ACCELERATE **CHICAGO**

Craft software with confidence in 2026

Stick With It

Making “Glue Work,” Work

About Me

I'm Gayle Silverman.



I'm a principal product strategist at TXI, currently working with a 10-person engineering team, all of whom are awesome at what they do – especially the Tech Lead.

I often say "two things can be true at one time."

I delight in ending virtual meetings with a rapid series of high fives or a good old fashioned, "goooooo team!"

What is Glue Work

Glue work = the invisible, often uncredited tasks that hold teams together & make them successful.

This concept was popularized by Tanya Reilly's 2019 talk *"Being Glue."*

If you haven't read it / want a refresher, check out her article Being Glue or watch it online here.

It Can Look Like

Glue work is all the extra stuff a person willingly takes on without being asked because it’s the right thing to do.

- •Updating documentation
- •Onboarding new team members
- •Back-channeling to get buy-in on a technical decision
- •Making sure notes are easily accessible
- •Reviewing PRs at the expense of your own individual commitments

This is often considered non-promotable work.

Hidden Cost of Glue Work

Fewer promotions = Lower lifetime salaries + Less leadership opportunity + Increased burn out

Glue Work By the Numbers

- Women spend 200 hours more / year on non-promotable tasks
- Year 1 - the gap begins
- Year 2 - promotions start
- Gap compounds with time

What Prompted our Tournament

Our organization runs an annual engagement survey.

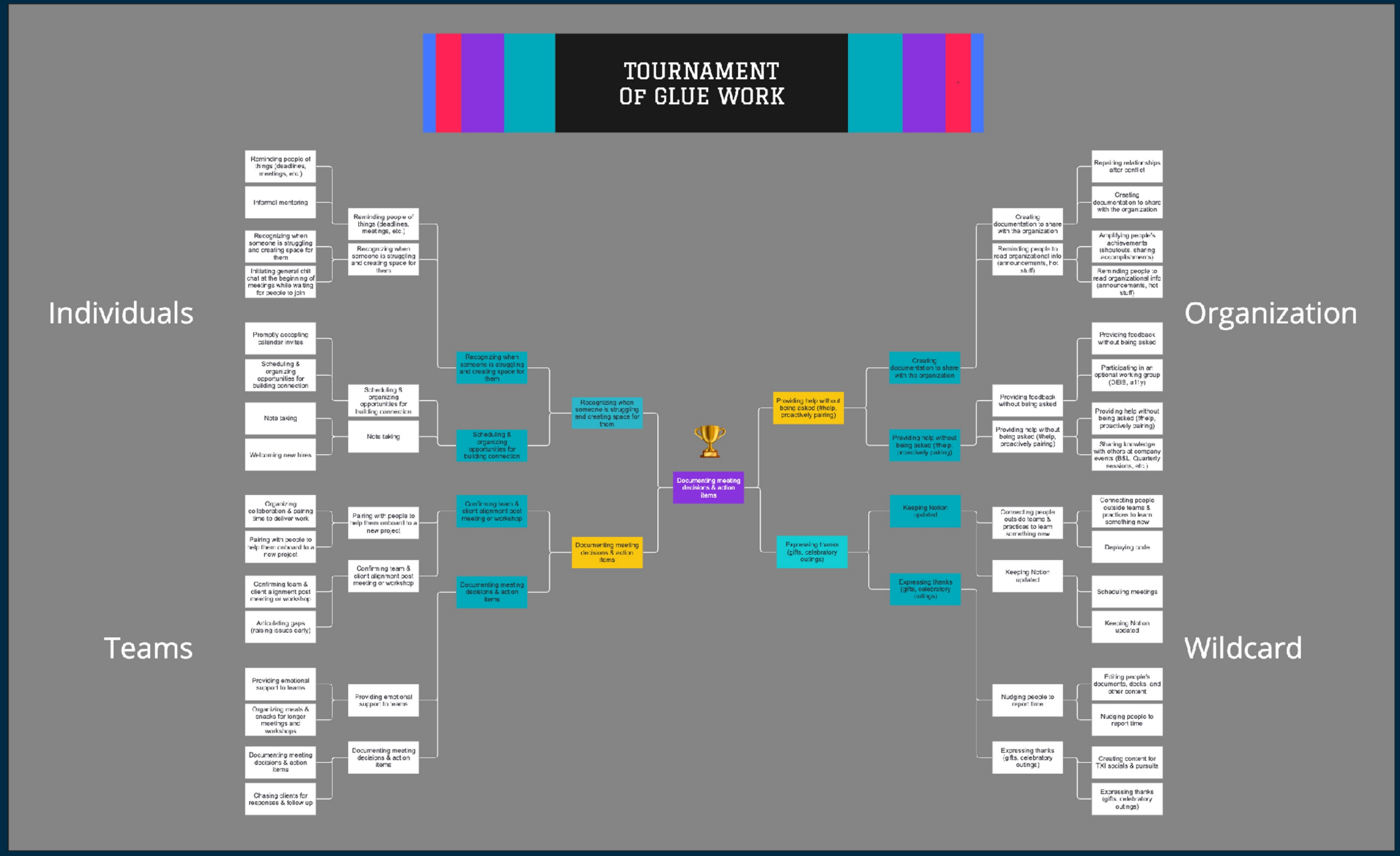
In 2024, responses indicated there was a significant **disconnect between how men, non-binary individuals, and women** at TXI assess the equitable distribution of glue work.

