

The Women's Foundation
Appointments Project®:
Best Practices for Civic Boards and
Commissions

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Prepared By:

Rachel Dicke

Institute of Public Policy

Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs

University of Missouri



Institute of Public Policy
Harry S Truman School of Public Affairs
University of Missouri

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INTRODUCTION

Local government plays an important role in the lives of Americans. However, unelected officials serving on governing boards and commissions make many of the key decisions that touch the lives of residents. These often-overlooked bodies are only as effective as their members are. Thus, it is imperative that boards be reflective of the populations they represent. Yet, boards and commissions in the United States lag behind in their representation of women and minorities and few localities focus on sustaining their board diversity by ensuring an inclusive atmosphere and formal policies exist to retain a diverse pool of board members.

For these reasons, the Women’s Foundation contracted with the Institute of Public Policy to produce a list of best practices for civic boards and commissions. These best practices sprung from extensive research into what makes civic boards and commissions diverse and effective. This brief will first give a detailed explanation of why diverse experiences matter for government boards and commissions. Finally, it will explain how boards and commissions can recruit and retain a diverse pool of members.

DEFINITIONS

Before moving forward with this brief, a quick note about the terminology used throughout it will be instructive. Because several of these terms are used in specific, contextual ways, some clarification is necessary. First and foremost, what is meant by governing boards and commissions? There are three main types of governing boards and commissions: government, corporate, and non-profit.

Government (civic) boards and commissions are directly created by the government and subject to its rules and regulations for public employees or appointees. Government boards and commissions can refer to national-level entities, but more likely refer to local-level and state-level entities. Where applicable, this brief will differentiate among these levels because it is unlikely that they function in exactly the same manner and they certainly differ on the context in which they operate. Boards of health function in much the same way at the local, state, and national level but with greater or lesser scope and focus on local issues. For example, the Boston board of health is responsible for a number of record-keeping, reporting, monitoring, and advising functions; the Columbia, MO board of health fills many of those functions as well, advising the city on matters relating to public health and consisting of members hailing from certain medical professions and appointed by city authorities. The Missouri State Board of Health reviews and advises on rules drawn up by the state Department of Health and Senior Services. It also consists of members appointed by the governor, some of whom must come from certain professions. The national Department of Health and Human Services creates laws implemented by state and local boards and

considers a broader range of issues than state and local boards. Additionally, any concepts that contain the descriptors “civic” or “public” refer to the government sphere rather than the corporate or non-profit sphere.

Corporate boards and commissions are part of for-profit companies and are generally the steering bodies of their full organizations; they “manage the business and affairs of the corporation” and can act in full, or can delegate authority to standing committees addressing specific issues.¹

Non-profits are organizations that are tax-exempt because they are formed to provide a “public benefit,” and can include private foundations as well as public charities.² Boards of directors for these organizations function in much the same capacity as they do in for-profit businesses; they steer the organization, ensure that it is advancing its mission, and make sure that it follows applicable laws and regulations.³ Again, similar to corporate boards, non-profit boards can have a number of committees for a range of issues, like board governance, fundraising, financial oversight, and an executive committee, among potential others.

The next set of definitions deals with the broader concept of equality, and includes gender parity, diversity, gender diversity, and racial and ethnic diversity. First, *gender parity*: this concept is essentially the numerical equality of men and women; the United Nations¹ measures gender parity by dividing the number of men in a given area by the number of women in a given area.⁴ This would mean that gender parity in government would be the ratio of female to male legislators, government board members, or corporate board members. Perfect parity would reflect the general population, which is about fifty percent each in any given area, so there should be a 1:1 ratio of male to female members on a given board or in an assembly. Because the literature often uses “parity” to refer to “perfect parity” unless it specifies that parity is either improving or decreasing, this is also how it will be used in this brief. However, perfect parity has not currently been achieved and is unlikely to be achieved in the near future, so gender parity will be most frequently used in this brief to indicate movement towards that goal. Increasing gender parity thus means increasing the percentage of women towards 50%.

Diversity is a more complex concept that encompasses gender, race, ethnicity, and other characteristics on which the populace varies. Increasing diversity thus means increasing the extent to which the board or commission reflects the characteristics of its residents. When all of these elements are relevant or when some combination of these elements of diversity are being discussed, the term diversity will be used. When a specific type of diversity is being referenced, this brief will use the appropriate modifier; for example, *racial or ethnic diversity* refers to the degree to which the racial or ethnic makeup of the board reflects the racial or ethnic composition of its residents. In an effort to not overly complicate things however, gender parity will be used in place of gender diversity as they mean very nearly the same thing in the context of this brief.

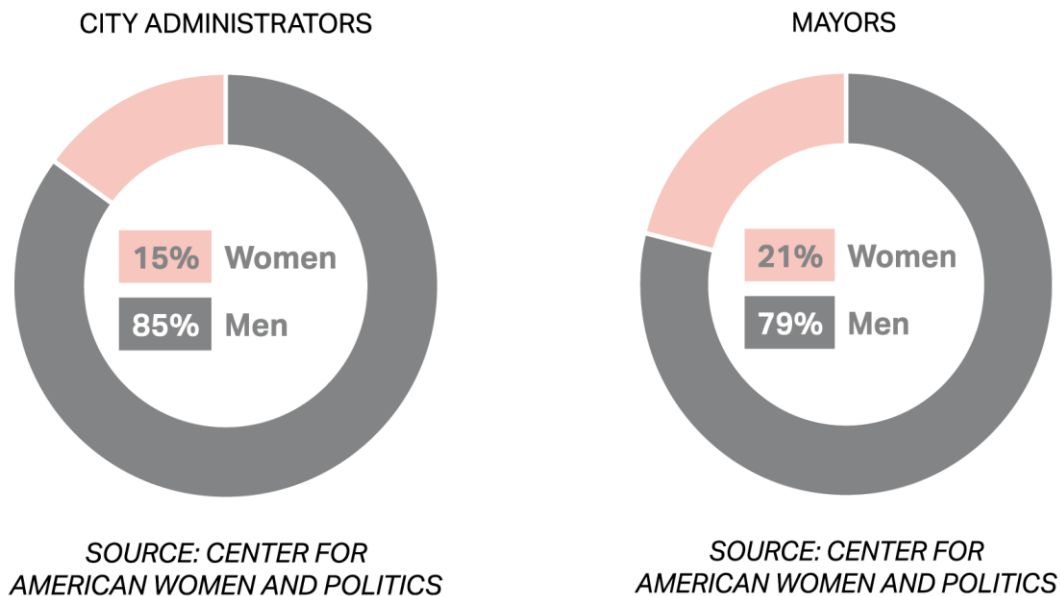
Having briefly discussed the contextual meanings of various terms to be used going forward, the remainder of the brief proceeds as follows: the lack of gender parity in government and corporate boards and committees particularly is shown, the benefits of increasing diversity are reviewed, general solutions are presented, and finally five best practices for boards and committees to implement are elucidated.

¹ The United Nations’ definition is used because it is widely accepted, easy to understand, and because the UN has been doing a good amount of work in attempting to promote gender parity within its own organization and within its member states.

GENDER PARITY IN GOVERNMENT

With few exceptions, women are under-represented at all levels of government worldwide; this is a pervasive and long-standing phenomenon. The United States is no exception; women at the local, state, and national level do not achieve parity with their male counterparts. This difference is especially pronounced in local government, where what little research has been done suggests significant disparities. Additionally, the fact that there is such a dearth of information is in itself concerning. Figure 1 shows the percentage of city administrators and mayors in the United States prior to November 2018.

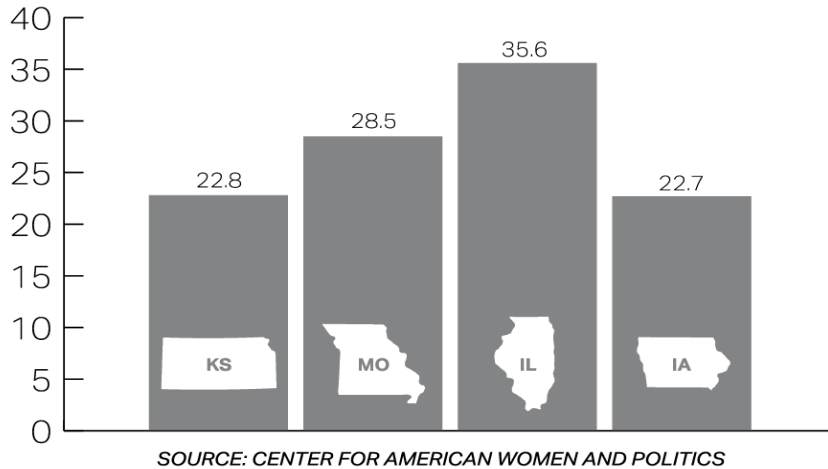
Figure 1: Women in Local Government



Before the November midterms, the most up to date information showed that only fifteen percent of city administrators and twenty-one percent of mayors in the United States are women; this is only a small increase from the 13% that had held steady from 1981-2014.⁵ At the county level, information is also extremely limited, but what little has been collected indicates that county offices like supervisors, commissioners, and sheriffs are those with the least gender parity; more than half of county boards across the United States have no women on them at all.⁶ Thus, representatives at the local, state, and federal level look very different from their constituents.

