



Women's Innovation & Narrative Lab (WIN)

Waterloo Economic Mobility Hub + Corridor Expansion
Transforming Workplace Narratives for Women in Northeast Iowa

Women across Northeast Iowa face workplace barriers that are both structural and narrative in nature. These barriers persist not only because of unequal policies or limited opportunities, but because of deeply embedded stories about who is suited to lead, whose labor is valued, and what strong leadership looks like. Research confirms that bias significantly interferes with women's ability to thrive and that women are judged differently for identical leadership behaviors.

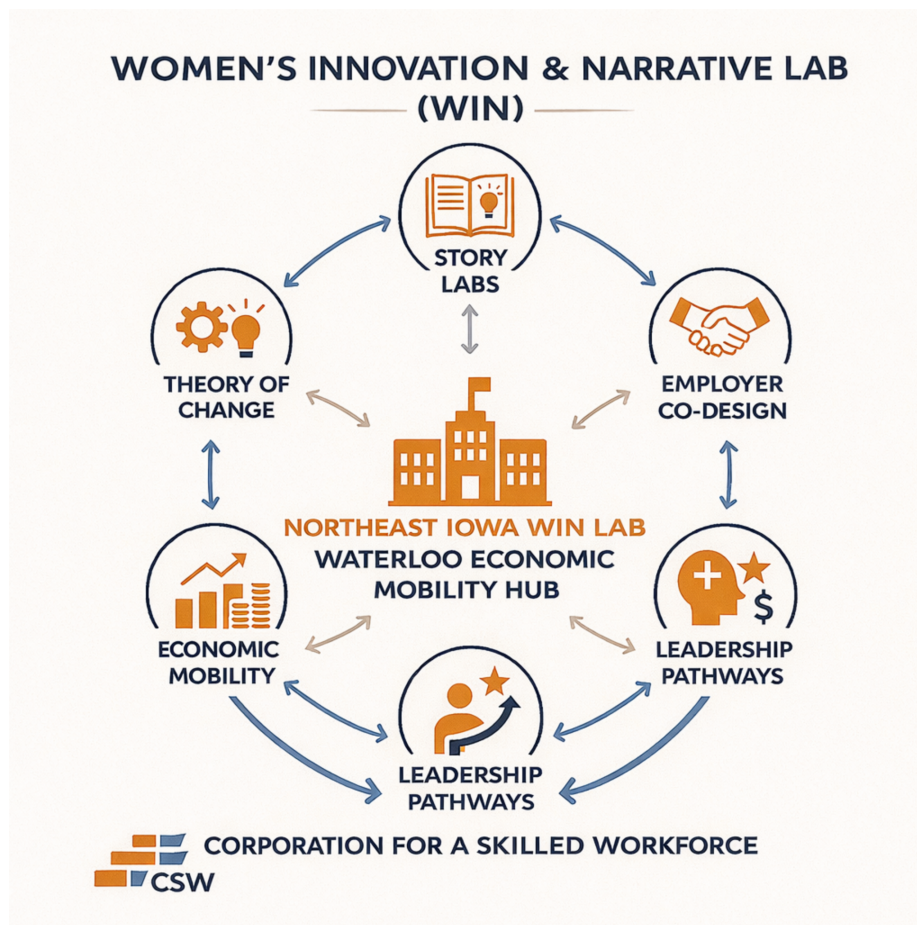
The Waterloo Economic Mobility Hub, co-led with the Corporation for a Skilled Workforce (CSW) and powered locally by the Mill Race Center for Entrepreneurship & Innovation, ONE Cedar Valley, Grow Cedar Valley, SHRM Cedar Valley, the Waterloo Career Center, Hawkeye Community College, the Northeast Iowa Workforce Development Board, and the Community Foundation of Northeast Iowa, proposes an evidence-based, narrative-driven solution. WIN transforms the stories shaping workplaces by centering women's lived experience, elevating leadership identity, and embedding those narratives directly into employer practice.

What We Will Do

WIN will launch Story Labs across the Cedar Valley in Year 1, expanding into Cedar Rapids and Dubuque in Year 2. Through multimedia storytelling, leadership circles, and community-based narrative mapping, women articulate leadership strengths, challenge stereotypes, and construct expansive visions of their careers. These narratives directly inform employer co-design, including narrative-informed workplace audits, bias interrupters, inclusive hiring and promotion pathways, and equitable leadership models.

Why This Matters

As AI, caregiving pressures, and shifting labor markets reshape job quality, narratives about women have not kept pace. When employers redesign systems using women's lived narratives rather than generic DEI content, workplaces become more innovative, equitable, and resilient. This approach aligns with Aspen Digital's commitment to narrative change and economic opportunity so everyone can thrive and lead at scale.



Scaling the Impact

CSW will serve as the national scale and learning partner, translating the Waterloo–Corridor WIN model into toolkits, playbooks, and learning products for adoption by employers, chambers, and workforce systems nationwide.

Our Promise

If funded, WIN will model how a region can transform workplace narratives at scale, empowering women, strengthening employers, and building communities where leadership is defined not by outdated bias, but by lived expertise, innovation, and full potential.