Shall We Play a Game?

To have transparent conversation around this topic, we hosted a “Tournament of Glue Work” at our Quarterly Meeting.

Our goal wasn't just friendly competition. It was a way of committing to one act of glue work we'd share more equitably over the next 12 weeks.

TOURNAMENT OF GLUE WORK



Brackets

- **Individual**
- **Team**
- **Organization**
- **Wildcard**

How it Works

Identify → Synthesize → Vote → Measure

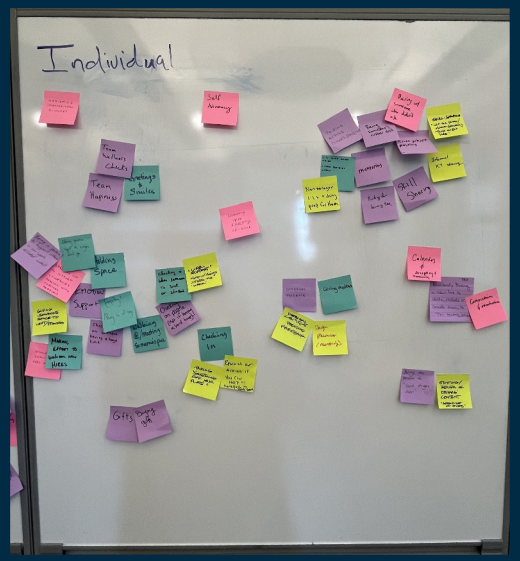
Identify

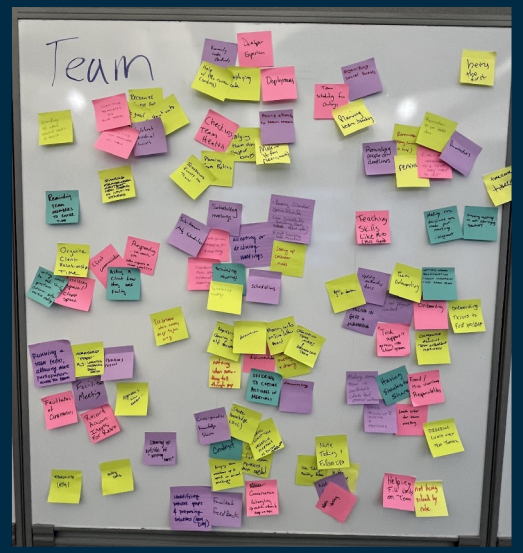


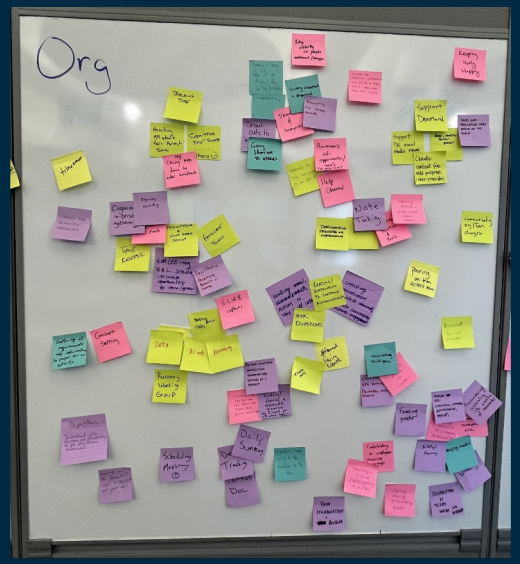
Break into small groups and identify the glue work that happens at our organization