In the U.S., women are underrepresented at the state level as well. As of 2018, there are only six women governors, with just 39 women holding the position since 1925.⁷ Preliminary 2018 election results indicate that nine women won the Governor's race, three of whom will be the first elected woman governor in their states (Main, South Dakota, and Iowa). This leaves 20 states that will have never had a woman governor.⁸ In state legislatures, only 25.4 percent of the members are women.⁹ Prior to the 2018 election, Missouri ranked 30th overall with only about 23 percent of its two houses being women.¹⁰ Preliminary election results indicate that while a record number of women ran for political office in Missouri in 2018, the actual gains were not revolutionary, with the net addition of five women legislators. This brings the percentage of women in the Missouri General Assembly to about 23.4%.¹¹ Figure 2 shows the percentage of women in legislative assemblies in the Midwest.

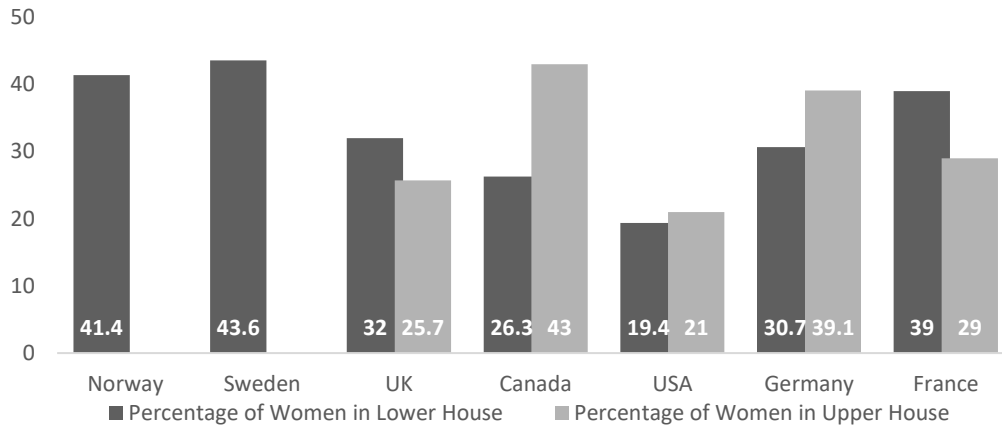
Figure 2: Percentage of Women in State Legislatures



Additionally, Arkansas's legislatures total 19.3% women, Oklahoma's total 14.1% women, and Indiana's total 20% women legislators. Barring Illinois, the greatest concentration of states with a dearth of assemblywomen appears to be in the South and the Midwest. Those with the highest percentage of assemblywomen tend to be clustered in the Northwest and Northwest.¹² So in all, Midwestern states are not close to gender parity and rank towards the lower middle of all states for women's representation in government. In the entirety of the U.S. not one state achieves the preferred one-to-one ratio. The highest-ranking state (Arizona) has only a 40% representation of women in its assemblies.¹³

Nationally, only 24 of the 146 countries for which data was available had women heads of state in 2017, which is an increase from 15 the previous year, of which 8 were the first woman in power in their country.¹⁴ The first woman member of a national legislature was not elected until 1907, in Finland. And while women's representation in those institutions has been growing, by 2003 the percentage of countries with legislatures comprised of at least 30% women was just over 10%.¹⁵ While some countries show a higher ratio of women to men in government, the United States lags behind. Figure 3 presents the percentage of women in assemblies in the U.S., Canada, and several European Countries that are members of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD).

Figure 3: Percentage of Women in Legislative Assemblies (Selected OECD Countries)



Source: Inter-Parliamentary Union¹⁶

The U.S. is currently ranked 103rd out of 193 countries in the world for legislative gender parity, falling between Indonesia and Kyrgyzstan when ranking countries according to single or lower-chamber percentages.¹⁷ In both houses combined, the U.S. Congress is only 20.3 percent women.¹⁸ There is a slightly higher percentage of women in the Senate (23.9%) than the House (19.6%) but both fall well below a one to one ratio of male to female legislators. Of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) countries, Sweden has the highest number of woman legislators at 43.6%.¹⁹ The US is 40th of the 79 countries that have two-chamber legislatures. If we combine the percentage of women in the upper and lower chambers while retaining values for those countries with a single chamber, the US ranks 98th out of 193 countries; the world average is 24%, see Table 1. The world average for the lower or single house is 23.9% and the upper house is 24%. If we are looking at regions, Europe’s average is 27.7% for the lower and upper houses, and the Americas’ average is 29.5% for the lower house and 30.6% for the upper house. Although the Senate typically has a higher percentage of women legislators, it took until 2000 to have a woman on every committee in the US Senate.²⁰

Table 1: Percentage of Women in Dual/Single Chamber Legislatures

Country	% Women
1. Rwanda	55.7
2. Cuba	53.2
3. Bolivia	51.8
4. Mexico	48.4
5. Nicaragua	45.7
96. Bangladesh	20.3
97. Pakistan	20.28
98. United States	20.27
99. Tajikistan	20
100. Slovenia	20
189. Haiti	2.7
190. Yemen	0.5
191. Vanatu	0
192. Micronesia	0
193. Papua New Guinea	0

GENDER PARITY IN CORPORATIONS AND NON-PROFITS

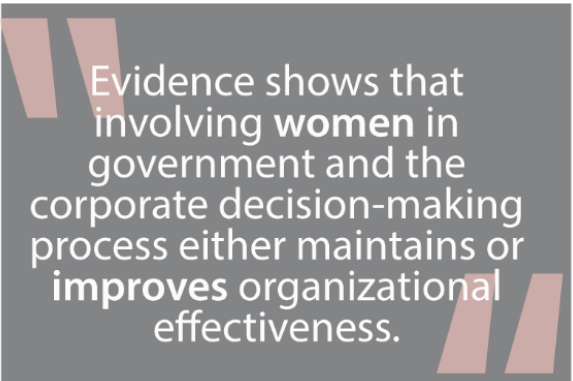
The corporate world has struggled with the representation of women on boards as well. Similar to the relative dearth of women in government, the corporate world also lacks gender parity in the corporate suites, and corporate boards often have very little diversity. Recently, organizations such as the 2020 Campaign, which set a target of twenty percent representation of women on corporate boards by 2020, have put this issue in the spotlight. However, even though the 2020 Campaign succeeded in surpassing its target by ensuring 20.8% of 2010 Fortune 1000 companies' board members were women, this number is still less than halfway to perfect parity. Of the active 2017 Fortune 1000 companies, women represent 19.8% of board seats.²¹ It is something to note that even the goal of this initiative is so far from parity. More information can be found in the Appendix. Nonprofits fare somewhat better, as a 2017 study of nonprofit boards across the country found that women made up 72% of the chief executives, 42% of board chairs, and 48% of board members, though there was very little racial or ethnic diversity.²²

WHY GENDER DIVERSITY?

Having established the lack of gender parity in local, state, and national governments as well as in the corporate world, the question then arises of why this should matter. Increasing gender diversity in an attempt to reach gender parity benefits not only the organization itself, but also the public and the relationship between the public and the organization.

DIVERSITY IMPROVES EFFECTIVENESS

Evidence shows that involving women in government and the corporate decision-making process either maintains or improves organizational effectiveness. When women govern, they perform just as well as or better than male officials.²³ Effectiveness, measured in legislative terms, usually takes into account the amount of legislation developed and/or sponsored, the rank of legislators in a given assembly, and the types of committees where legislators serve. In a study of state legislatures, it was found that women were just as successful in terms of their ability to legislate and maintain office as were male legislators.²⁴ This trend is similar in the U.S. House of Representatives, where women were found to be just as effective as similarly-ranked men in terms of their ability to draft and pass legislation and obtain and retain seats on coveted House committees.²⁵ Woman legislators in the US Congress have also been found to be more bipartisan as a whole.²⁶ When women sponsor bills they recruit a larger number of cosponsors than male representatives, and Republican women in particular elicit a larger number of sponsors from the opposition, particularly on bills related to women's issues, which increases bipartisanship. This is likely due to proximity to the median voter's preferences and a possible lack of support for women's issues within their own party.²⁷ One notable example is the 2013 bill ending the



Evidence shows that involving women in government and the corporate decision-making process either maintains or improves organizational effectiveness.

government shutdown, which began in an informal meeting of nearly all of the 20 women in the Senate and ended as a bipartisan compromise that restarted the government.²⁸ However, despite the evidence from no more than a few years ago, it has been suggested that recent increases in partisanship have dulled the effect of gender on bipartisan cooperation in the US Congress.²⁹ Additionally, increasing the number of women in government could increase government accountability to the public by informing and empowering them. Women constituents represented by women Senators are not only more aware of the substantive policy positions taken by their representatives, but use that knowledge to weigh their performance.³⁰

There is also some evidence that women in government may be superior in both responsiveness to constituent concerns and government cost savings. One study found that women legislators were particularly effective in relating to their constituents because they were particularly goal-oriented, meaning they were more effective at responding to specific constituent situations than were similarly ranked male legislators.³¹ A later study in Italy also found that woman legislators were more responsive to constituent concerns, focusing specifically on concerns about social justice and issues facing families in a study of local governments. In terms of spending, women may provide some cost savings in local government. As they were more likely to have smaller, more cohesive executive staffs. This smaller staff tended to save money on administrative costs. Thus, women in government may produce leaner administrative budgets.³² Another potential cost-saving highlighted by the literature is that women administrators in public school districts are found to reduce turnover in faculty and staff and increase long-term staff and faculty retention rates.³³ This means that these districts have lower onboarding costs and can spend more of their budget on students rather than administrative costs.

