

LEAP: Leaders for Equity, Advocacy, and Progress is PowHer®New York’s new 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.

Welcome to our first LEAP Newsletter, created by LEAP Facilitator Celina Trowel! Keep reading to **get to know a LEAP 2024 cohort alumni, see our 2024 LEAP Year in Review, hear from a member of our LEAP Advisory Team, and more.**

First Year In Review



LEAP 2024 Inaugural Graduating cohort. Location partners - Welcome to Chinatown- The Hub

In 2024, PowHer® New York launched its inaugural leadership development program, focused on women in advocacy. Through monthly session over the span of six months, a diverse group of women engaged in skill building, knowledge sharing and networking that spanned across various areas of advocacy:

Session 1: Introductions & Objectives

brought together the LEAP cohort for the first time, in person. 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

explored the fundamental framework of advocacy and its influence on socio-political policy. Na'ilah Amaru, an accomplished Advocacy & Policy Strategist, introduced the case study, "Let NY Vote," a nonpartisan, statewide coalition

working to make voting more accessible, secure, & equitable for New York voters.

Session 3: Communications to Create Impact featured communications experts Deanne Braveman and Sasha Ahuja. The cohort explored how to create effective messaging to various target audiences, and assess different communication strategies and tactics to move the target audience to action.

Session 4: Community Engagement and Activation explored base-building and tools of activation for advocacy. Environmental Justice Advocate and Energy & Decarbonization Strategist Shii-Anna Mudie presented the case study of Brownsville Green Justice, a grassroots community led collective of residents in East Brooklyn, calling for remedial action in response to the expansion of fracked gas infrastructure in Black, Brown and poor communities.

Session 5: Flip the Switch, PowHer® the Vote focused on PowHer®NY's **PowHer® The Vote** program, a nonpartisan election action series.

The cohort had the opportunity to strategize how they could increase civic engagement in their communities, and how they could support the passage of the New York Equal Rights Amendment (Prop 1).

Session 6: Relationship Building in NYC, Albany, and the Federal Level, the final program session, focused the LEAP Cohort 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.

LEAP Closing Ceremony

The 2024 LEAP cohort came together for a closing ceremony, celebrating the skills and connections they built over the 6 month program.

Special thanks to PowHer®NY's LEAP team - Celina Trowell, Facilitator; Elsa Weisinger, Program Associate; and Mary M. Luke, Board Chair - for making this new project, supported by the Amplify Her Foundation, a great success!

LEAP ALUMNI HIGHLIGHT

Get to know LEAP 2024 Alumni Dani Lopez



Where did you begin your advocacy journey?

One of my earliest memories of advocacy is walking with my incredible mom and little brother in **the Brides March with a group from Nuevo Amanecer at the Dominican Women's Development Center (DWDC) in Washington Heights when I was 9 or 10.**

To see all these women in white marching through the streets of Washington Heights, bravely taking up space and demanding greater supports and resources for DV prevention was awe-inspiring yet painful in realizing how much more common it is. **So many women and children are trapped in these situations because we don't have the financial independence or support to leave - this was certainly our case.** Nuevo Amanecer/DWDC and North Manhattan Improvement Corporation (MNIC) got us access to crucial benefits like SNAP and helped my mom secure a union job (shoutout

to 1199!) and low income housing in The Bronx by the time I was 11. The impact was incredible but we needed more support - especially with food access. **I learned how to navigate systems but it was time-consuming and dehumanizing and those experiences activated me to improve our benefits systems.**

What is the current area of advocacy you are focused on?

As cofounder of Lulo, I'm focused on increasing access and retention in the federal Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children - or WIC. WIC provides eligible children under 5 and pregnant people over \$1000 a year and nutrition + lactation counseling and referrals. WIC is the most impactful and cost-effective federal benefit program with impacts like reductions in maternal and infant mortality and improved cognitive development.

Yet only 53% of those eligible participants in part due to the difficulty of getting WIC food. Each state mandates the brand, flavor, and size of WIC items. It's convoluted so **families leave nearly 40% of benefits behind** - over \$1 billion federal dollars that doesn't make it to families tables or local economies.

We built the free Lulo app to match families to WIC-eligible food to increase redemption and connect resources like healthy recipes and diaper banks. Since launching in September, over 1700 WIC families in NYS are using Lulo, with 36% in Spanish.

I'm particularly excited about the ability to leverage Lulo's data on WIC utilization to help government and community organizations improve service delivery and access to WIC and strengthen existing advocacy efforts at the local and state levels.

What was a skill or moment from the LEAP Program that stuck with you?

The Community Engagement and Activation session on Brownsville Green Justice with Shii-Anna Mudie and Celina Trowell stands out to me as both deeply engaging and profoundly important. A common misconception I often encounter when discussing advocacy and activism is the belief that meaningful involvement requires direct engagement in politics or government. I hear that a lot from folks with more technical backgrounds—whether in sciences, technology, or complex regulatory fields—who sometimes feel disconnected or that they lack something valuable to offer.

A key through-line in LEAP is the idea that advocacy can take many forms, operate on different levels, and ultimately succeed through collaboration and coalition-building. Shii-Anna and Celina exemplify this by blending technical expertise with deeply rooted community engagement. Someone who might not see their value as an accountant could bring critical insights to uncover malfeasance in contracts impacting communities.

Shii-Anna and Celina's combination of technical skills with community involvement, achieved accountability and action with Brownsville Green Justice, presenting an incredible model of effective advocacy that bridges multiple stakeholders. It's a reminder that everyone has something unique to contribute to advocacy when we work together intentionally and strategically.

How can folks get involved or learn more about your advocacy?

We'd love support in sharing Lulo with your networks—whether it's moms, colleagues, or friends in maternal health, early childhood, or food access spaces. Help us get Lulo and our free resources into the hands of as many families in New York State as possible.

Connect with Dani!

[Follow on LinkedIn](#) | [Join the Lulo Movement to empower WIC families to access healthy food and bring more federal dollars into our local economies](#)

LEAPing into 2025! First session: February 4th!

- Intensive Sessions open to alumni and new cohort
- Monthly Coffee Chats/Study Groups
- More Networking and In Person Advocacy
- Forging Connections with Mentoring & Buddies



Advisor's Corner



"Leadership and advocacy programs like LEAP are vital for young women leaders of color to claim their space in shaping equitable systems. These programs provide the tools, resources, and networks necessary to dismantle barriers and create pathways for inclusive decision-making" - LEAP Advisor La'Shawn Allen Muhammad

Special thanks to our esteemed Advisory Team:

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

Sip N Social

The cohort met for an evening of community, networking and conversation. Location partners: The Gay Center.



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