

FemSTEM Coaching Circles™

National Report

Partner Organisation: Women in Digital Initiatives Luxembourg Asbl (WIDE)

Partner Country: Luxembourg

Pilot: 1



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INDEX

INTRODUCTION	2
RECRUITMENT	3
OVERVIEW OF PARTICIPANTS	5
THE FORMAT AND PROCESS OF THE COACHING CIRCLES IN LUXEMBOURG	7
ADDITIONAL INFORMATION	7
Impact of the Coaching Circles	10
SESSION EVALUATION FORMS	10
FINAL EVALUATION FORM	14
TESTIMONIALS	15
SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT	16
FACILITATOR'S COMMENTS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT	17
CONCLUSION	18
ANNEXES	18

Introduction

Due to the Covid-19 crisis, we decided to organise our first pilot of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles online, using Zoom (first session) and Google Meets (second and third sessions). Our Coaching Circles started on the 28th of June from 1 pm to 3:30 pm with 6 participants. One participant dropped after the first session for personal reasons. The second session was held on the 5th of July within the same timeframe as during the first session with 5 participants. The last session held on the 12th of July welcomed 4 participants as one participant was stuck in a meeting for her work and was not able to join before the session ended. However, we kept in touch and were able to discuss the different points she would have liked to address in the session she was unable to attend. The participants also kept in touch throughout the programme and until the end of July on the Slack group that WIDE had created for the occasion.

As we have seen many times during this health crisis, involving people in an online programme over several weeks can quickly turn into a cat and mouse game. However, with regards to the femSTEM Coaching Circles, participants were committed and remained very active and serious between the 3 sessions.

This first pilot test of the Coaching Circles was a real success in Luxembourg, it was very nice to see their progress and development over the course of the 3 weeks. The Circle acted as a network, and offered the possibility to express oneself as well as to find one's own answers (with the help of others) and without judgement. The main experience and impression felt by the participants of the FemSTEM coaching circles In Luxembourg, was that it was a chance to connect with other women in STEM, whether they are in the same situation or not, to enhance one's strengths and gain more self-confidence. The discussions were rich, full of kindness and listening and the participants discovered new things about themselves thanks also to the different exercises used.

Recruitment

Before starting the promotion of the FemSTEM coaching circles' first pilot session, we contacted and invited women from our WIDE network individually by email, via LinkedIn or in-person to share with them the opportunity to participate in our pilot programme. We also contacted the women who participated in the first phase of the project (IO1) and who said they were interested in the future test of the platform and programme, as well as the women who have been interviewed for the testimonials on the platform (IO2).

In order to recruit participants, WIDE put out a call on all its social networks on 15 June 2021, including Twitter, Instagram, Facebook and LinkedIn. A visual was also created specifically to promote the FEMSTEM Coaching Circles. Attached are screenshots and links to the posts made on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and LinkedIn.

<https://www.instagram.com/p/CQJHdHoBcx3/>



https://twitter.com/wide_lu/status/1404790203605213194



<https://www.facebook.com/Wideluxembourg/posts/4030027677073842>



https://www.linkedin.com/posts/wide-luxembourg_stem-online-coaching-activity-6810556782822354944-brQp



In order to mobilise its network the call for participation was also made in the WIDE Summer Newsletter. Indeed, the presentation of FEMSTEM Coaching Circles has been added in the upcoming project section. Below is a screenshot and the link to the project section in the WIDE Summer newsletter.

[https://mailchi.mp/35d4e5a946dc/spring-newsletter-5371338?e=\[UNIQID\]](https://mailchi.mp/35d4e5a946dc/spring-newsletter-5371338?e=[UNIQID])



Overview of Participants

For each pilot of the IO3 Coaching Circles, the Partner Organisation brought together a minimum of 5-7 women in STEM. Below is an overview of the participants involved in the pilot which took place in Luxembourg.