While studies on women on civic boards and commissions do not focus on these particular measures of effectiveness, the results of the aforementioned studies suggest that when women take on government responsibilities, they do perform well. Based on these results, women on boards and commissions should perform as well as men who are of a similar rank. Likewise, there could be potential efficiencies and improvements found where women serve on boards and commissions, similar to the results of studies of women in state and local government.

As for the benefits of increasing the percentage of women on corporate boards, arguments have been made that better gender parity at the executive level in general, though not specifically the board of directors as a whole, increases those companies' profits. In the US, greater gender parity has been shown to lead to better financial performance for a firm, primarily through the functioning of the audit committee of the board of directors.³⁴ International studies tend to confirm the general pattern of increasing diversity to increase performance; increasing women executives and board members significantly increases both a firm's gross and net profits. Further, companies in the top quartile on an executive level were 21% more likely to outperform their bottom quartile peers on the earnings-before-interest-and-taxes margin and 27% more likely to outperform them on long-term value creation.³⁵

DIVERSITY IMPROVES THE LIVES OF PEOPLE

As shown above, the number of women in government in Congress and state assemblies still lags behind most other similar democracies. Women representation in government is very important because woman legislators have been shown to approach policy decisions differently and to focus on different policy issues than do male legislators. According to research on women in politics, women in government have been shown to advocate for women's issues, such as family leave and equal pay, in local, state, and national government.³⁶ Women legislators have also been shown to be more likely than their male colleagues to

request earmarks for programs concerning women's economic empowerment, women's health, and violence against women.³⁷ In a broader sense, women have shown different policy preferences than men. Research indicates that women legislators in state assemblies are more likely to choose to sit on health and social committees, as opposed to financial committees. This is not due to coercion but due to different policy preferences that lead women legislators to engage with the policy issues tackled by these committees.³⁸

It is important to note that none of this is to say that women do not or should not also serve on other committees, or hold a multitude of policy preferences aside from those deemed "women's issues." Quite the opposite in fact; women Members of Congress (MC) have larger legislative agendas than their male colleagues, focusing not only on women's issues, but on a broad range of policies. Male MCs expand their policy agendas primarily when they seek higher office, while women sustain a broader range of interests over the entire course of their service.³⁹ However, the presence of women on health and social committees and their attention to issues like education, family leave, and equal pay makes it more likely that those issues are raised at all, and thus that a large portion of the population receives the benefit of policy attention that they may not have otherwise been able to.

Certain segments of the population are likely to have policy needs that are best addressed by representatives who are of the same segments of the population because they are aware of problems faced by these constituents and are thus more able to generate effective solutions.⁴⁰ For example, in a 2009 debate over health care reform in the Senate Finance Committee, Senator Jon Kyl was opposed to including maternity care, saying "I don't need maternity care, and so requiring that to be in my insurance policy is something that I don't need and will make the policy more expensive." Senator Debbie Stabenow pointed out that everyone benefits from maternity care, particularly the children whose mothers are recipients.⁴¹ Without her perspective in the meeting, the result may not have been the eventual inclusion of maternity and newborn care into the Affordable Care Act; having women at the table provided a diversity of perspectives that may not otherwise have been present, and may have led to an overall less desirable outcome. An international example can be found in the Appendix.

It is also important to acknowledge that the majority of women in government are not elected officials. These women are either appointed to boards, commissions, or administrative posts in state agencies or they work in state agencies as civil servants. Because government decisions are made every day by government officials and civil servants who will never face election, it is crucial that they, too, represent the interests of all constituents. While little scholarship looks directly into women appointments to boards and commissions, a great deal of research focuses on executive-level appointments and rank-and-file state workers, known also in the literature as bureaucrats. While this literature differs in focus, the lessons learned are relevant to the representation of women on boards and commissions as these are unelected public officials who are integral to the service of constituent interests and needs.

The representative bureaucracy literature shows that women and minorities are better able to represent constituents by making the agencies in which they work for more reflective of the populations they represent. Woman bureaucrats may represent the interests of women more effectively in many key policy areas from education to policing. In public education, woman math teachers have been shown to improve math scores for women students.⁴² This same trend of women educators producing better performance for women students has also been found to hold true in Africa and Asia, suggesting that the relationship is a robust one.⁴³ Government workers also improved the efficacy in child support bureaucracies, a policy area that disproportionately affects women clients. Woman supervisors, in particular, were more effective than male supervisors in child support enforcement efforts.⁴⁴ They are also more likely to

prioritize goals emphasizing collection for custodial parents, children, or families rather than collecting money for the state or the agency, and to allocate more time to those cases.⁴⁵ Finally, in the case of policing, the presence of woman officers in law enforcement agencies leads to a greater rate of sexual assault reporting. It also leads to an increase in rape reporting specifically, and importantly, to an increase in the clearance rate of rape reports. This increased reporting is likely due to a sense of safety or security felt between women residents and women law enforcement officials.⁴⁶ This trend holds outside of the US as well, with women police chief constables presiding over districts with greater arrest rates for domestic violence. Increasing women police officers carrying out frontline policing also increases the rate of arrest.⁴⁷

State and local boards and commissions cover a broad swath of policy issues. However, many of these boards and commissions regulate issues that can disproportionately affect women. Examples of such civic boards and commissions are state occupational licensing boards, childcare licensing boards, human rights commissions, and local boards that provide health and social services. Likewise, because boards and commissions are engaged in important rulemaking activities outside of the normal legislative process, the discretion boards exercise, as a whole, can be substantial. The impact of such decision-making is wide-ranging. To effectively ensure women are represented in society, women should be better represented in government – especially in policy areas that are gendered and require actors to exercise greater amounts of discretion, which are two factors the literature considers to be essential to the concept of representative bureaucracy and government.⁴⁸ As explicated more thoroughly above, this is not to say that women in government should exclusively concern themselves with issues that disproportionately affect women in society, but rather that women members of government in positions with greater levels of autonomy are better able to effect greater change.

DIVERSITY IMPROVES PUBLIC TRUST

Trust in government is an essential part of a functioning democracy at all levels of governance, and diversity in representation has been shown to increase the public's trust in the process as well as the outcomes of governmental decision-making. Because governing boards and commissions play a vital role in the government's ability to regulate aspects of everyday life, to enhance public safety, and to distribute goods effectively; it is important that the public view these boards and commissions as legitimate institutions. One way to improve public trust is to increase the gender and ethnic diversity of these organizations to more closely match the composition of their communities. When civil servants in a given agency are more representative, people in the community are more willing to trust the agency and its workers have been found to be more cooperative with agency goals. In policing, two large studies in the United Kingdom⁴⁹ and United States⁵⁰ have determined that more representative police departments have higher levels of public satisfaction and cooperation with minority community members. This trend is similar when applied to the representation of women in government. Residents are more likely to consider police agencies to be fairer and more trustworthy when domestic violence units are more representative. Other policy areas also show a similar trend.⁵¹ For example, in the Veterans Administration, veterans expressed higher levels of trust and service satisfaction in counseling programs when they know or assume their counselor is a veteran.⁵² In all, this evidence emphasizes that when agencies look more like the populations they serve, a stronger level of public trust is found than in areas where this is not the case.

