

KANSAS MUNICIPALITIES & GENDER BALANCE

THE STATUS
OF BOARDS &
COMMISSIONS
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A RESEARCH
PROJECT FOR:

*The Appointments Project® and Ready to
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APPOINTMENTS PROJECT® & READY TO RUN KANSAS®
WOMEN'S LEADERSHIP SERIES



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Introduction

This research project was conducted as part the Appointments Project® and Ready to Run Kansas® Women’s Leadership Series, which focuses on preparing women to sit on civic boards and commissions and run for political office in Kansas. The Series was developed through a partnership between United WE and the Institute for Leadership Studies at the University of Kansas. With an overall shared goal and vision of increasing women’s participation and civic engagement throughout Kansas, this study provides the first systematic statewide snapshot of gender balance on municipal boards and commissions for the state of Kansas.

Gender (im)balance and service on boards and commissions: An overview

Service on civic boards and commissions is essential to meaningful representation in governance, and the more that boards and commissions reflect the diversity of the community(ies) they serve, the more responsive they will be to the needs of and resource allocation for the entirety of the community. Corporate boards provide compelling evidence as to the notable impact diverse board membership delivers. In the corporate sector, women’s presence on boards is related to an improved return on investment, improved stock performance (Misercola, 2016), and increased earnings (Thwing Eastman, Rallis, & Mazzucchelli, 2016). A recent study also found companies with more diverse boards reported better financial performance during the COVID-19 pandemic (Meyer, 2021). It is not surprising, then, that research consistently finds more diverse teams – such as boards – yield higher performance and output while fostering increased creativity and innovation (Williams Woolley, Chabris, Pentland, Hasmimi, & Malone, 2010).

The realization that gender balance on civic boards and commissions is essential to a fully democratic government is not without a long history. As early as the 1930s the American Association of University Women’s (AAUW) Committee on the Economic

and Legal Status of Women had developed a response to continued systemic imbalances in civic appointments. Their project, called “Rosters of Women Qualified for Public Service” (Gould, 2013; Temko, 2019), identified women who were qualified to serve in appointed positions, gathered materials that supported their experience and detailed their qualifications, and then nominated and advocated for their appointments to civic posts at all levels of public governance. Their decades-long efforts of gathering names and building files of evidence in support of women’s cases was focused on breaking what is known as the “glass floor.” Whereas the “glass ceiling” references the social barriers that prevent women from being promoted up to higher level – and higher paying – jobs, the “glass floor” references the implicit, social barriers that prevent women’s entry into opportunities. As the AAUW identified almost 100 years ago, the refusal, oversight, or lack of consideration by a political committee (i.e., a city commission) or political leader (i.e., a mayor or governor) to appoint a qualified woman over a man is a clear example. Even the unwillingness to acknowledge a lack of diversity and/or failure to expand a pool’s diversity before making an appointment qualifies as perpetuating the glass floor as well.

With a lingering disparity of women at all levels of political office, and to elevate the need for women’s voices at the table, in the past three decades, 11 states have created legislation that requires gender balance on civic boards and commissions. As evidence of the difficulties in passing initiatives that support gender balance, the legislation in these 11 states offers neither consistency in their language nor clarity in how gender balance would be enforced. True, legislation written in both Iowa and Illinois may appear to be exceptions as they specify a clear requirement for gender balance. First passed in 1987, Iowa’s legislation stipulates that for boards with odd numbers of members “the members of one gender must equal one-half the membership plus one,” while on boards with an even numbered membership “no

more than one-half of the membership shall be of one gender” (Iowa Code, Chapter 69.16A). While their initial 1987 language referred only to state boards and commissions, in 2009 Iowa became the only state to extend their gender balance legislation to include state, county, and city boards and commissions.