Participant	Background Information
Participant 1	Luxembourg based, age between 36-46, Master Degree in Software engineering, currently working as an application developer with between 5 to 10 years of experience (studies & work experience) in STEM. Wanted to better organise/structure her day and learn how to juggle/balance work and personal life. Wanted to share experiences with the group and try to find solutions, insights from other women in her situation. Also wanted to know how the others cope with being the only women in a team and dealing with moody colleagues.
Participant 2	Luxembourg based, age between 36 & 46, Bachelor degree in Computer Science, currently working as a Digital Preservation Coordinator at the National Library of Luxembourg with more than 15 years of experience (studies and work) in STEM. (dropped after the first session)

	<p>Wanted to share her experience of "impostor syndrome" and how she can be overwhelmed by setting goals. To get some thoughts and experience from others that worked in a misogynistic environment in IT as well as thinking positively to gain more strength and self-confidence.</p>
Participant 3	<p>France based, aged between 25 & 35, Bachelor degree in Biotechnology, isn't working currently, with between 2 and 5 years of experience (studies and work) in STEM.</p> <p>She wanted to share her experience regarding the inequality of income in the public sector (in France) and the lack of mentorship. She wanted to have some mentorship and learn how to value her skills, develop her self-confidence and increase her influence.</p>
Participant 4	<p>Luxembourg based, aged between 25 & 35, Master Degree in Organisational Psychology, isn't currently working, with between 2 and 5 years of experience (studies and work) in STEM.</p> <p>Wanted to gain more self-confidence to establish herself and gain respect among her future colleagues as she is searching for a job. She was also searching for some structuring tips as well as being part of a network of women in STEM.</p>
Participant 5	<p>Luxembourg based, aged between 25 & 35, Master Degree in Natural Language Processing, currently working as a Project Officer - ICT and technical standardization, with between 10 to 15 years of experience (studies and work) in STEM.</p> <p>Wanted to better organise her work/life balance. Wanted to share her experience of "impostor syndrome". Wanted to know more about change management and how to change her career path. Wanted to get some insights from other participants regarding communication, how to establish priorities, stop hesitating/distracting, and to celebrate the victories rather than focusing on errors.</p>
Participant 6	<p>Luxembourg based, aged 25 & 35, Master Degree in Biomedical data science, currently a PhD researcher at LCSB-University of Luxembourg, with between 5 to 10 years of experience (studies and work) in STEM.</p> <p>Wanted to learn how to self-organise, share her online communication difficulties, and overcome some challenges such as task management and enhancing productivity (stop spending time on social media, being less distracted, find a balance between relaxed and "burnout").</p>

The Format and Process of the Coaching Circles in Luxembourg

The first pilot of the Circles, in Luxembourg, was attended by 5 participants (6 during the first session, 4 during the last session). All sessions took place online on Zoom and Google Meets. The Luxembourg facilitator was Emeline PETIT, Project and Research Officer as well as a trainer for adults and kids at Women in Digital Initiatives Luxembourg Asbl (WIDE).

<u>Session Number</u>	<u>Date</u>	<u>Number of Participants</u>	<u>Tools Used/Comments</u>
1	28/06/2021	6	Ice breaker "Start, Stop, Continue Change" tool SMART goals
2	5/07/2021	5	Warm-up exercise Covey circle of influence SMART goals
3	12/07/2021	4	Warm-up exercise Mind maps SMART goals

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION

Each session was prepared in advance by email or on the Slack group. Before starting the programme, the participants were informed about the rules (learning agreement) and received their learner pack, allowing them to familiarise themselves with all the exercises that could be proposed during the sessions.

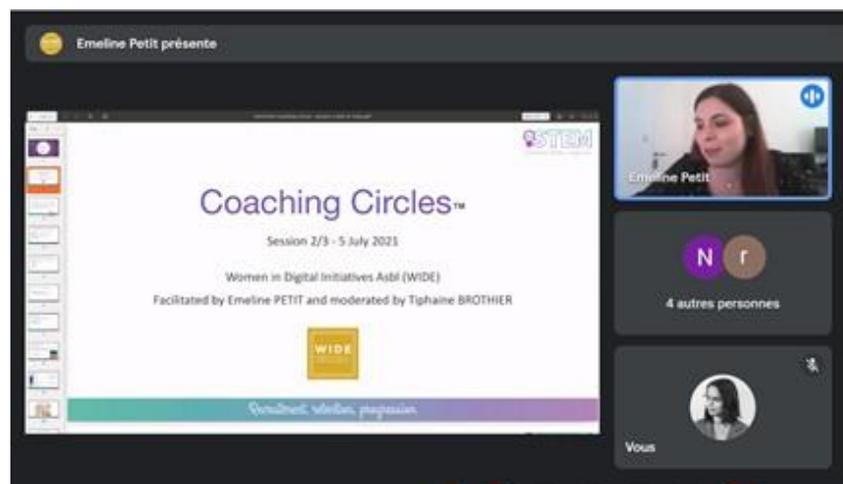
In the first session, the focus was on introducing the participants, the facilitator and the moderator, as well as the FemSTEM project and Coaching circles with a precise explanation of the methodology used and questioning techniques. Ground rules were then agreed with the participants to ensure that they were comfortable with how the sessions were to be carried out. Then an activity was carried out with the use of the tool "Start, Stop, Continue, Change", which allowed each participant to express herself in turn. Then each participant had the opportunity to reflect on their smart goals with the support of other members of the group.