Having a representative number of women as elected officials also buoys civic trust and can increase the participation rate of women. One way that civic trust or trust in government is measured is via a concept called political efficacy. Defined broadly, political efficacy is found when voters feel as though their votes

can effect change in government. Higher levels of gender parity in state government lead to stronger expressions of efficacy among women voters, particularly feelings that government is responsive to their needs.⁵³ Similar findings are seen in other OECD countries.⁵⁴ Similarly, in local elections, greater gender parity can lead to greater turnout. In Italian municipal elections, the authors find that turnout among women increases in areas known to have more women in local government.⁵⁵

The increase in trust in government, however, is not only limited to women in a given population. Findings suggest that an increase in women in government may also lead to an increase in trust among men. One study of 31 developed nations went beyond previous work focusing just on the attitudes of women to investigate the attitudes of both women and men about trust in government in relation to gender parity. In doing so, they also found that increased gender parity led to increased trust in government for both women and men.⁵⁶ More broadly, other work has found that both women and men feel better about their government when that government is more diverse.⁵⁷

The argument for increasing descriptive and substantive representation is broad; not only do members of traditionally marginalized groups actually hold different policy preferences and act on them, but the public perceives symbolic benefits to being represented as well. Residents of all stripes have more trust in how government decisions are made and their outcomes, perceive government as more legitimate, and have more of a connection to and engagement in politics.⁵⁸

Representation also influences more than just gender and is important because intersectional identities matter as well. The decision-making process is perceived as more fair by African-Americans when there is greater descriptive representation; interestingly, this holds for white residents as well. In the absence of black descriptive representation, outcomes that are unfavorable to black neighborhoods are evaluated as unfair by both racial groups.⁵⁹ The beneficial influence of descriptive representation on political efficacy also holds for racial and ethnic minority groups; greater numbers of African-American elected officials results in higher levels of trust and efficacy among African-American electorates.⁶⁰ The presence of Latino/Latina state legislators in California and Texas lowered the level of political alienation among Latino/Latina constituents.⁶¹ Higher numbers of Latino elected officials more generally also mobilize Latino electorates to be interested in politics, to feel less alienated from government, and to enhance their participation in the political process (Barreto 2007; Barreto, Segura, and Woods 2004).⁶²

Research on gender parity in corporate boards reiterates the conclusion that more diversity leads to better public perceptions. Various studies have shown that companies with greater gender parity have a better public perception than companies with lower gender parity.⁶³ More specifically, a lack of gender parity can hurt a company by leading potential customers and shareholders to view it as being “socially irresponsible.”⁶⁴ Low board diversity can also be seen as “board misconduct.”⁶⁵ Thus, public trust and perceptions in both the public and private sector are influenced by perceptions of gender parity.

While, again, this literature does not speak directly to the question of how gender parity affects trust in governing boards and commissions, it suggests that gender parity and diversity have an important impact on trust in various types of organizations. Since trust in organizations that regulate constituent and corporate activities is crucial to affirming faith in a democratic system, increasing board diversity can improve the relationship between governing boards and residents.

SOLUTIONS FOR IMPROVING BOARD DIVERSITY

Having established that there is a lack of gender parity in the public and private sectors, and that increasing gender parity provides benefits to the organization, the public, and the relationship between the organization and the public, what can be done to help government, corporate, or nonprofit boards increase their gender diversity? One solution for US local boards and commissions is a voluntary system, a strategy in which there are no formal requirements or enforcement mechanisms and organizations participate of their own volition. A more controversial option is to implement a quota system, a formal requirement that is legally enforceable. Many Latin American countries and several African countries have implemented legislative or party quota systems, which require a certain percentage of seats in the legislature be held by women and that a certain number of high-level party officials be women, respectively. Each has different benefits and drawbacks.

VOLUNTARY BENCHMARKING

Voluntary benchmarking is perhaps the most common strategy for alleviating gender imbalance in both the private and public sector. This sort of project incentivizes organizations to strive for gender parity with either reviews, scorecards, or other publicity. Under such a system, there are no formal or legal requirements for corporate or government entities to meet. There are also no enforcement mechanisms. Organizations choose to join these initiatives and there are no legal repercussions for not meeting the quota.

Domestically, the Women's Foundation has pioneered an initiative program in the public sector that goes beyond encouraging local and state boards and commissions called the Appointments Project®. While it does encourage these boards, it is now also focused on building the capacity of boards to increase gender parity; the Women's Foundation has done outreach to find qualified, dedicated board candidates. It has placed over 90 candidates on boards across Missouri and Kansas since 2014 in large and small cities as well as a few counties. The difference for Kansas City has been striking; at the end of 2017 the number of women on boards and commissions has increased by nearly 10%, though it is still not at perfect parity. The Appointments Project® does not vet candidates, but substantially eases the transactional costs associated with finding and applying for vacancies while managing a talent bank of women interested in public service to more accurately match their expertise and skills with current vacancies.⁶⁶

Internationally, one example is the 2008 "Talent to the Top" initiative in the Netherlands, in which 110 of the largest corporations voluntarily took a pledge to add women to their board. This resulted in at least a 9% increase in the percentage of women on Dutch boards in just two years.⁶⁷ Both the UK (2008) and Australia (2010) have introduced voluntary targets for the percentage of women on corporate boards that have had less dramatic impacts than mandatory quotas, but have still encouraged several percentage points of improvement.⁶⁸

QUOTA SYSTEMS

Quota systems are different from voluntary benchmarking, as they are formal requirements that are legally enforceable. The goal of quotas is the same. Quotas attempt to increase gender parity for government institutions or corporations. Still, these systems have the ability to incentivize good behavior by levying fines or other forms of punishment if corporations or agencies do not comply with the quota

or are not making reasonable progress towards the quota. There are three types of quota systems used to increase gender representation: legislative quotas, party quotas, and corporate quotas.

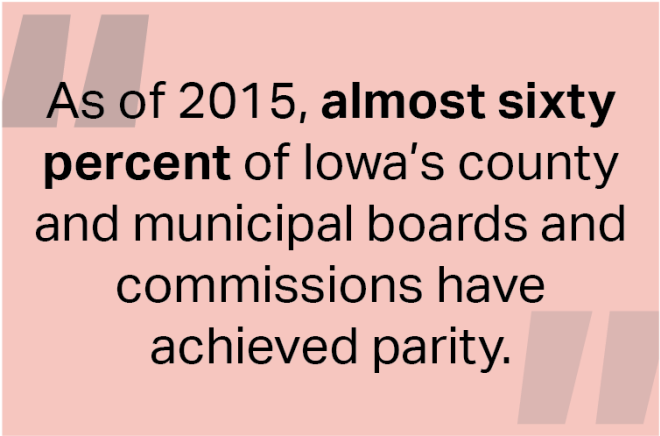
Legislative Quotas

These most commonly refer to national legislatures, but can also refer to local and statewide quotas. While a national or state quota system for legislative seats is impractical in the United States, appointments to governing boards and commissions can be districtwide or statewide. This is an area of U.S. government where such a system is very practical. However, this system is not seen in most areas. It has not been found illegal or unconstitutional on a national level, though likely, because the question has not been formally adjudicated and so there is no legal precedent to which to refer for guidance; at least one legal scholar believes that Congress may not have the power to institute one.⁶⁹

Iowa Example

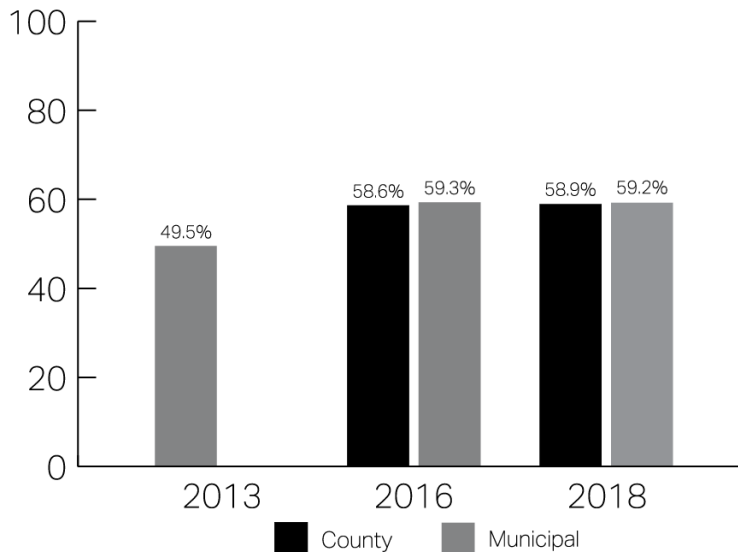
The state of Iowa has been a pioneer in this area by adopting legislation in 1987 that required women make up at least fourteen percent of the seats on a state board or commission.⁷⁰ As of 2009, all state, county, and local civic boards and commissions are required to have gender parity.⁷¹ Like the Appointments Project®, this process encourages women to apply through an online portal and tries to match women based on their credentials to appropriate local and state boards and commissions. Boards and commissions must attempt to maintain a simple majority on a board. If they cannot select a quality woman candidate to maintain or increase parity on a board, then the board can seek male candidates after ninety days.⁷² The Iowa Department of Human Rights monitors compliance and progress, working with the Gender Balance Project to assist in the recruitment of women candidates, connecting candidates and vacancies, etc.

This quota has been successful for Iowa. As of 2015, almost sixty percent of county and municipal boards and commissions have achieved parity.⁷³ A more in-depth study consisting of surveys of local gatekeepers finds that despite self-identified conservatives' more negative views of the requirement, most gatekeepers believe that "society is balanced, so local boards should be too."⁷⁴ Gatekeepers are current board members who could help or impede people from also being members of the board. These individuals have a certain amount of discretion in how stringently to carry out Iowa's law. If board members are committed, their recruitment efforts are likely to be more impactful; if they do not believe in the law, their efforts may be lackluster. While the overall results are positive, economic boards still tend to have a higher proportion of men; non-economic boards are much more balanced. While overall opinion on the quota law may be positive, there are still some boards with norms that deter potential candidates by implying they would be token.⁷⁵ Figure 5 details more information about the gender balance in Iowa county and municipal boards and commissions. Of note is not only the fact that women make up about a third of county seats and more than a third of municipal seats, women hold almost a quarter of all chair positions in county boards and commissions and almost a third of all chair positions at the municipal level.