More limiting than Iowa, Illinois’ legislation that passed in 2000 applies strictly to state boards and commissions, stating that the membership “shall be as gender balanced as possible” (State of Illinois, 2000). Of the other nine states with gender balance legislation – Connecticut, Utah, Montana, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Rhode Island, Oregon, Florida, North Carolina – their legislation reads much more as a suggestion, using language such as “good faith effort,” “to the extent possible,” “strongly consider,” etc. (Carrie Chapman Catt Center, 2014). However, if no one is aware of vacancies on boards and commissions, let alone how to apply, a lack of public transparency can further perpetuate the “glass floor” and a lack of diverse representation. In 1993, in an effort that recognized this very real concern, Montana passed a bill focused on gender and racial balance on state boards and commissions. They further stipulated that recent appointments as well as upcoming vacancies be published in the monthly Montana Administrative Register, a document available to the public.

However, while passing legislation is a first step, evidence suggests that alone is not enough to address the entrenched, systemic barriers. The Iowa Gender Balance Project reports that 34 years after passage of their legislation the intended outcomes of the law are still out of reach. For instance, in 2020 the seats held by women on municipal planning and zoning commissions totals 34.28%, which is similar to the water boards (33.33%), zoning board of adjustment (30.73%), and airport boards (20.24%).

Even when gender balance is the goal, striving for a broad average across all boards may perpetuate systemic inequities. In other words, striving for gender balance

on each board is the goal. Research from multiple states' boards and commissions finds results similar to those in Iowa, wherein more women are frequently appointed to library boards than, for instance, planning commissions. One explanation for this disparity – which impacts women *and* men – is that certain boards and commissions are associated with “masculine” stereotypes and others are associated with “feminine” stereotypes (i.e., Kerr, Wedel, Schmidt, & Donn, 2014; Grande, King, & Bauges, 2016). Further, “masculine” boards are perceived to be the more powerful boards. In 1999, the Women’s Forum of North Carolina published a report which first coined the term “power boards.” Their use of the term references the boards who have “decision-making authority, financial allocations, and influence on making policies that affect a majority of North Carolinians” (Women’s Forum, 2018). Building on the work of the Women’s Forum, political scientists at Boise State University released a 2015 study of their state’s gender balance on local civic boards and commissions, studying data on 5,000 board appointments and finding that often appointees were “gender sorted” to align with stereotypical board appointments (Grande, King, & Bauges, 2016; Russell, 2015). For instance, they found women were more often appointed to boards that had stereotypical “feminine missions” – i.e., the library board, education-related boards, health-related boards – and men more likely to be appointed to boards with stereotypical “masculine missions” – i.e., boards associated with agriculture, construction, commerce, science, technology, the environment, etc. At the state level, they found that 30.8% of appointees were women, and 69.2% were men. However, women received 15.8% of appointments to state boards with “masculine missions,” and 51.1% of appointments to boards with “feminine missions.” Overall numbers were similar between state, county, and municipal appointments, with 34.4% of county and 38.3% of city appointments were women, compared to 65.% of county and 61.7% of city appointments going to men.

In 2014, Dr. Barbara Kerr and her colleagues conducted a study for United WE (formerly the Women's Foundation), in which they identified five key barriers to achieving gender balance on Kansas City, Missouri, boards and commissions. Barriers included women worrying they were lacked requisite knowledge and expertise, as well as lower levels of confidence in their leadership skills. The study also found that the women were convinced they would not be asked to serve, and importantly they reported high uncertainty about how the process worked. They also reported concerns about their time being spent efficiently if they were to accept an appointment and about a need for mentoring. The report also identified a need for board/commission leadership to be inclusive and to ensure member time was used wisely. Ultimately, the report's findings confirm that any gender imbalance is not attributable to the lack in desire to serve. Instead, the report was clear: women are civically engaged and want to be civically engaged. However, appointment and boards/commission systems and structures need to be both more inclusive and diverse, efficient, and transparent.

With these key findings in mind, our study seeks to provide a benchmark on the status of gender balance on Kansas' civic boards and commissions. By providing a first level look at municipal boards and commissions, the results reported here offer policymakers, elected leaders, and advocacy groups data from which to evaluate their practices in identifying and filling open seats. Our data also provide a baseline from which we can compare future studies, which will include a study of gender balance on state and county boards and commissions. Finally, it is our goal to inspire Kansas citizens to be involved in their civic governance and seek appointment to civic boards and commissions in their communities.