The second session was opened with an icebreaker exercise, the participants were asked to choose a GIF representing their mood. After discussing their current feelings and their doubts/hopes regarding their professional life in STEM, the facilitator focused on the SMART goals and first achievements of the participants. One by one, each of them described how they achieved it and then, guided by the facilitator and the group, they defined new steps that they wished to accomplish for the next session. Then the tool "convey of influence" was used to help the participants in the development of their journey.

The third session was opened with an icebreaker exercise, participants were asked to choose a song with lyrics and a title that represented their current mood. While some of them chose songs that described their emotions about participating in the session, other participants picked a song related to their achievement of the week. Then, they once again presented the achievements of their SMART goals. The second part of the session was focused on participants' mind maps. The mind maps were to be created by the participants in between the 2nd and the 3rd session. The facilitator gave 20 minutes to the participants during the session to finish, and reflect on how they would present it to the rest of the group. To conclude this session, they were also introduced to the femstem.eu online platform and modules created in IO2 by the consortium of FemSTEM so they could complete some modules between the sessions.

Each of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles sessions were 2.5 hours long and were held on Mondays from 1pm to 3.30pm. In order to create a favourable group dynamic and cohesion, an ice breaker/warm-up exercise was proposed at the beginning of each session. The facilitator used a PowerPoint presentation of the structure of the training, including the methodology, reminder of the ground rules etc. Tools and exercises were displayed on the screen throughout the session and the group was well managed in terms of timing and speaking time. Apart from the facilitator's camera, which remained switched on, the participants turned on their cameras when they spoke, during discussions to ensure a good connection quality.

In order to encourage communication and exchange between participants, a Slack group was created for the entire period of the sessions. Slack was also used by the facilitator to contact participants between sessions and distribute information, documents and links to surveys. This was a tool to be used by participants to have direct and quick contact with any member of the circle as well as the facilitator and moderator. The participants were encouraged to work in between sections, first on their smart goals but also on completing some exercise like a mind map for the next session or do some research to get their own answers and help other participants to find theirs.





Impact of the Coaching Circles

In order to ensure a thorough assessment of the impact of the Circles, three evaluation exercises were undertaken by the participants:

- **Session and final Evaluation Forms:** participants completed one form at the end of each Circle session and a final evaluation form at the end of the last session.
- **Soft Skills Development:** participants evaluated themselves at the beginning (Circle 1) and end (Circle 3) of the training.
- **Testimonials:** participants were asked to provide testimonials about the sessions they attended.

These forms and feedback will provide the basis for the analysis of the impact of the training programme below.

SESSION EVALUATION FORMS

A Session Evaluation Form was completed by participants at the end of each of the Circle sessions. This included asking the participants about their expectations, the methodology and what they found most useful about the session.

Circle 1

The following statements were taken from the evaluation form responses after each Circle session.

Expectations for the session.

- I needed some opinions and guidance. I had some relevant recommendations.
- I expected an introduction to the program and an outline of what's coming next. And I got a rather good understanding of how things are being organized.
- Learn something new everyday (new skills and knowledge) to experience life-changing and exercise my brain
- Connecting with other women and yes, I was able to relate to their stories and feel part of a community.

3 main things to take away from the session:

- Questions to ask myself, recommendations and experiences of others
- 1) Everyone has her own issues to work on; 2) phrasing the issue is the first step towards solving it; 3) "smart" goals are difficult to formulate but easier to achieve
- There are worse problems out there, what I want to start/stop/change/continue doing, it's good to discuss personal challenges with others.
- 1. Always determine what I want to do before I start doing it, 2. Evaluate my KSAs (skills, knowledge and abilities) with the right tools and methods, 3. Use Pomodoro technique to get stuff done.
- To conquer fear in order to share not just issues, but also ideas and solutions with the rest of the group. The energy that is created when mind-like people come together. Doing targeted exercises to build self confidence in one's skills.