As of 2015, almost sixty percent of Iowa's county and municipal boards and commissions have achieved parity.

Figure 5: Gender Balance on Iowa Civic Boards and Commissions



SOURCE: CARRIE CHAPMAN CATT CENTER FOR WOMEN IN POLITICS

Other states have also formalized such quotas for their boards and commissions with some success since Iowa's adoption of this legislation, though the language generally specifies only that gender should be taken into account during the appointment process. A table of these states and a brief explanation about their legislation can be found in the Appendix. Currently, Iowa is the only state that requires quotas at the local and county level.

The first governmental quotas began after the 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference.⁷⁶ Such laws set a target for the representation of women in government. Internationally we see most examples of legislative quotas in Latin America. Argentina first legislated a quota system in 1991, and more than half of Latin American democracies have followed suit. Although closed-list quota systems are the most effective at increasing the percentage of women in government, quota systems in general are quite effective when they are adequately designed and enforced.⁷⁷

For more information on legislative, party, and corporate quotas see the Appendix.

Criticism

Voluntary benchmarking systems are attractive as they are non-mandatory and non-punitive. These approaches encourage participation through incentivizing good behavior. Organizations participate for the acknowledgement of being friendlier for women or for taking a visibly active role in tackling the lack of gender parity. However, the effectiveness of voluntary approaches depends on the context in which they operate. Studies of regulatory and voluntary schemes addressing the representation of women in government find that legislative quotas effectively increase women's representation in legislatures, particularly in systems with party-list proportional representation; voluntary party quotas in particular can

be very effective in electing women in developed countries but such initiatives are less effective in developing countries.⁷⁸

Quota systems for both women and minorities receive a great deal of criticism in all sectors of the economy and government. Opponents argue that quotas do not place qualified women on boards and, instead, lead to “tokenism.”⁷⁹ Studies of women in government have shown this to be false, particularly in Latin America, Africa, and in national proportional representation systems. Especially more recently, women have similar social, educational, and career backgrounds and hold similar political ambitions to men; specifically, one study finds no statistically significant difference between the number of men and women legislators who seek reelection or higher office in several Latin American countries.⁸⁰ An example of companies complying with a mandate using this approach is found in India. Recently, a law was adopted requiring that at least one director in a corporation be a woman. While most companies have complied to avoid financial regulations, a majority of these women on boards served alone and only thirteen percent of these directors were actually executives in the company.⁸¹

Another argument in the literature which criticizes quotas states that they fall short in bringing lasting change for women or promoting the ideas of women. Similarly to the criticism about tokenism, these thinkers believe that quotas alone do not elevate women in an effective way. For example, Norway has one of the most effective quota systems in the world, but while the country has gone above and beyond its corporate quota with 40% of the boards of public limited companies being women, less than ten percent of CEO’s in Norway in 2016 were women.⁸² Turning back to what we know about the representation of women in government, this seems to also be a fair criticism. For example, women lag significantly behind in their representation as executives in local government (Figure 3).

Finally, quota systems may work best when electoral systems do not select candidates based on local legislative districts, such as the American case. For example, a system based on a party list would likely be impractical in American elections because seats are tied to geographical locations rather than party lists and rankings. Likewise, in the U.S., quota systems based on public campaign financing would be largely ineffective because most funding is private.

The context in which a given initiative operates is of utmost importance to the success of an initiative. Wide-ranging efforts such as the Appointments Project® often function across state lines. In this system, a voluntary initiative is very feasible. However, a formal approach as is shown in the case of Iowa’s state government may also be feasible and would allow for better enforcement. If internal capacity allows, these formal initiatives seem to be most effective.

OUTSIDE FACTORS THAT IMPACT DIVERSITY

The literature regarding diversity and women in government and corporate life suggests that quotas or voluntary schemes alone will not solve the problem of representation in these places. While voluntary initiatives or quota systems will help some women gain access, they do not help integrate women into administrative or government positions and they do not ensure that women are successful and have the opportunity to advance to positions of power within these structures. Thus, while appointing women to boards is important, it is only the first step to ensuring women are successful on those boards. Three main barriers exist for women once they are appointed that can limit their ability to integrate into the organizations where they serve or that can stifle their advancement potential: cultural barriers, legal protections, and critical mass.

CULTURAL AND SOCIO-POLITICAL BARRIERS

The literature shows that a society's culture is an important factor in how successful quotas are for women. Culture is important for a variety of reasons because notions of stereotypical gender norms can limit the likelihood that qualified women will seek out appointments on boards or run for office. One survey of potential officeholders in the US found that equally qualified women are less likely to run for a public office than men because they are far less likely to receive encouragement to run and often view themselves as less-qualified even when this is not the case.⁸³ An updated version of the study finds that women are still significantly less likely to be encouraged to run for political office by either political or non-political actors, even when they share the same professional status, educational attainment, age, and political interest.⁸⁴ Even when women are qualified for an office or appointment, they may feel unqualified or avoid reaching out to take part in a board, which is compounded by existing political leaders' reluctance to recruit them. Another issue for some women is the lack of adequate policy support like subsidized child care or paid maternity leave; because women shoulder more of the childcare and household responsibilities than men, this functions as a deterrent from seeking office.⁸⁵ Even if schemes or quotas exist to propel women onto boards and commissions, they face an uphill battle if the cultural ideas surrounding women serving in government do not change.

Similarly, societies may be able to ameliorate issues of socialization by ensuring their education systems allow for women to succeed. In countries where women are very well educated, corporate boards have more women serving. Higher levels of education are also correlated with greater political ambition. If countries allow women to advance in postsecondary education, more women will be appointed to corporate boards and, perhaps, government boards or commissions.⁸⁶

Finally, gatekeepers can play a crucial role in the ability for women to succeed in their appointment to a government or corporate board. In the corporate world, oftentimes corporate success and future promotion into leadership relied on recruiters or headhunters being invested in looking for diverse talent and reaching out to women who were well-qualified.⁸⁷ As these people have a great deal of power in who is seen by hiring committees and those who would choose to appoint a board member, they can either be an important barrier or an ally.

LEGAL PROTECTIONS

Initiatives to encourage women to serve on boards and commissions do not exist in isolation. Scholarship describes the efforts to place women on corporate boards or in assemblies as connected to other protections that benefit women such as equal pay, family leave, and sexual harassment policies. A world-wide study of women on corporate boards found that legal institutions and framework shape board diversity above all else.⁸⁸ While quotas matter, other types of legal protections such as paid family leave, sexual harassment policies and equal pay laws also help women. In economies where there are more workplace protections for women and families, women are more likely to serve on corporate boards.⁸⁹ It is not specified that formal, government quotas are required for effective promotion of women in the executive segments of public and private life, but instead that many approaches may help women, but without substantial legal workplace protections women still face obstacles and exclusion in these roles.⁹⁰

CRITICAL MASS

Similar to the concerns about "tokenism", some literature shows that women need to reach a certain number on a board to effectively advocate for their women counterparts or constituents. This line of theory is called "critical mass theory". The idea behind this research is that tokenism does not actively

advance the interests of women. However, when multiple women serve on a board or in government, their strength in numbers will allow them to better advocate for women's issues. Critical mass, thus, may promote a different and more women-friendly culture than would exist if only one woman was represented on a board.

When studying government quotas for women worldwide, researchers found that both voluntary and mandatory quotas were effective as long as they had regulations which led to compliance and only if these schemes focus on the critical mass of women required to bring about active representation.⁹¹

The results reveal that a minimum threshold of 30% of women is effective in promoting active representation and will allow for the presence of women on boards to make a difference in governments.⁹²

In all, these findings suggest that the solution which works best is based on a case-by-case basis. In developing countries or local governments, what may work is not the same as large states or developed countries. Still, the wide range of studies both into private and public representation of women reveals that culture, legal protections, and the number of women serving has a large impact on how effective these attempts to promote women are. In turn, how societies and governments approach these issues individually matters more than the system used to promote women and will most likely determine the success of the approach.

Still, a main drawback of the literature as it looks at women's representation is that this scholarship about quotas rarely looks at the long-term success or challenges of appointing women to government boards. While literature often evaluates the results of quotas or voluntary schemes or determines how effective these women are once placed, very rarely do these studies address the length of time women serve once appointed or what makes longevity or advancement most common. This is why the Women's Foundation has requested a study of best practices of women on boards. In the next section, the Institute of Public Policy proposes five tenets designed to increase the success and impact of women on government boards and commissions. While the Appointments Project® has had great success in placing women on local and state boards and commissions, it is known that this is not enough. This section will go beyond the evaluation of impact of that project. Instead, will give insights into how women remain successful in these institutions.

