On July 10th, the newest Pacesetter class met for their first session at President Circle Firm BNY Mellon. While the program is designed as a specialized development initiative for future leaders; it is our belief that in order to get the most out of it, they need to be comfortable and trusting of one another and program leadership. Therefore, our first session was dedicated to getting to know each other and beginning to form lasting connections.

The session began with an empowering welcome from Simone Vinocour, FWA President. As a former Pacesetter mentor, Simone has seen the benefit the program can have on these women's lives, and encouraged them to truly engage as you only get out what you put in. She focused on the benefits of being a part of the broader FWA organization, utilizing the resources they are given and to making connections that will long outlast the year-long program. It was the perfect introduction for the night's event.

The evening continued by making it clear that the group is a safe space to discuss career goals, ambitions, worries – pretty much anything – without the fear of it leaving the group. As Marian Olah, program Co-Chair, put it – “it's kind of like Vegas, what happens here, stays here“. The session was centered around the Leadership Lifeline Exercise. It asks participants to draw a graph of the highs and lows in their lives, and then to reflect upon how each made you feel and how you overcame certain obstacles in your path. After creating each of their charts, the Pacesetters were divided into groups of two to share the details of their stories. Afterwards, each of the participants had time to share with the broader group.

While the consensus was that most of us are not great at drawing line charts, the outcome was strong – invoking at times laughter, tears, support, understanding, and even a hug or two. Despite a very diverse group, it was apparent the number of similarities in life that we shared and that shaped who we are today. Some common themes included: moving to a new country, excitement over a first job, impacts of the financial crisis, marriage, divorce, promotions, lay-offs, and everything in between.

In a time where there is such division and a need to combat unconscious bias, it is
important to remember that just because we are all unique in our own way – there are always shared experiences that can bring us together. The Pacesetters have shared their stories with each other and are now ready to embark on this journey together instead of individually.