



Acknowledgements

Forsyth Futures has been on a journey of transformation shaped by learning, relationships, and accountability. Through our partnerships with Action4Equity, the Black Philanthropy Initiative, the Women's Fund, the People's Research Council, Thriving Together, and many others, we have been challenged to more deeply examine harm, power, responsibility, intersectionality, and solidarity – and to reckon with the role data plays in either reinforcing inequity or supporting collective liberation.

We are deeply grateful to the many people, organizations, and networks who have walked alongside us as partners, teachers, and guides. In particular, we thank Action4Equity for their patience, honesty, and persistence in holding us accountable with care, and the Black Philanthropy Initiative and the Women's Fund for their vision, trust, and flexibility in nurturing this new way of working as it has evolved.

We also extend gratitude to the members of Thriving Together, and to all across our community who refuse to accept the status quo and continue showing up differently in pursuit of a more just future.

This work is collective by nature. Together, we continue learning and working toward the conditions that allow all people to thrive. No exceptions.

Gender Lens Report Foreword

This report exists within a larger moment of reckoning and possibility. Across our community, and far beyond it, there is growing recognition that the conditions shaping people's lives are not the result of individual choices alone, but of interconnected systems that distribute opportunity, safety, and dignity unevenly. These systems were designed over time, reinforced by policy and practice, and too often sustained by silence, habit, or incomplete understanding. Meaningful change, therefore, cannot be isolated, incremental, or owned by any single entity. It must be collective, relational, and rooted in a shared commitment to transforming the systems themselves.

Forsyth Futures exists to support that work.

As a data and research organization, our tagline for years was, *Studying Our Community, Informing Action*. And yet, data is never neutral. What we choose to measure, how we interpret it, who gets to define the questions, and where knowledge ultimately lives all reflect power. Historically, and in Forsyth Futures' own history, data has often been extracted from communities, abstracted from lived experience, and used to justify decisions made without the participation of those most affected. Even well-intentioned research can unintentionally reinforce harm when it centers institutions over people, outcomes over context, or efficiency over equity.

Wielded inclusively and with intention, data can help us see patterns that are otherwise obscured, understand how systems interact, and identify where inequities persist. It can illuminate trends, inform strategy, and support accountability. In our collective efforts, shared data can offer a common language that helps diverse partners align around goals and measure progress together. And so in this moment, in collaboration with our partners, networks, and neighbors, we are asking with intention, which communities are we studying and why? What action are we informing and how?

This moment calls for something different.

For Forsyth Futures, participating in collective systems change means showing up as part of something larger than ourselves. As a backbone organization within [Thriving Together](#), our role is not to direct the work of changing systems, but to help nurture the conditions that allow it to move — supporting alignment and communication among partners, strengthening shared learning, and ensuring that data serves the collective good rather than institutional priorities. Thriving Together is a connector and mobilizer: bringing people, sectors, and strategies into relationship so that systems change is coordinated, sustained, and rooted in community-defined goals.

Within this model, data is not a standalone product delivered to decision-makers, but a shared resource that supports collective action. It is generated, interpreted, and used in relationship with community members, organizations, and leaders working across systems. Knowledge is most powerful when it is shared, when it informs and is informed by many hands and voices, and when it strengthens – not replaces – local wisdom.

In this work, learning is not linear. It demands accountability, reflection, and a willingness to be changed by what we hear. As a predominantly white organization operating within systems that have historically elevated our perspectives over others, Forsyth Futures understands our responsibility to remain reflective and transparent about how power shows up in research, interpretation, and use. Growth in this context does not come from claiming expertise, but from

listening deeply, sharing power intentionally, and creating space for those most impacted by inequity to shape the questions, narratives, and solutions that guide systems change.

Thriving Together reminds us that no single dataset, organization, or strategy can create the conditions for everyone to thrive. Systems change depends on trust, relationships, and the alignment of values and actions across sectors. Data can support this alignment, but only when it is paired with dialogue, shared ownership, and community leadership. Through the People's Research Council and other community-led structures, lived experience is not an input to the work; it is a foundation of it.

This report is offered in that spirit.

It is one contribution within a broader ecosystem of learning, advocacy, and action. It reflects a belief that advancing gender equity, and equity more broadly, requires us to look beyond individual outcomes to the structures that shape them. It also demonstrates an understanding that progress is not measured solely by improved indicators, but by shifts in who has voice, who has influence, and whose experiences are centered in decision-making spaces.

As you engage with this report, we invite you to read it not as a definitive account, but as an opening. An invitation to question assumptions, to share insights and make new connections, and to participate in the ongoing work of building systems that are more just, more responsive, and more humane. We hope it sparks conversation, deepens collaboration, and supports collective action grounded in both data and lived experience.

The work ahead is complex and unfinished. But we believe that when knowledge is shared, power is redistributed, and communities are trusted as experts in their own lives, transformation becomes possible.

It is in that possibility, and in partnership with Thriving Together and all those committed to a thriving Forsyth County for all, that Forsyth Futures continues to learn, contribute, and evolve alongside our community.

In solidarity and humility,

Forsyth Futures Staff