BEST PRACTICES FOR BOARDS DEDICATED TO DIVERSITY

As is shown in the above review of the literature about including women on boards and commissions, it is clear that initiatives to involve more women in government are not enough. Creating a culture in which women are supported on boards and have continued success with these boards is important as a "next" step. The friendlier a board or commission's culture is to gender parity, the more likely it is to not only retain its women members, but to attract even greater participation from women in the future. Due to this, it is the hope that best practices help boards better target diverse members, have policies in place to sustain diversity, and assist boards in implementing policies to assess board performance. These practices should be low-cost or no-cost for boards to implement and should appeal to boards from the local level all the way up to the state. In all, these best practices aim to be practical and to help boards reduce liability and streamline the process of diversifying membership in a sustainable way.

FIVE TENETS OF BEST PRACTICES FOR BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

The Institute of Public Policy has created a list of best practices for boards and commissions interested in sustaining and supporting diversity in their membership. These best practices are structured as five tenets – ease and transparency in the application process, community outreach, a commitment to professional development and training, using formal policies and procedures, and assessments of performance. These tenets cover the application process through the evaluation of board performance. Thus, they oversee a wide-range of essential board functions from onboarding to ongoing training. For these reasons, IPP believes that the use of these five tenets will help boards and commissions function at the highest level possible. These tenets will assist board executives and staff by providing guidance for creating diverse, welcoming environments that are ideally also more effective. The responsibility for implementing these tenets will rest with the existing leadership of boards and commissions interested in increasing their gender diversity.

While the focus on these tenets is on women, these tenets can be applied more broadly to include diversity in other areas. It is clear that if boards and commissions are to be more reflective of their communities, involving people from various ethnic, religious, geographical, and religious backgrounds is also important. Implemented properly, these tenets will help boards foster and sustain diversity. A model board will have policies and processes that cover all five tenets.

EASE AND TRANSPARENCY IN THE APPLICATION PROCESS

Although the vast majority of academic and corporate literature focuses on the retention of women members and their effect on the functioning or profitability of the board or commission, there are a few lessons to be gleaned. First, it is important that boards make it clear to applicants how the application process functions and how they recruit members. One way to ensure that women are recruited easily is to ask for help from outside organizations. Understandably the capacity of every organization is different. Outsourcing some of the recruiting efforts to a group known for recommending quality candidates could lower the burden for small county and city governments and streamline the process of diversifying a board. If a board is interested in receiving help and candidate referrals, officials should contact the Women’s Foundation Appointments Project® for more information. Applicants generally apply via the Appointments Project® website (<http://www.womens-foundation.org/a-p/>) and are then referred to boards that best match their qualifications. However, an ongoing relationship between a board and commission and the Women’s Foundation Appointments Project® makes this process easier. Other states and localities have also invested in this approach. For example, in Iowa, boards and commissions can access a Talent Bank provided by the Friends of the Iowa Commission of the Status of Women to recruit members.⁹³

Beyond this approach, however, there are ways to ensure the process is easy for applicants and boards. The Iowa Commission on the Status of Women recommends that board application processes targeting women be “transparent, simple, and formal”.⁹⁴ Technology can provide a good solution for this requirement. An easy way to recruit which is simple, transparent, and formal is allowing for interest in boards and commissions to create an online application form on an official government webpage. This approach will reduce the time applicants spend potential gathering applications or submitting them via mail or in-person. An online form can also standardize the process of applications by requiring all parts of an application be completed before submission or that a set of responses to a question are limited to several acceptable options. Free web applications and widgets can help boards design such forms with little or no web development experience. Likewise, by using simple forms, submissions can be undertaken using slower internet speeds where many candidates do not have broadband internet access. Clearly, in

some cases, candidates will prefer a paper application so we do not suggest completely boards and commissions completely end the use of these. However, promoting web forms can reduce the cost of entry both for prospective board members and for boards and commissions. Perhaps an even more accessible and easy to use platform would be an app-based system, like PayIt, which allows citizens to connect with government through a smartphone app to do things like pay their taxes, renew their motor vehicle license, reserve campsites in state and local parks, and more, all within one app.

Assessments to help boards decide on candidates, beyond the help of outside organizations that prepare packages for quality candidates, do exist as well. The state of Iowa has created a simple assessment to help boards determine if candidates are a good fit and help candidates determine if they are a good fit for board service.⁹⁵ In only three short questions, this document can quickly help boards assess where candidates will be successful and if they will fit into board culture. Questions included ask about professional and volunteer experience, honors, other interests, how these experiences inform which boards a candidate feels they are suited for, descriptions of the applicant's personality from a list of choices, and an explanation of why applicants feel they will be an asset to a given board or commission. When both parties are utilizing the same set of vocabulary and considering the same issues, it makes for easier coordination; rather than interviewing a number of candidates for a vacancy, boards may be able to select only the best-suited candidates as a time savings. Boards and commissions may also be able to use one general application either in paper or web form to fill several vacancies at a time. Relatedly, boards can use this information to create some sort of guideline or handbook to detail what they are looking for in potential candidates and how to find it; Tucson, AZ provides new volunteer board and commission members with just such a handbook outlining the basics of municipal government, rules and regulations, how meetings are conducted, and additional resources. It can be found via this link: https://www.tucsonaz.gov/files/clerks/BCC_Handbook_3-20-18.pdf. Overall, this can lower the barriers for candidates as well as boards or commissions.

Boards and commissions can ease the process of board applications on prospective candidates by keeping an up-to-date list of current and upcoming vacancies on a city, county, or state webpage. This allows candidates to quickly see which appointments they may be best suited for. This, again, is a low-cost activity that only requires a webpage, which many localities already have, and short periods of time spent updating the list. This allows prospective candidates to know which board seats are currently open or will be opening soon. The City Clerk's office of Columbia, Missouri maintains a website of this nature, which lists current vacancies on city boards and commissions as well as providing short descriptions of each vacancy, details on how to submit an application in person, and an online application form. The Missouri state government also maintains a webpage of this kind, although it offers only the names of the vacant positions or the almost-vacant positions without the additional brief summaries provided by Columbia's website. Wichita, Kansas maintains a similar website, on which is listed vacancies on citizen advisory boards and commissions, and brief descriptions of the duties of those boards and commissions.

COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Several of the recommendations touted by corporate boards do not translate exactly to local or state government, though their essence can be retained. For example, McKinsey, a global management consulting firm, suggests utilizing both personal searches and a firm to recruit candidates to prevent the maintenance of an "old boys" network. They also suggest expanding searches to individuals without prior board experience to expand and diversify the pool of women candidates available.⁹⁶ While this does not directly apply to the world of state and local government, where applicants are less likely to be plucked from other boards and commissions, there are lessons to be gleaned. First, publicizing vacancies and

information sessions can be a vital tool that is free for boards and commissions seeking applicants. The Iowa Commission on the Status of Women's training for boards and commissions recommends several approaches to recruitment.⁹⁷ The first is to use the help of local organizations. Reaching out to these organizations can pay off for boards and commissions. Specific organizations which target women or minorities who are generally underrepresented already exist in many communities. Also, if boards take the assessment approach outlined above and ask about volunteer or nonprofit board experience, they can determine which organizations may be good partners and would be open to having government officials come and speak about these opportunities at their meetings. Alongside asking members if they would like to join, boards and commissions can also speak to local organization leadership or municipal or county government leaders to see if they know anyone qualified who might be interested in serving.

In addition to utilizing local organizations to aid in the recruitment of larger numbers of women candidates, existing board members should be willing to encourage qualified women friends and colleagues even if they may not have served in any prior capacity. Although relying on individuals to spread awareness of vacancies is not as efficient numerically, the personal touch should make it much more likely that the individuals informed actually carry through and apply for any vacancies on boards or commissions. Combining the two – utilizing local organizations and personally recruiting individuals should allow for a greater number of women applicants.

Another Step ICSW recommends is staying visible on the web.⁹⁸ Social media already plays a key role for most city, county, and state governments. Utilizing social media sites like Facebook and Twitter is free to the user but often has a big reach. It should also be noted that partner organizations (community organizations, local governments) may also have a larger or more-targeted web presence. If a board or commission has already established a good recruiting relationship with these organizations, they may ask these organizations to also share their posts on Twitter or Facebook to create more "buzz".

COMMITMENT TO PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

Boards who are committed to making their women members successful are committed to training not only at the time of onboarding but also throughout their time on the board. Boards who have a formal training process and professional development requirements ensure that members are all aware of important formal procedures and policies and will value and respect other board members who come from backgrounds that differ from their own. Because formal training is helpful in a wide variety of areas from official board processes to sexual harassment and diversity training, boards will benefit from the development of a regular training schedule. While common in the corporate and non-profit board worlds, such training for local and state civic boards and commissions is limited.