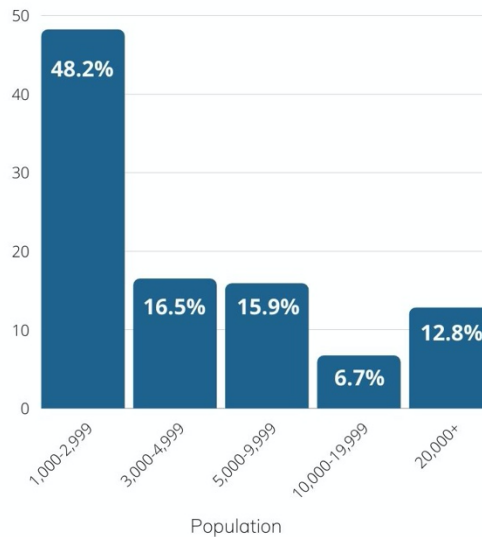
Gender Parity and Board Composition: 2021 Data

Our analysis of the extent to which gender parity exists on Kansas municipal boards and commissions, the first of its kind in Kansas, was conducted in the fall of 2020 and spring of 2021. We first identified a list of 668 municipalities in Kansas (kansas-demographics.com). Because a larger population increases the likelihood of a municipality utilizing boards and commissions as part of their governing process in cities/towns, we chose to focus our data collection on those cities and towns with populations over 1,000. Of those municipalities, 203 were listed with a population over 1,000 at the time of our data collection.

A graduate student next researched each of the 203 municipalities to identify the following data points for each municipality: number of boards and commissions; names of boards and commissions; number of members for each board or commission; names of appointed members of each board or commission. A member of the research team then contacted those municipalities for which data was not publicly available; multiple attempts were made to obtain information from each municipality's point of contact. The data collection process resulted in completed information across all data points for 164 municipalities (80.8%). For the purposes of this report, we excluded the remainder of the sample for the following: only partial data (all but appointee names) was publicly available and/or provided ($n = 6$, 3.0%); municipalities reported not utilizing appointed boards or commissions in governing ($n = 14$, 6.9%); data was not publicly available or provided either online or through direct requests ($n = 19$, 9.4%).

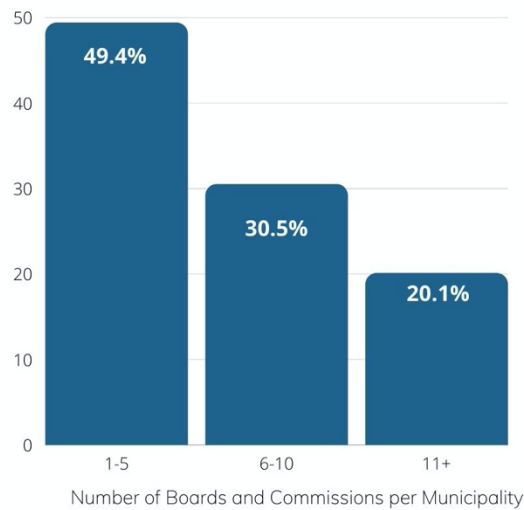
Thus, the results reported in this report reflect the data gathered from 164 municipalities with populations over 1,000 in Kansas between fall 2020 and spring 2021. The majority of our sample was comprised of municipalities with a population of 1,000-2,999 (48.2%). Municipalities with a population of 3,000-4,999 comprised 16.5% of our sample, and municipalities with populations of 5,000-9,999 comprised 15.9% of our sample. Almost seven percent (6.7%) of our sample fell within the population range of 10,000-19,999, and 12.8% of the municipalities in our sample had populations of more than 20,000 (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Data Sample of Kansas Cities and Towns - 2021
Percentage of sample by population



Across the municipalities in our sample, the majority have from one to five boards and commissions to which citizens are appointed. In fact, almost half of our sample consists of municipalities with numbers in this category (49.4%), while 30.5% of the municipalities in our sample have from 6 to 10 boards and commissions, and 20.1% have eleven or more boards and commissions assisting with the governance of their city or town (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. Data Sample of Kansas Cities and Towns - 2021
Number of Boards and Commissions per Kansas Municipality*