The best part of the Coaching Circles so far?

- Listening to the others who share similar issues
- Hearing from others
- The start/stop/continue/change model sheet, made me think a lot about myself
- Shared experiences on the Perceptions of stereotypes and the challenges in STEM disciplines
- Being part of a community

Any further comments?

- I understand that this session was the first in the series and needed a lot of ground to be prepared so, if I may, I would like to recommend this training which works with emotions in order to have a smoother introduction in the topic for future sessions: "webinar by Trainers Toolbox: Optimal emotions for learning, and how to create them" <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iLCKc1xzVvg>

Circle 2

Expectations for the session?

- Discuss the SMART goals and learn about techniques for building a self-describing mind-map. We didn't get to the mind-map but discussed the SMART goals
- Do more targeted exercises and indeed these were more in my area of interest (time management)
- Making my steps clear for my goal and it was fulfilled
- To make sure my goals are best described and achievable.
- They have been fulfilled with advices and recommendations

3 main things to take away from the session:

- (1) It can be important to change one's attitude to the things that are out of one's control so that they could benefit things that are in one's control or within the sphere of influence. (2) If one's SMART goal is big, it's important to define milestones towards it, to be able to track progress and not get overwhelmed. (3) I think I'm doing rather good job in organizing myself/managing my time
- The need to do more introspection on a regular basis. The circle of influence exercise. The questioning exercise has the consequence of going outside the comfort zone in order to embrace more challenges and different types of rewards, plus the implicit use of the active listening skill (which has improved due to being more forgiving and grateful).
- A more structured view of my path, some suggestions from others, some concrete or technical help opportunity
- The smart goals, and to accept some things are out of my influence
- It's important to be aware of what I can change and what I can't change so that I can focus my energy where it can have more impact.
- In my everyday life and In my career, the development of skills are very important. It can help me to build confidence, to find new ways of thinking and problem solving, Lastly,
- Once I learn to accept what is, and then focus on what I can control , I will always win

The best part of the Coaching Circles so far?

- Discuss the in/out of control + in the sphere of influence things
- The ice breaker exercise :)
- The advice from others
- Clearing out my steps
- When we all shared our opinions on what are not within our control

Any further comments?

- Better paced session with more interactions between participants.

Circle 3

Expectations for the session

- Yes! My expectations have been fulfilled.

- I've received the perfect advice on how to use my mind map to unleash my brain's creativity and potential.
- Frankly, this last session has shown and helped me to discover connections between different topics as well as the way our minds work.
- I was expecting to get feedback on my process and my expectation was met.
- Discuss the platform, coaching modules, maybe do some exercises in group (because some require the presence of another person or a group). This was not done, we focused on other exercises

3 main things to take away from the session:

- Not to put Pressure on myself. Always do what I love. It's important to learn from others directly or indirectly!
- A new mind map that will help me understand myself better, not focusing on only one type of assets, we are a lot more than that. The performance graph which showed me that I improved during this Circle.
- (1) making progress towards goal feels good, (2) don't put your professional goal above everything else (or at least make the alignment with who you are and what you want from life), (3) talking to others about one's problem/issue helps

The best part of the Coaching Circles so far?

- The first question in the beginning of the session: A song that describes me and Why? Then, the 4 questions at the end of the session. Different women with different perspectives but I enjoyed everyone's experiences. The exchange of information, knowledge was useful.
- making my goals and steps clear
- sharing the problems/challenges/issues (and what we do to overcome them)

Any further comments?

- Someone told me once that: Good leaders never stop learning. Even if you're super successful or you've achieved small or big goals, You can always stand to learn from those around you. I've learned a lot from participants and I encourage every woman in Stem to join FemSTEM coaching circles! It's the best opportunity to experience something new, something different, something more.
- I think the coaching circles are very useful for women who are at a point where they feel stuck or lost in their careers. Sharing and exchanging feedback with other women is very encouraging.
- could be great to do an exercise or from the coaching modules during the circle

FINAL EVALUATION FORM

A Final Evaluation Form was completed by participants at the end of the final Circle session. This included asking the participants the usefulness of the session and how the sessions have helped them in thinking about the next steps to developing in the STEM sector.