Pillar, an organization that works with nonprofit boards in Canada, suggests that an onboarding training program include ideas about the sector where boards operate, the roles and responsibilities of people on a given board where a new person is assigned, the legal duties, ethical guidelines and responsibilities of board members, and financial disclosures.⁹⁹ Pillar argues that boards must be willing to address diversity as part of an ethical duty taken on by board members.¹⁰⁰

In terms of developing such training policies, the Institute for Local Government, a California non-profit created in the 1950s to coordinate and improve the efforts of local governments, provides an easily accessible online packet of orientation materials for individuals new to local government.¹⁰¹ These are meant as supplementary materials, but provide general information regarding how decisions are made, clarifying the roles played by elected and appointed officials, complying with open government and ethics

laws, and interacting with the public, the media, and other levels of government. It also functions as a repository for information about specific policy areas. For example, the Institute provides a list of the social media policies of public agencies, the General Services Administration, and a few private sector businesses as examples.¹⁰²

Additional elements of training related to open records and meetings law in the US should include knowing and understanding the requirements of Sunshine Laws, particularly as they may apply to electronic communications. The federal Government in the Sunshine Act was passed in 1976 as the third in a series of laws designed to increase transparency and accountability in government, but most states also have their own Sunshine laws. Missouri's was introduced to the Missouri Senate in 1973 and ensures that "meetings, records, votes, actions, and deliberations of public governmental bodies be open to the public" with few exceptions (§610.011, RSMo). This includes telephone and electronic communications as well. The recent booklet produced by the Missouri Attorney General's office is 72 pages long.¹⁰³ The state of Colorado introduced legislation to ensure that state boards and commissions implemented written policies and training procedures regarding the state's Sunshine laws, after several audits had found that board members failing to understand their responsibilities and to adequately carry them out. Citing a need to identify and implement best practices, Colorado lawmakers quickly passed this bill, which was signed into law in April 2018.¹⁰⁴ Relatedly, social media usage is a relatively new and potentially complicated field to navigate for new board members.

States and some localities are requiring sexual harassment training upon appointment and on a rolling basis for the purpose of protecting women and ensuring the culture of boards is welcoming and respectful to them. The State of California now requires a sexual harassment prevention training workshop of at least two hours for all appointees within six months of their appointment.¹⁰⁵ Localities also have begun to address this issue in the shadow of the #MeToo movement. Sun Prairie, a town in Wisconsin with about 33,000 residents, passed a law requiring all appointments on local government boards and commissions take a sexual harassment course when appointed effective January 2018.¹⁰⁶ The locality also encourages elected officials such as the city council or school board also take board trainings.¹⁰⁷

An important lesson from the literature on non-profit best practices shows that mentorship programs can complement formal trainings and help new board members feel more connected to other appointees. Pillar recommends that boards create programs that pair experienced board members with incoming appointees to provide guidance and feedback to the new member as well allow for them to ask questions in a less-formal session.¹⁰⁸

Different boards will have different levels of capacity but with many resources available for training from municipal leagues and the Women's Foundation, boards of all shapes and sizes should be able to build safe and diverse environments for board members. For example, the Missouri Municipal League (MML) offers a variety of resources to members of local government, including the newly developed Municipal Governance Institute (MGI). The MGI builds on existing MML training with workshops and conference sessions in twelve core areas and several elective areas, including Sunshine laws, ethics, sexual harassment, and time management, among others. However, these are provided to individuals rather than boards as a whole and cost approximately \$20 per class.

BOARDS NEED FORMAL POLICIES AND PROCEDURES

Effective boards create formal policies and procedures. Training is most helpful when it is clear that there are conflict resolution procedures and policies in place that are transparent and enforceable to encourage

civil discourse over harassment, recriminations, and legal procedures. While training can alert board members to what harassment is or what a toxic work environment looks like, in isolation, it will not bring change. To make the skills that board members learn in training actionable, boards should develop policies that make reporting, investigation, and decision-making processes clear.

While it may seem as though the point of having formal social media or harassment policies is to protect board members, these policies are equally important for the civic boards and commissions where members serve. Such policies can help protect institutions from liability. By having no formal process or policy regarding diversity, harassment, or social media, organizations open themselves up to litigation. The Local Government Research Collaborative sponsored a study which found that having grievance policies in place not only reduces the risk of legal action, but can also provide feedback as to which policies or personnel may be problematic and allow an organization to more effectively deal with those problems once identified.¹⁰⁹ The study suggests updating policies, using regular performance evaluations and employee surveys to prevent issues in the first place, and implementing several reforms to the system for when issues do occur. Policies should be formally written out, logically designed, consistently applied, and have goals understood by all stakeholders (i.e. what constitutes prohibited behavior and why should be clear to all parties).¹¹⁰ These policies should of course be applicable to every individual on the board, including leadership. No individual should be above being investigated and no individual should be denied protection.

Policies that involve third parties which investigate complaints and follow a strict zero-tolerance protocol are likely to save organizations the worry and hassle of costly legal battles. Whether carried out by certified employees or individuals from outside the organization entirely, mediation can reduce the number of formal complaints filed and thus reduce the loss of time, money, and employee trust. The State of Texas has an outlined list of steps to take to prevent harassment, develop official policies, and limit liability by creating enforceable guidelines which could be utilized by most state and local governments. The state of Arizona has taken things further, mandating “annual workplace [sexual] harassment prevention training for all state employees” as of January 2018. This training will be half an hour long and all employees will be required to retake it every year.¹¹¹ The impetus for this bill was the sexual harassment of a woman lawmaker and the lack of response from House leadership.¹¹² While not all boards and commissions could utilize an outside counsel or firm to investigate complaints, the capacity to conduct a thorough internal investigation should exist in most areas.¹¹³ Thus, boards benefit from these policies as much as their members do.

EFFECTIVE BOARDS ASSESS PERFORMANCE REGULARLY

Boards who do an outstanding job of supporting their members and communities acknowledge the importance of performance evaluation. Of course, the first step of this must be to begin collecting data. Without a baseline for the number of women in the organization, how members are recruited, what the organizational culture is, whether or not there are formal policies in place, and how effective the board is at meeting its goals, there is no way to tell if improvement has been made. For example, it was mentioned above that there is a distinct lack of information on the number of women serving in local government, let alone any details about their service. Data should be collected on the number and demographics of women and men currently serving on boards and commissions to assess the current state of diversity. Data should also be collected on the demographics of the population being served; Census data may be a viable option for this. If the goal is to make boards and commissions more representative of their communities, then it will not only be necessary to know the composition of the boards, but also of the community. Without first gathering that information to develop baseline measures to benchmark against,

it will be an impossible task to determine whether or not conditions are improving. With this information however, it is possible to create a baseline measure of diversity within the board or committee in order to determine what their goals should be, create a strategic plan to work towards these goals, and regularly review their performance to ensure that these goals are being met. A Department of Commerce survey of industry leaders found that top companies practice measurement and evaluation; one way in which this was accomplished was the development of a five-year diversity plan that incorporates a monitoring system to measure diversity representation over several specific measures.¹¹⁴

Boards can evaluate their effectiveness in a variety of areas from chair leadership to the culture of the board. Thus, if a local or state government has made a commitment to inclusivity and diversity on its boards and commissions, it should evaluate how well the board members feel that it is meeting these goals. Regular evaluations will also allow boards the ability to assess other challenges or determine where they need to improve. Apart from the obvious benefit of making the culture of boards and commissions more accepting and supportive of current women members, both the change in culture and the act of doing so send strong signals to future candidates that this is a board that would welcome their participation, making more applicants in the future more likely.

There is little information out there for the evaluation of governing boards and commissions outside of school board superintendent evaluations, which have become commonplace since the early 2000s.¹¹⁵ However, there is a wealth of information about corporate board evaluations. A recent study of corporate boards and their evaluation strategies revealed that eighty percent of corporate boards conducted a formal evaluation.¹¹⁶ Corporate board reviews cover a wide-range of topics from culture to leadership. Similarly, many nonprofits have also adopted an approach of board evaluation based on the literature and learning in corporate governance. In a review of best practices for nonprofits, Boardsource recommends that nonprofit boards regularly evaluate their performance and include measures that focus on diversity and inclusivity in their membership.¹¹⁷

The National Council of Nonprofits (NCN) recommends self-evaluations of the organization as a whole or at least of certain aspects of the organization as the first step towards achieving effective outcomes. Organizations that first identify what success looks like for them, make a plan for how to achieve it, and continuously collect information on their work and its outcomes, are more likely to be effective.¹¹⁸ Board members can also conduct self-assessments separately from evaluations of the nonprofit as a whole. The NCN suggests that each board member is asked about their roles to prepare for a larger meeting about the role of the board in general. Then, they should be asked to determine how close they believe they are to those expectations. Two questions the NCN suggests starting with are “why does this nonprofit exist?” and “how can our board advance the mission?” Whatever the unit of analysis, regular evaluations can help ensure that boards and the organizations they lead continue to perform well and be successful. The NCN also provides samples of generic self-assessment tools.¹¹⁹

CONCLUSION

Overall, making the application process clear and easy to comprehend, publicizing vacancies, reaching out to qualified women candidates, developing professional development training programs, formal policies and procedures, and regularly evaluating performance can help to recruit and maintain greater numbers of women board and commission members. These best practices are essential to any board or commission that is interested in sustaining and supporting diversity in their organization.