It makes sense that the larger the size of a municipality the more likely it is there will be an increase in the number of boards and commissions serving the governance of the town or city. Our data further supports this logic. For those municipalities with a population over 20,000, on average their governance works with over 16 boards and commissions. Those municipalities with populations ranging from 10,000 to 19,999 have on average 10 boards and commissions, with populations between 5,000 and 9,999 supporting on average 7 boards. For those municipalities with populations ranging from 3,000 to 4,999 and from 1,000 to 2,999, they each on average have 6.56 and 4.66 boards and commissions, respectively, participating in their municipality's governance (see Table 1).

To best study gender parity on boards and commissions in Kansas, we identified the boards that most commonly serve municipalities in our study. While the frequency of library boards, parks and recreation boards, and housing boards is very clear, the presence of planning and zoning boards requires some clarification. The most frequent board occurring in Kansas municipalities is a version of a planning board or

Table 1. Average number of Kansas boards and commissions by population of the municipality*

| City/Town Size | Average # of Boards/Commissions | Data from # Cities/Towns |
|----------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|
| 20,000+ | 16.38 | 21 |
| 10,000-19,999 | 10.00 | 11 |
| 5,000-9,999 | 7.04 | 26 |
| 3,000-4,999 | 6.56 | 27 |
| 1,000-2,999 | 4.66 | 79 |

commission. While the planning board/ commission is often created as a separate entity from the Zoning board/commission, in 39 Kansas municipalities the planning and zoning boards are combined. Further, in some municipalities a planning/zoning board exists, along with a zoning appeals board. Therefore, for the purposes of our data analysis we coded separately those municipalities with a distinct planning board, a distinct zoning and/or zoning appeals board, and a distinct planning/zoning board.

Each of the most common boards can be found in Table 2, along with a statewide total membership, the statewide percent of women appointed to those boards, and the statewide total of men appointed to those boards. In three of the six most common municipal boards – Planning, Zoning, and Planning/Zoning – women represent only 23-25% of the membership on the board, compared to men at 74.9-76.6%. Similarly, when it comes to Parks and Recreation boards women are still some distance from balance, with only 38.4% of Parks and Recreation boards in Kansas comprised of women. When it comes to service on library boards, however, women are much more likely to be appointed. Specifically, 69.2% of the library board seats in Kansas are held by women, compared to 30.8% of seats held by men. Housing Authority boards/commissions are the only board representing parity in its members. In Kansas municipalities, women (52.3%) are just as likely as men (47.7%) to be appointed for service.

Table 2. Gender equity on most common Kansas boards and commissions

| 5 Most Common Boards/Commissions | Total Membership | %Women Appointed | %Men Appointed |
|----------------------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| Planning | 743 | 24.0% | 76.0% |
| Library | 679 | 69.2% | 30.8% |
| Parks and Recreation | 463 | 38.4% | 61.6% |
| Zoning | 390 | 25.1% | 74.9% |
| Housing Authority | 327 | 52.3% | 47.7% |
| Planning and Zoning* | 239 | 23.4% | 76.6% |

We next analyzed the frequency of women’s appointments to boards and commissions based on a municipality’s population. We then categorized the percentage of seats held by women at the time of our data collection to identify more specific patterns of representation. It is of course not surprising that the percentage of seats held by women on planning commission boards rarely exceeds 50%, however table 3 reveals how consistent the pattern is across size of municipality. In particular, those municipalities with a population under 10,000 are less likely to appoint women to their planning commission; 55-57% of the time women represent less than 25% of their appointments. Among municipalities over 10,000, 25-49% of the appointees to planning commissions are women. The planning commission in most communities may be considered a “power board,” with its ability to plan, approve, and make recommendations on planning proposals that include land use, growth and development, housing, highways, etc. Certainly Kerr et al.’s (2014) research on Kansas City boards and commissions indicates that the planning commission was perceived to be one of the “power boards” in the community. As such, planning commissions may be subject to gender sorting and/or other perceptions related to accessibility based on experience, knowledge, skills, or training. Either way, education of both civic leaders and women in these communities as to the importance of gender balanced

appointments and diverse board membership – particularly where strategic and long-range planning needs of a community are studied and considered – will be important action steps toward a realization of gender balance goals.

