominant narrative:** We can use our stories to interrupting a dominant narrative and start a new one. Use these questions:
 - What do you want to disrupt?
 - What is your vision?
 - What is the result?
 - What's in the way?