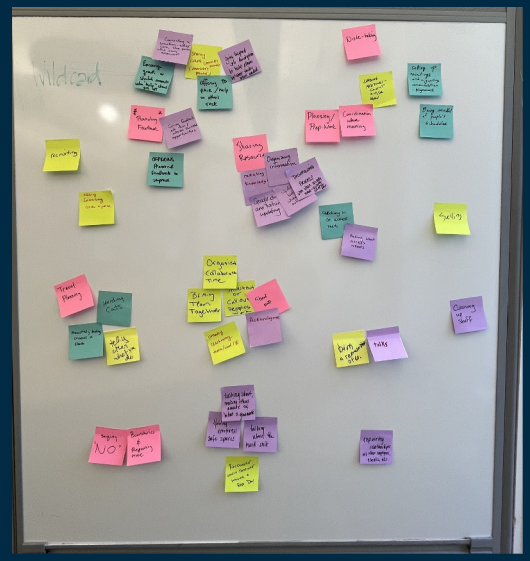
Synthesize

Volunteers affinity map examples of glue work groups identified

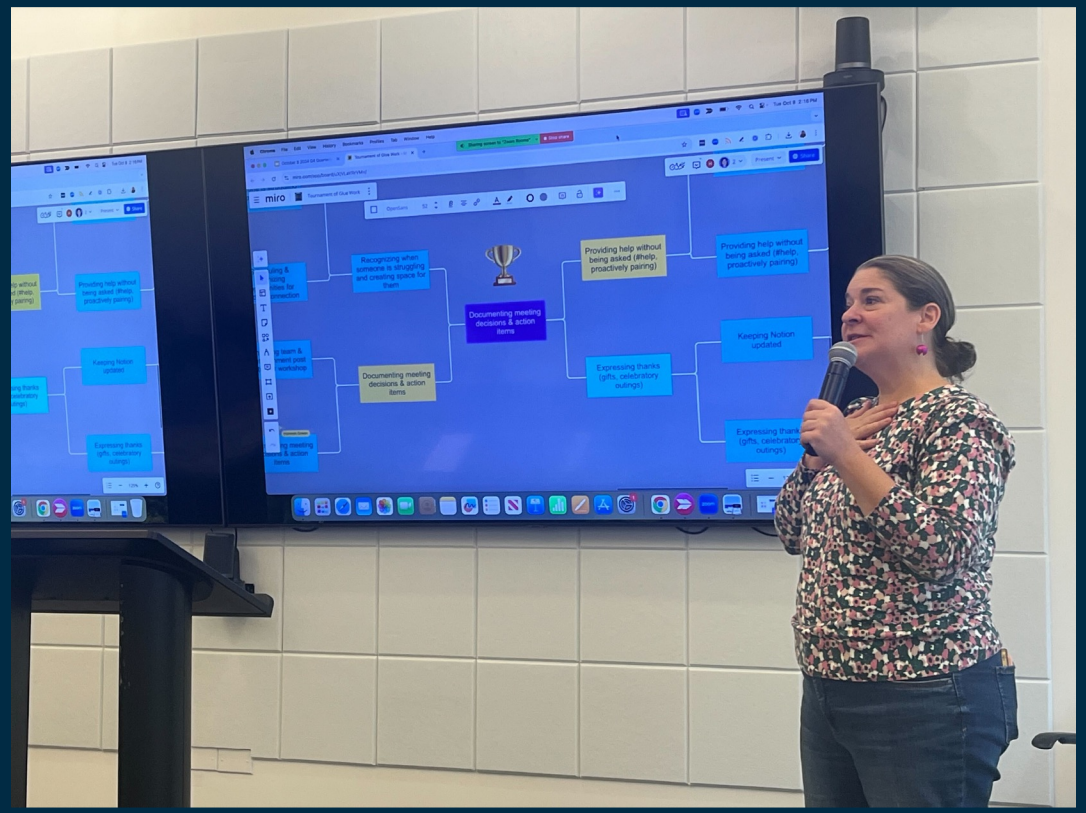








Vote



Tournament held and winner chosen.

We used a very scientific method to vote – hand raising!

The “champion” is the 1 aspect of glue work that we will commit to sharing more equitably.

And the Winner Is



Documenting meeting decisions & action items

Measure

Results from the latest Engagement Surveys show we're making progress

- ⬆ Scores from women increased in 2025 (13 pts) & 2026 (10 pts)
- ⬇ Scores from men decreased in 2025 (15 pts), then held steady in 2026

Awareness is closing the gap.

Currently there's only a 10-point spread in our Glue Work question.

Most Unexpected

Providing feedback without being asked

vs

Participating in an optional working group (DEIB, a11y) 

Biggest Heartbreaker

Reminding people of things (deadlines, meetings, etc.) 

vs

Informal mentoring

Crowd Favorite

Promptly accepting calendar invites

vs

Organizing opportunities for building connection 

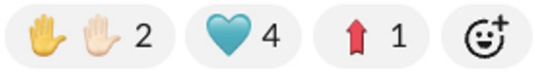
First of Many Steps

- Scheduled an assessment of our Tech Lead Toolkit to be more explicit about Glue Work
- Added “glue” emoji in Slack to make this work visible
- Follow up sessions at Town Halls & Quarterlies
- PEARS (Professional Expectations of All Roles) campaign, including regular “PEAR drops” in Slack

Example of PEAR Drop

PEAR Drop #1: Don't make the group wonder.

If you realize you're going to be late to a meeting, send a quick ping to attendees before it starts. Don't wait until you've already missed five minutes and someone is wondering whether to start without you. A 30-second message saves the whole group from that awkward pause, and signals that you respect their time even when yours is slipping. The effort is small. The message it sends is not.