				
Were the Coaching Circles useful for your soft skills development and goal setting?		1	1	1
Do you have a clear idea on your next steps after these sessions?		1		2
How useful was the peer support, and small group environment, to help you with self-exploration?			1	2
Would you recommend the FemSTEM Coaching Circles to a friend?		1	1	1

How have the Coaching Circle helped you to think about moving forward with your career in STEM and/or your soft skills development and your next steps to achieve this?

- The coaching circles helped me to solve problems with confidence and find specific strategies within myself that got me excited about projects I'd been dreading.
- introduction of the smart goal and putting it on track with the weekly follow-up; advice/thoughts from the others;

Any further comments or notes regarding the Circles?

- I think smaller groups (max 2/3 people) would have worked better, in a setting more like a mentoring session than a group session.

TESTIMONIALS

Name: Michelle Mianza

Took part in: Pilot 1 of the FemSTEM Coaching Circle in Luxembourg

Someone told me once that: Good leaders never stop learning. Even if you're super successful or you've achieved small or big goals, You can always stand to learn from those around you. I've learned a lot from participants and I encourage every woman in Stem to join FemSTEM coaching circles! It's the best opportunity to experience something new, something different, something more.

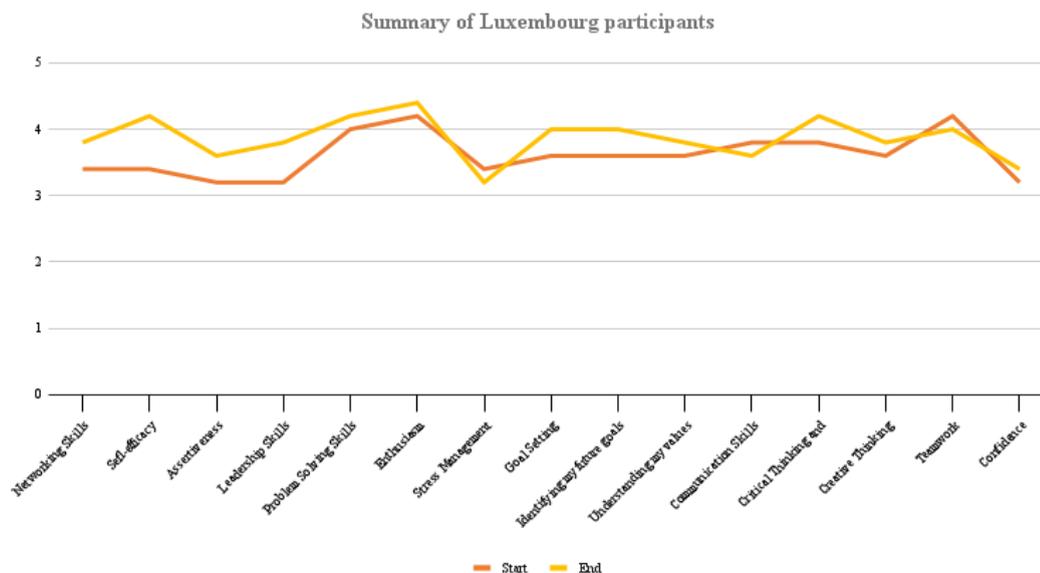
Name: Reyhan Baykara

Took part in: Pilot 1 of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles in Luxembourg

I think the coaching circles are very useful for women who are at a point where they feel stuck or lost in their careers. Sharing and exchanging feedback with other women are very encouraging.

SOFT SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

As part of the training, participants self-assessed their soft skills in relation to their personal development in the STEM sector. Participants evaluated themselves at the beginning and the end of the Circles period. A summary of the participants' results in Luxembourg are shown below.



We can see a great improvement in Networking, self efficacy, assertiveness, leadership skills, problem solving skills, goal setting, identifying future goals, critical thinking, creative thinking and confidence for the majority of the participants.

Regarding stress management, some of the participants rated it more negatively at the end than at the beginning. After discussing it, they mentioned the fact that they came to realise that they are not letting go as much as they want, especially after the exercise "within my control, not under my control".