BEST PRACTICES SUMMARY TABLE

Best Practices for Boards and Commissions	
Best Practice Tenets	Reasoning
Ease of Application <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask for outside assistance • Prepare questions to fit candidates to boards • Maintain an online application process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Difficult applications make it less likely that individuals will complete the process.
Community Outreach <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Actively publicize vacancies • Search out qualified candidates via local organizations and extant board members • Maintain a social media presence 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding the pool of potential applicants, particularly with a specific gender focus, can increase the number of women applying.
Professional Development and Training <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Implement onboarding programs • Implement mentorship programs • Suggest or require a regular training schedule 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Without the proper training, it can be daunting to break into an established group. • Training sets behavioral expectations.
Formal Policies and Procedures <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Create enforceable guidelines • Create grievance policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If there is no recourse when grievances occur, women may be more likely to leave. • Formal and neutrally applied policies can reduce formal complaints.
Performance Assessments <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Collect (and continue to collect) relevant data • Regularly evaluate the board's performance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Data collection facilitates evaluation • Regular evaluations allow problems to be identified and resolved.

*The chair of local government boards and commissions has some authority to institute community outreach, professional development, formal policies and procedures, and performance assessments, but the city or state's executive branch should maintain a comprehensive online application portal.

APPENDIX

States with Gender Parity Laws for Boards and Commissions

State	Passed	Level(s) of Government	Requirement
Connecticut (P.A. 93-424)	1993	State	Gender and race must be taken into account during appointment process to be reflective of the state
Illinois (5ILCS 310/2)	2000	State	Gender balanced to the extent possible during the appointments process; significant representation otherwise
Iowa (HF 243)	1987, 2009	State, County, Local	Gender balance
Montana (Code 2-15-108)	1993	State	Gender and proportional representation of minorities should be taken into account during appointment process
New Hampshire (Code 21:33-a)	2011	State	Gender may be taken into account during appointment process
North Dakota (NDCC 54-06-19)	1989	State	Gender must be taken into account during appointment process
Rhode Island (Code 28-5.1-3.1)	2007	State	Gender and race shall be taken into account during appointment process
Utah (Code 67-1-11)	1992	State	Gender must be taken into account during appointment process "strongly"

Source: *Carrie Chapman Cat Center*¹²⁰

*only "must" indicates obligation

Iowa Gender Balance Law: Full Text

HOUSE FILE 243

AN ACT PROVIDING FOR GENDER BALANCE ON LOCAL BOARDS, COMMISSIONS, COMMITTEES, AND COUNCILS, AND INCLUDING AN APPLICABILITY PROVISION.

BE IT ENACTED BY THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF IOWA:

Section 1. Section 69.16A, Code 2009, is amended to read as follows:

69.16A GENDER BALANCE.

1. All appointive boards, commissions, committees, and councils of the state established by the Code, if not otherwise provided by law, shall be gender balanced. No person shall be appointed or reappointed to any board, commission, committee, or council established by the Code if that appointment or reappointment would cause the number of members of the board, commission, committee, or council of one gender to be greater than one-half the membership of the board, commission, committee, or council plus one if the board, commission, committee, or council is composed of an odd number of members. If the board, commission, committee, or council is composed of an even number of members, not more than one-half of the membership shall be of one gender. If

there are multiple appointing authorities for a board, commission, committee, or council, they shall consult each other to avoid a violation of this section. This section shall not prohibit an individual from completing a term being served on June 30, 1987.

2. All appointive boards, commissions, committees, and councils of a political subdivision of the state that are established by the Code, if not otherwise provided by law, shall be gender balanced as provided by subsection 1 unless the political subdivision has made a good faith effort to appoint a qualified person to fill a vacancy on a board, commission, committee, or council in compliance with subsection 1 for a period of three months but has been unable to make a compliant appointment. In complying with the requirements of this subsection, political subdivisions shall utilize a fair and unbiased method of selecting the best qualified applicants. This subsection shall not prohibit an individual whose term expires prior to January 1, 2012, from being reappointed even though the reappointment continues an inequity in gender balance.

Sec. 2. APPLICABILITY. This Act is applicable to appointive boards, commissions, committees, and councils of a political subdivision of the state on and after January 1, 2012.

Iowa Board Questionnaire

Self-Assessment Exercise

1. Skills and Experience

Professional
Experience

Volunteer
Experience

Educational
Experience

List your skills acquired through your professional, volunteer, and educational experience:

From these, highlight skills that will directly contribute to your selected board/commission:

2. Honors, Awards, and Other Interests:

3. Descriptive Qualities:

Analytical	Flexible	Organized
Calm	Goal-Oriented	Reliable
Confident	Innovative	Resourceful
Cooperative	Knowledgeable	Self-Directed
Creative	Leadership	Self-Motivated
Decisive	Well Connected	Team Player
Fair	Logical	Tolerant

Compile your qualities, skills, honors, and experiences that pertain directly to your selected board or commission, especially as relating to the guiding mission and duties. Gathering this information will help you reflect on your qualifications and strengthen your application to the selected board or commission. How will you be an asset?

International Quota Example

An interesting case study is Argentina, which instituted a quota system in 1991 that has effectively increased the percentage of women in the national legislature. These women were just as educated, effective, and politically ambitious as male legislators, and were able to make access to contraception universal and free, first by passing the (cross-partisan) bill that had been stalled for years and then by following through with the executive branch and civil society to promote proper implementation. The key factor in this change was that the increased presence of women in the legislature and the executive allowed policy entrepreneurs to emerge and to create networks of support.¹²¹

Legislative Quotas

Argentina and Costa Rica for example, have legislatures with close to 40% proportion of women to men.¹²² An example from a different continent is Rwanda; following the 1994 Rwandan Genocide, Rwanda's government has required that thirty percent or more seats in its parliament be held by women.¹²³ In the Rwandan case, women now hold sixty-four percent of the seats in Rwandan parliament.¹²⁴ Most legislative quotas rely on party list systems which means that candidates in a national assembly are elected from one or more large, at-large districts rather than small, geographically-specific districts. Party lists are just listings of candidates submitted by local party organizations and as seats are gained, candidates are picked from the list. The more seats a party gets, the more people on the party list receive a seat in office. This system is common in Europe but in contrast to the plurality system used in federal, state, and most local elections in the United States.

Party Quotas

Party quotas are much more common than legislative quotas. Party quotas are very similar to legislative quotas in that they set a requirement for party lists to contain a certain number of women or for a certain number of high-level party officials to be women. These systems work well in countries where party organizations are generally decentralized such as in federal states like Canada, Germany, or Australia. The national party organization generally holds local districts accountable for ensuring local

candidates in primary contests meet their gender quota. For example, in Canada, the NDP, a social democratic party, began requiring that each primary contest have a woman running in each federal riding (district).¹²⁵ These organizations may choose to withhold funding from state or provincial organizations that do not meet the quota. Such systems include a hybrid number of characteristics between voluntary systems and legislative quota systems.

Corporate Quotas

Governments have also adopted quotas for corporations. These quotas mandate that a certain percentage of women should be on a corporate board by a targeted date. Similar to legislative quotas, these are mandated by the government and are not voluntary. Quota amounts range from thirty-three percent (Italy, Belgium, Kenya) all the way to fifty percent (Israel and Québec).¹²⁶ Norway adopted some of the most ambitious quotas in the world for its corporations in 2006 but what is most notable about its adoption of a forty percent gender quota is the fact that the mandate was passed alongside strong sanctions for corporations who violate it.¹²⁷ In Norway, if a company is non-compliant with the mandate, it will be unable to register as a business enterprise or face dissolution, which would essentially end the business.¹²⁸ This is a strong deterrent to businesses who might otherwise evade the law. Due to this, forty-two percent of the people serving on Norwegian corporate boards are women. In the US, California recently passed a law requiring all publicly held corporations to have at least one woman on their board of directors by the end of 2019, the only state that does so. As the size of the board increases, so too should the number of women – boards with five directors should have two women members and boards that have six directors should have three women members by the end of 2021. Boards that do not meet this requirement can be fined anywhere from \$100,000 to \$300,000.¹²⁹ New York is also looking to introduce similar legislation.¹³⁰

The best example of this in the corporate world is the 2020 Women on Boards initiative described earlier in this brief. The project scored corporations based on the degree to which women were represented on their boards. 2020 Women on Boards uses data from the Gender Diversity Index to determine where large corporations rank. The initiative graded boards, placing each in four categories, as seen in Table 2:

Table 2: 2020 Women on Boards Criteria

Grade	Definition	Percentage of Corporations
W	Winning – women make up 20% or more	55 %
V	Very Close- women make up 11% to 19%	22%
T	Token – women make up less than 11%	16%
Z	Zero – No women	7%

Source: 2020 Women on Boards¹³¹

Each year, corporations receive a score in an annual report. Those who wanted to be actively involved could reach out to the initiative for help and use this benchmark to improve their score. A similar project called the 30% Club exists to ensure thirty percent of people on corporate boards are women throughout the developed world.¹³²

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