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Project seeks to woo more female to politics

Sandhya Somashekhar, Washington Post
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Despite a number of high-profile female candidates this year, women have yet to break through in politics the way they have in the rest of the workforce. Only 17 percent of members of Congress are women, and women make up just 24 percent of state lawmakers.

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Now, a group of activists and academics hopes to train a new generation of female candidates in time for the 2012 elections. The 2012 Project intends to take advantage of next year's redrawing of state and congressional districts.

Reapportionment, which occurs after the census, typically creates new and open seats to account for population shifts. They are easier for political newcomers to win than those held by incumbents. Over the next two years, participants in the project will recruit women of diverse political views to run for office. They will place a particular emphasis on encouraging "Third Act" women - [Baby Boomers](#) who might be looking for a new challenge after family and careers.

"Our hope is to get women who have made it in their fields, who have broken their own glass ceilings, who are at a point where they're asking, 'What's next for me?'" said Debbie Walsh, director of the Center for American Women and Politics at [Rutgers University](#), which is leading the project. "We want to say, 'Why not think about politics and public service?'"

The group hopes to raise millions of dollars in donations to pay for events at conferences of female engineers, health care professionals and other career groups. The project will help the women tap into training programs and fundraising networks in their states with the hopes of putting them on a path to running for office in 2012.

Mary Hughes, a Democratic consultant from [San Francisco](#) who is leading the nonprofit, nonpartisan project, said the paucity of women is of concern, but not only from an equity perspective. Advocates say that having more women in positions of power will usher in policy changes that benefit women and families, including issues such as health care and maternity leave. And they say too much talent is being left on the table when such a large segment of the population is reluctant to join the ranks of policymakers.

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