

Nearly a Decade Wiser: Reflecting on the Impact of the WISE Series



Founded in 2015, [Women in Sustainability and Energy \(WISE\)](#) is a Building Energy Exchange (BE-Ex) inclusive platform for people of all backgrounds and gender identities to learn from experienced women leaders in the sustainability and energy industries, share knowledge and ideas, and advance equity in the workplace.

Looking Back

In honor of Women's History Month, we are reflecting on nearly a decade of WISE. For the last nine years, WISE programming has coalesced an empowering community that has provided

emerging professionals with a forum to connect with other industry practitioners, discover career opportunities and new information, and forge fruitful relationships.

WISE was founded by the women of BE-Ex based on an interest to create a forum for professionals—and especially emerging professionals—to learn what other ambitious and smart people are doing across many sectors of sustainability. Ellen Abramowitz, a founding member of WISE, felt there were often so many “awesome women” that were the sole female at events that she thought, “What if we put all those women in the same room and see what happens?”

Since 2015, WISE programming has:

- Held **58 panels, keynote programs, networking events, and media clubs;**
- Featured **84 women leaders;**
- Engaged **1,060 LinkedIn group members;** and
- Welcomed **2,981 attendees** at WISE events.



Participants listening to opening remarks at the 2023 WISE & BE-Ex Holiday Party.

WISE’s success as a community has only been possible because of the women of BE-Ex and our generous sponsors: [Con Edison](#), [EN-POWER Group](#), [Environ Energy](#), [New York Power Authority](#), [New York State Energy Research and Development Agency](#), [ROCKWOOL](#), [Sive Paget Riesel](#), and

[Voltus](#). BE-Ex has always prioritized the importance of gender diversity, currently maintaining a staff of two-thirds women and a 50% female board of directors. Across all BE-Ex events, 58% of speakers at our panel events in Q4 2023 were non-male and zero panels were entirely comprised of just men.

As WISE has evolved, however, BE-Ex staffers felt the need to address the larger issue of intersectionality and inclusivity to not only prioritize gender diversity, but racial and ethnic diversity as well. “Everybody is welcome. That is a key principle of what we are trying to do with WISE,” said Nicol La Cumbre-Gibbs, another former BE-Ex staffer. After a few years of WISE, BE-Ex staff broadened the mission statement to include language that welcomed all people. “Being able to look up at a panel and see somebody who’s doing things you might aspire to be doing or maybe you didn’t even realize were options” is important to embodying representation, said Helen Chananie, who was present at BE-Ex during this shift.

Additionally, the format of events has expanded over the years. Staff began to develop luncheon events to offer other methods of networking that would allow for people to connect in different kinds of ways that might work better for them.

These evolutions over the years have made WISE a rewarding and impactful community for all people to be a part of whose power is “very lasting,” according to Ellen Abramowitz.

Looking Ahead

With these successes in the background, WISE continues to develop new programming and engagement that will grow our community further.

To kick off 2024, we reinvigorated BE-Ex’s live podcast series, [Radio BE-Ex](#), publishing an interview with longtime BE-Ex board member and Advisor to the [Urban Future Lab](#) at NYU Tandon School of Engineering, Pat Sapinsley.

We aim to expand our reach into other industries in the energy and sustainability sector, as “the definition of sustainability is evolving rapidly,” said another founding WISE member, Jocelyn Gan. To continue developing new community relationships and partnerships, WISE is pleased to be hosting our [Sustainable Career Showcase](#) on April 4th at BE-Ex’s office in downtown Manhattan. This event is a unique opportunity for anyone interested in learning more about various sustainability career paths beyond the built environment to expand their networks as well as find opportunities available in the climate space.

Other WISE programming and goals on the horizon are:

- Engage more with our [LinkedIn](#) community, with a goal of breaking 1,500 members;
- Produce panel events that can bring together more organizations;
- Hold more networking opportunities through luncheons and happy hours to create more diverse opportunities for people to connect in other formats; and
- Host our annual holiday party in December.



The past and present staff of Building Energy Exchange.

Can't wait until we hit a decade of WISE! Thank you to all of our WISE supporters and participants – we could not do it without you!



Written by Hailey Moll, Senior Associate of Educational Resources