

Zevin Asset Management, LLC

PIONEERS IN SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE INVESTING

Investors “Take the Lead” on Advocating for Gender Equality



In the wake of the #MeToo campaign, in a year when women still fight tirelessly to close the gender pay gap, and under an administration that clearly does not prioritize women’s health issues, it’s a pressing moment to advocate for gender equality. On November 14th Zevin Asset Management will team up with Women Investing for a Sustainable Economy (WISE) to discuss how investors can empower women through advocacy and more thoughtful capital allocation. On that day, we will participate in an inaugural nation-wide “Take the Lead” event led by its namesake organization in New York. Take the Lead has [charged itself with the ambitious goal](#) of reaching gender parity for women in leadership positions across all sectors by 2025.¹

That kind of gender justice would be a revolution. Take The Lead’s goal of leadership parity exceeds any of the existing strategies outlined by the World Economic Forum to close global gender gaps in education, health, political empowerment, and economic participation. In fact, the World Economic Forum has concluded that [it will take 170 years](#) for women to be equal to men on these four measures.² If we hope to shorten that timeline, it will take all of our efforts. On Take the Lead Day, Zevin Asset Management and WISE will highlight the special responsibilities that investors have in helping women take their fair and equal share of the economy

As a socially responsible investment firm, Zevin Asset Management is not alone in advocating for gender and racial equality in its investment portfolios. Pursuing challenging, high-level engagement on gender justice with portfolio companies is one lever we pull to align our clients’ investments with gender advancement. The Criterion Institute [outlines three tools we can use as a society](#) to advance the economic status of women by using a gender lens: granting women access to capital, supporting products and services that benefit women, and promoting gender equity in the workplace.³

Take the Lead as Lenders

Access to capital has long been difficult for women-owned and -led businesses. “[Decades of research \[have\] documented large gaps between women and men in accessing capital](#) — from the ranks of household businesses seeking micro-lending to female entrepreneurs with scalable business models seeking venture funding.”⁴ Lenders must provide much-needed capital, whether through the community development financial institutions (CDFIs) that focus on lending to female business owners or by individuals helping to seed the venture fund of a female friend in their network. We, as women and investors, can have an impact on providing opportunity where little currently exists.

Take the Lead as Consumers

Many of us were disappointed with the outcome of last year’s election, but I remind myself that I get to vote every day with the way I spend my money. If you are interested in using your consumer dollars to advance women’s equality you can do so daily by making a conscious decision to support your local female-owned

¹ <https://www.taketheleadwomen.com/blog/power-topia-join-take-the-lead-day-moving-women-leaders-to-gender-parity/>

² https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2017/01/31/it-will-take-170-years-for-women-to-be-equal-to-men-under-current-conditions-study-says/?utm_term=.84f5dd401195

³ <https://criterioninstitute.org/gender-work/a-gender-lens/>

⁴ <https://criterioninstitute.org/gender-work/a-gender-lens/>

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business. This helps you transition from being an ordinary consumer into being a local patron. You can also choose to buy services and products that specifically meet the needs of women. [The Criterion Institute states that there is a:](#)

“...wide range of business models selling products that range from reproductive/maternal health innovations to daycare services, from water wheels to money management training. In general, investments revealed through this lens respond to a need, whether biologically or socially driven, that is particularly unique to female consumers. In meeting this need, these businesses improve the condition of women by both reducing burdens placed on women and empowering women – ultimately, fostering fuller social participation and productivity amongst the women of the world.”⁵

Take the Lead as Investors

Lastly, some of us have the good fortune to have investment portfolios, providing the opportunity to align our assets with our values. There are those who invest specifically with a gender lens like the Pax Global Women’s Equality Fund and State Street Global Advisor’s SHE Fund. These leaders in the gender lens investing space seek public companies that adhere to a certain standard of gender equity in the workplace. There are also investors like Zevin Asset Management, investing on behalf of our clients, and using our voices as shareholders to advocate for gender equality and change the practices of the companies we invest in. Over the past year our work has included fighting for gender diversity at the board level, putting a focus on [gender and racial equality](#) in the tech sector, and pushing for [equal and ample paid family leave](#) for all parents, whether female or male, biological or adoptive. By screening or advocating for gender equality, investors have a unique role they can play in helping achieve gender equity.

Next week Zevin Asset Management and WISE join countless other voices to help promote, empower, and amplify the role of women in our economy. Please join us at our Boston event to share your ideas or look for our recorded session on [our YouTube channel](#) to hear how investors seek to help achieve gender equity ahead of schedule. And join us at www.medium.com/zevin-views for future impact investing updates.

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⁵ <https://criterioninstitute.org/gender-work/a-gender-lens/>