What Can You Do?

Normalize asking your direct report(s) about Glue Work. Provide feedback if they are doing too much / not enough.

Start explicitly naming & rotating Glue Work on your team.

Advocate for Glue Work to be included as part of performance reviews.

Host your own Tournament!

Time for a Rematch?

Let’s play a few rounds today



Rematch: Individual Glue Work

Recognizing when someone is struggling and creating space for them ✅

vs

Scheduling & organizing opportunities for building connection

Rematch: Team Glue Work

Confirming team & client alignment post meeting or workshop

vs

Documenting meeting decisions & action items 

Rematch: Organization Glue Work

Creating documentation to share with the organization

vs

Providing help without being asked
(#help, proactively pairing)



Rematch: Wildcard Glue Work

Connecting people outside teams & practices to learn something new 

vs

Expressing thanks (gifts, celebratory outings)

Let’s See Our Final Four

Rematch: Final Four

Recognizing when someone is struggling and creating space for them ✅	vs	Documenting meeting decisions & action items
Connecting people outside teams & practices to learn something new	vs	Providing help without being asked (#help, proactively pairing) ✅

Ok… Final Round!

Rematch: Final Round

Recognizing when someone is struggling and creating space for them

vs

Providing help without being asked (#help, proactively pairing)

Rematch: And Our Winner Is

Providing help without being asked (#help, proactively pairing)

QUESTIONS?

ASK ME IN THE APP

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PLEASE RATE MY SESSION