



**Holly Smithson**  
CEO



**Athena is a professional development organization dedicated to empowering women in the STEM workforce. Will you share with us some of the challenges that women working in STEM companies are experiencing?**

Athena has been providing leadership development, mentoring and research for women in STEM for 20 years. In 2018, we're at an exciting intersection in our journey towards gender equity. Some call it the year of the woman, I submit it's the decade of the woman. We have an enormous responsibility to mobilize and execute around this seismic shift in society on what the new norms are for gender diversity in the workforce. Biased recruiting, interviewing and hiring techniques, pay disparity and inflexible work policies are among the many elements that work against a diverse and inclusive corporate culture.

**How does Athena support women in STEM?**

For our 20th Anniversary, Athena launched its premier thought leadership piece indexing the percentage of women in STEM in San Diego and nationally. We are driving the national dialogue around gender diversity with a data-driven approach to not only discover the root cause of the gaps but how best to close them. Athena's 5000 supporter community views Athena as a safe harbor to learn how to navigate the inherent biases, to gain greater awareness of the power of the network and how to invest in their career versus the job.

**Do you see any challenges specific to the San Diego region?**

As a global STEM hub, we assumed San Diego would be ahead of its competitors. As the data reveals however, women represent 23% of San Diego's STEM workforce compared to 25%, nationally. Although the gap is nominal, we have higher expectations of this region and Athena is positioned to now empower STEM companies with data and strategic capital.

**How will Athena change these statistics?**

Athena is honored to form its newest alliance with the United Nations and the UN Global Compact. We will be announcing our formal collaboration on December 6 in San Francisco. Launched in 2000, the UN Global Compact is the world's largest multi-stakeholder initiative dedicated to driving business awareness and implementation of its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, also known as Agenda 2030: [www.unglobalcompact.org/sdgs](http://www.unglobalcompact.org/sdgs). Sustainable Development Goal # 5 is focused on "Gender Diversity" and that's where Athena steps in. Through this UN partnership, Athena will leverage its 20-year convening power and market access and facilitate implementation efforts on SDG # .5

**What is the state of women working in the tech sector?**

We know the biggest creation of wealth is unarguably the tech sector and yet women are leaving the tech workforce at a 50% exit rate. This calls for a dramatic course correction. Women influence 80% of consumer purchasing. Women hold 60 % of the US personal wealth. Women comprise 51% of the world population. When we look at the statistics, we need to get to the root cause of this huge disconnect inside the tech sector and challenge our assumptions and hypothesis. The UN partnership will set that flywheel in motion as Athena helps companies create an inclusive environment that celebrates the business and societal rewards stemming from gender equity.



**What is next for Athena?**

We want to empower one million women working and leading in STEM workforce by 2030. This audacious goal will require a sophisticated digital communications campaign, so we can effectively reach all those women and women champions ready and willing to contribute to society through STEM.