Communication skills and team work are also soft skills that have been rated less favourably by some participants at the end than at the beginning. They mostly came to realise that they sometimes have trouble expressing their feelings/needs/thoughts, that they thought they could listen well but that the sessions made them realise that there are different techniques of listening to people.

In general, their soft skills were evaluated more positively at the end than at the beginning of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles sessions. Another good thing to highlight is that their level of enthusiasm stood for most of them at the same level between the beginning and the end of the programme.

Facilitator's Comments and Recommendations for improvement

The facilitator guide was clear and well-written and structured. Some exercises were quite complicated to be put in place, especially the "NPL questioning". The facilitator of these sessions did not find a good time or opportunity to use this tool which can mean that this is not the best tool to use during these session (also can be mix with the questioning technique)

Longer training, maybe different steps or role play exercises for the training would have been better to master the questioning technique. The training for trainers of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles was organised online due to the Covid-19, and even though Inova Consultancy did a great job with relevant and interesting online presentation and training, the impact is still not the same as if we were in the same room working altogether.

Using questioning techniques rather than advice worked to some extent. It turned out that participants had many questions about software/tools to use, books to read, websites to consult to enrich their knowledge, to enlarge their circle, to write CVs and cover letters... They were very keen to get advice and tips. In addition to using the questioning technique as much as possible so that they could find solutions by themselves, the participants were also asked to give advice, only when it was explicitly requested.

The three tools "covey circle of influence", "Start, Stop, Continue, Change" "mind maps" were very relevant to our sessions because they allowed the participants to work on self-confidence, letting go, knowing how to recognise oneself and highlighting one's skills. The Smart Goals used at the end and the beginning of each session in our case were very useful to the participants, it is a very concrete tool for goal planning that some of them decided to continue to use in other situations of their life.

At the beginning of each session, we have added a warm-up/ice-breaker exercise to motivate everyone and open the discussion. This was always related to their current feeling, their mood, or as a way to express a current issue.

If we had a suggestion to make, it would be to create smaller groups with less participants for the online format of the femSTEM Coaching Circles. Also, we felt that the women present could have had more to say and that the group exchanges could have been more in-depth and rich. Also the barrier of the screen must have played a role in what was said, even if it was not necessarily felt overall. If we are able to organise our second pilot session at the end of 2021, this time in person, we will be able to confirm or deny this statement later.

Conclusion

We are very happy to have been able to offer this programme in Luxembourg and the feedback from our participants has been very positive about the relevance of the programme to their situation. Even though it was tested online in this first pilot session, we are confident that we will be able to offer it in the near future in a face-to-face setting to create a stronger sense of belonging to the group.

However, for the second pilot session, it will be necessary to consider organising an additional training session for the future facilitators or to have additional resources to the existing one to better understand the "Questioning technique". We find that the tools and techniques used in this programme are relevant for the participants.

Another suggestion could be to create a smaller group for the online format of the FemSTEM Coaching Circles as the sessions do not last as long as face-to-face and we have the feeling that the group exchanges could be more in-depth and rich with less participants (for the online version).

We hope to be able to organise our second pilot session at the end of 2021, this time in person to evaluate both formats of this programme.

Annexes

List of evidence can be found in the associated Google Drive folder.

- Signed **attendance list** from each Circle session – or declaration of attendance signed by the legal representative.
- Signed **Programme Agreement** from each participant – or completed via google form.
- **Soft Skills Evaluation** (at the start of their journey) - or completed via google form.
- **Soft Skills Evaluation** (at the end of their journey) - or completed via google form.
- **Session Evaluation Forms** (from each session) - or completed via google form.
- **Final Evaluation Form** (from the final session) - or completed via google form.
- **Photos** from each Circle session – or screenshots.
- **Evidence of recruitment** activities (e.g. screenshots on online advertising, social media, press releases etc)

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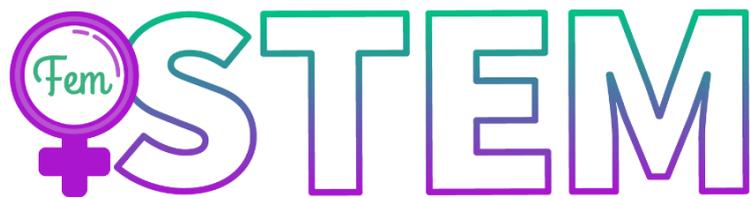
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FemSTEM

Recruitment, retention, progression



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