Table 3. Planning Commissions: average percent of women appointed to the board/commission by size of Kansas municipality

| City/Town Size | 0-24% of Board | 25-49% of Board | 50-74% of Board | 75-100% of Board |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 20,000+ | 41.2% | 58.8% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 10,000-19,999 | 30.0% | 70.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 5,000-9,999 | 57.1% | 19.0% | 23.8% | 0.0% |
| 3,000-4,999 | 56.3% | 37.5% | 6.3% | 0.0% |
| 1,000-2,999 | 55.0% | 35.0% | 7.5% | 2.5% |

Appointments to municipal library boards in Kansas suggest a consistency across population categories. Regardless of the size of the municipality, these data find that women are more likely to fill 50-74% of seats on library boards (see Table 4). For instance, 77% of municipalities with a population of more than 20,000, will appoint more women than men. One hundred percent (100%) of library boards serving municipalities with a population of 10,000 to 19,999 will find that 50-74% of their board is comprised of women appointees. For those municipalities with populations between

Table 4. Library Boards: average percent of women appointed to the board/commission by size of Kansas municipality

| City/Town Size | 0-24% of Board | 25-49% of Board | 50-74% of Board | 75-100% of Board |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 20,000+ | 0.0% | 23.1% | 46.2% | 30.8% |
| 10,000-19,999 | 0.0% | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% |
| 5,000-9,999 | 0.0% | 6.7% | 46.7% | 46.7% |
| 3,000-4,999 | 6.7% | 20.0% | 53.3% | 20.0% |
| 1,000-2,999 | 0.0% | 9.1% | 50.0% | 40.9% |

5,000 and 9,999, over 90% of library boards will have more women appointed than men, as do municipalities with populations of 1,000-2,999.

When examining the parks and recreation boards in Kansas, slight differences emerge across population categories. For instance, municipalities with less than 3,000 residents are slightly more likely to have 50-74% of their parks and recreation appointments filled by women when compared to municipalities of other sizes. Yet, across all communities, it still is clear that overwhelmingly most parks and recreations boards have more men appointees than women. Indeed, 58% to 85.7% of the municipalities in this study have parks and recreation boards comprised of less than 50% women appointees (see Table 5).

Table 5. Parks and Recreation Boards: average percent of women appointed to the board/commission by size of Kansas municipality

| City/Town Size | 0-24% of Board | 25-49% of Board | 50-74% of Board | 75-100% of Board |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 20,000+ | 23.5% | 47.1% | 23.5% | 5.9% |
| 10,000-19,999 | 42.9% | 42.9% | 14.3% | 0.0% |
| 5,000-9,999 | 35.7% | 50.0% | 14.3% | 0.0% |
| 3,000-4,999 | 27.3% | 54.5% | 18.2% | 0.0% |
| 1,000-2,999 | 29.0% | 29.0% | 35.5% | 6.5% |

As Tables 6 and 7 suggest, women are also frequently numbering less than 24% of zoning boards and less than 50% of planning and zoning, regardless of the municipality’s population size (see Tables 6 and 7). These numbers also follow closely the trends found among planning commissions in communities with populations of less than 9,999. For municipalities below 20,000, women are much more consistently underrepresented on zoning boards – 82.4% of boards with less than 50% women appointees – and in particular so among those municipalities smaller than 5,000 who

combine the work of planning and zoning boards – 85.7% and 65.4% of communities under 4,999 and 2,999, respectively, are comprised of less than 25% of women appointees.

Table 6. Zoning Boards: average percent of women appointed to the board/commission by size of Kansas municipality

| City/Town Size | 0-24% of Board | 25-49% of Board | 50-74% of Board | 75-100% of Board |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 20,000+ | 41.2% | 41.2% | 11.8% | 5.9% |
| 10,000-19,999 | 57.1% | 28.6% | 14.3% | 0.0% |
| 5,000-9,999 | 57.1% | 28.6% | 7.1% | 7.1% |
| 3,000-4,999 | 50.0% | 10.0% | 30.0% | 10.0% |
| 1,000-2,999 | 54.5% | 31.8% | 4.5% | 9.1% |

Table 7. Planning and Zoning Commissions: average percent of women appointed to the board/commission by size of Kansas municipality

| City/Town Size | 0-24% of Board | 25-49% of Board | 50-74% of Board | 75-100% of Board |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 20,000+ | 33.3% | 33.3% | 33.3% | 0.0% |
| 10,000-19,999 | 0.0% | 100.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 5,000-9,999 | 25.0% | 75.0% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 3,000-4,999 | 85.7% | 14.3% | 0.0% | 0.0% |
| 1,000-2,999 | 65.4% | 19.2% | 11.5% | 3.8% |

Housing boards, however, seem to cluster percentages of women appointees at 25-49% of boards or 50-74% of boards (see Table 8). A review of the overall average percentages (as reported in table 2) of women (52.3%) and men (47.7%) suggests this might be the case. However, by analyzing our data by size of the municipality that the board serves, we find it to be consistently the case regardless of the size of the municipality. The exception lies with those municipalities with populations between 10,000 and 19,999 where their housing boards are as likely to be comprised of 25%-

49% women appointee or 75%-100% of women appointees. While these boards may be charged with the development of operating procedures and budgets, they most commonly are charged with overseeing publicly owned housing in their municipality. Among the most common boards identified in our study, the housing boards in Kansas communities may represent the most likely boards on which gender balance is or can be readily achieved.

Table 8. Housing Boards: average percent of women appointed to the board/commission by size of Kansas municipality

| City/Town Size | 0-24% of Board | 25-49% of Board | 50-74% of Board | 75-100% of Board |
|----------------|----------------|-----------------|-----------------|------------------|
| 20,000+ | 10.0% | 40.0% | 40.0% | 10.0% |
| 10,000-19,999 | 0.0% | 50.0% | 0.0% | 50.0% |
| 5,000-9,999 | 0.0% | 44.4% | 22.2% | 33.3% |
| 3,000-4,999 | 9.1% | 27.3% | 45.5% | 18.2% |
| 1,000-2,999 | 0.0% | 51.5% | 27.3% | 21.2% |

Conclusion

While this study is a first look at the status of appointments to boards and commissions in Kansas at the municipal level, the data suggest there is work to do – for those enacting their appointments process in each municipality, as well as in future research.

- A review of research in other states reveals patterns of appointment that may be present in Kansas, such as an underrepresentation of women’s appointments to “power boards”; additional study of boards and commissions and the county and state levels will be essential to determining the prevalence of this pattern.
- Guides created to assist political leaders and committees charged with appointments to civic boards and commissions at their respective levels (state, county, municipal) can include sections to increase awareness of the

inadequacies that result from “gender sorting,” which causes more women to be appointed to boards with “feminine missions” and men to be appointed to boards with “masculine missions.”

- When political leaders examine their own gender balance practices in boards and commissions appointments, instead of calculating gender balance numbers based on overall appointment numbers, we encourage their use of a board-by-board calculation to uncover any hidden, systemic biases that may be present in their appointments process.
- Greater transparency of appointments, vacancies, and the application process is essential to overcoming appointment bias. Accessible materials explaining the appointments process, membership, and the purpose/mission of each board and commission can readily be made available online. Yet, not all municipalities provide online access to materials and instead require interested applicants to appear in person at the city offices to request information and application forms. A “hidden appointments process” serves to perpetuate the status quo and limit opportunities to increase diverse representation. Because of the ease of online communication and dissemination of information, public officials should no longer require citizens to request or retrieve materials in person as the only option for participating in the appointments process. Instead, best practices should involve posting online details about the application process, application materials, vacancies, and current membership.

Kansas has a long history of women’s engagement in politics and civic life. However, the numbers reported in this study challenge us to look more closely at appointment practices across the state. Our next phases of research on Kansas boards and commissions appointments will explore statewide, county, and

municipal data, along with accessibility to board information and appointment applications, all with a goal of encouraging greater engagement in Kansas civic life.

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