CHAPTER 4:
Women and Civic Engagement

CHALLENGE

Over the past century, women’s participation in the public arena has grown significantly. Despite this fact, we have a long way to go to achieve equal representation in elected office, top municipal jobs and boards and commissions, and to be heard as equal voices in newspaper, television, radio and internet editorials and commentary.

Recent groundbreaking research done by the Women Donors Network demonstrates how dramatically women and people of color are still underrepresented in elected office:

- Overall, white men represent 31% of the population and hold 65% of elected offices.
- Women represent 51% of the population and yet hold only 29% of elected offices.
- People of color represent 38% of the population and hold only 10% of elected offices.
- Only 17% of mayors are women.
- Only six governors are women—and only once has a woman succeeded another woman as governor.

This imbalance exists at all levels of government—local, county, state and federal. Further work is needed to overcome four persistent structural barriers to a reflective democracy, where our leaders reflect the people they serve:
• **Gatekeepers:** Open up access to resources and endorsements controlled by powerful gatekeeper networks such as party leaders, PACs and funders.

• **Civic institutions:** Encourage community organizations to engage in the political process.

• **Economic barriers:** Identify ways to overcome the obstacles that many women face in fundraising and supporting themselves while pursuing office.

• **Voting, electoral, governing and campaign financing structures:** Reform of the election system and expectations for elected officials while in office is essential to create a more level playing field for women and people of color.

Achieving gender equality in the U.S. will require structural changes, as well as a proactive approach that includes both women and men encouraging and promoting women and people of color to step forward in the civic space. A vibrant diversity of voices and talent will enhance every mayor’s ability to improve his or her community.

Other nations show these changes are possible. As Representation 2020 highlights in its report, State of Women’s Representation 2015-2016, government laws or major party rules in over 100 countries require a certain minimum number of women candidates on the ballot, while none of the countries that rank the highest in women’s representation use American-style “winner take all” elections.

Addressing structural barriers through campaign finance and electoral reform is essential for women and people of color to achieve parity in civic engagement. Mayors, individually and collectively, can have a strong voice on national issues that help level the playing field and open access to women and people of color, such as: establishing a National Voting Day Holiday, passing universal voter registration, overturning Citizens United, implementing ranked choice voting, and mandating shorter campaign cycles. State issues such as publicly funded
elections, voter registration, the security of vote counting technology, gerrymandering and laws that affect elections are critical issues for mayors to actively monitor and influence. Additionally, mayors can impact local and municipal issues regarding access to the polls, early voting, voting machine integrity, and free local airtime for qualified candidates. At the city level, mayors can take many concrete and supportive actions to increase the civic engagement of women and girls.
**RECOMMENDATIONS**

### GENERAL

- **Assessment:** Check the diversity of mayoral appointments and staffing; develop an intersectional lens, which takes into account gender, race, class and sexual orientation for all civic participation.

- **Task Force:** Institute a task force to ensure that policies—such as the timing of hearings and votes, the leadership selection process as well as staffing—promote equity for women and people of color.

- **Funding:**
  - Analyze the city's existing budget to assess how much current spending supports women and people of color.
  - Establish generous budgets to fully support the recommendations of this report.

- **Boards:** Ensure institutions have fair representation of women at the table. Currently, **nine states** have legislation requiring or encouraging gender parity on state and/or local boards and commissions.
  - Encourage ordinances that mandate equal representation on civic and corporate boards.

- **Childcare:** Provide childcare stipends for those with children; offer onsite daycare at City Hall.

- **Mentorship:** Use mayoral influence to encourage established power networks to offer mentorship for women at a larger scale.

- **Nonprofit Organizations:** Include nonprofit organizations at the policy table; they are often a valuable and untapped resource for mayors.

- **Public Education Campaign:** Diversity in local government starts with education about the broader concept of gender equality. Inclusion needs to be embedded in the culture and goals.
  - Educate women and men about the importance of gender equality.
  - Use social media to educate and engage women Millennials.
  - Libraries reach people from every socioeconomic level (e.g., immigrants, disabled, seniors, and more). Encourage libraries to participate in the campaign and affirm equal access from childhood to adulthood.

### MORE WOMEN IN OFFICE

- **Training:** Encourage programs that support and train women to run for office earlier; **there is evidence** that it is easier to integrate family responsibilities into civic engagement when a woman has experience with such engagement prior to having children. Also, **women state legislators** are more likely than men legislators to have participated in campaign training. Program elements might include:
  - Encouraging women to run and to understand that they do not need to prove themselves; storytelling and movies are an effective way to do this.
MORE WOMEN IN OFFICE (CONT.)

- Recruit and ask women early to run for office, while offering your support and introductions to influencers.
- Acknowledge the need for women and men, as they move up in the ranks or retire, to recruit and groom women to take their place.
- Encourage supporters to continue strong support of women after they are elected.

- **Running and Winning:** Adopt ranked choice voting systems that incentivize positive campaigning and grassroots organizing that elect more women and candidates of color.
- **Financial Security:** Address the economic issues that impede better representation by women. Provide pension plans for those in elected office.
- **Inclusion:** Invite men to take women and people of color into their circles and sponsor them in their personal networks.
- **Connection:** Encourage people to stay connected with elected women after they win, and work with them throughout the year.
- **Media:** Establish organizations and infrastructure to hold media accountable for portraying women leaders fairly.

MORE WOMEN ON BOARDS AND COMMISSIONS

- **Appointments:** Appoint women to all types of boards and commissions, particularly those with the greatest municipal clout; aim for 50% female representation. A commission appointment is often the first step on the path to running for public office.
- **Participation:** Encourage the full participation of all people: leaders need to reflect the people they serve.

Addressing structural barriers through campaign finance and electoral reform is essential for women and people of color to achieve parity in civic engagement.
RESOURCES

**Articles, Books, Organizations, Videos**

- **Who Leads US** - Women Donors Network provides a way to measure progress toward a democracy where our leaders reflect the people they serve.
- **UN Report on Alternate Policy and Gender Equity** - New policy agenda to transform economies and make women’s rights a reality.
- **RightNOW Women** - Volunteer organization helping elect qualified Republican women to federal office.
- **EMERGE America** - Changing the face of American politics by identifying, training and encouraging women to run for office, get elected and to seek higher office.
- **ProjectGoPink** - A national hub to recruit, train, network and promote Republican women as they work to achieve their public service goals.
- **Emily’s List** - Working for larger leadership roles for pro-choice Democratic women in legislative bodies and executive seats.
- **Status of Women in the States** - An interactive website and report by the Institute for Women’s Policy Research provides data on women’s progress in 50 states, the District of Columbia, and in the United States overall. It ranks and scores each state on women’s political participation statistics along with 5 other key indices for women.
- **Center for American Women and Politics** - A unit of the Eagleton Institute of Politics at Rutgers, CAWP is nationally recognized as the leading source of scholarly research and current data about American women's political participation.
- **PBWC** - Professional women’s business conferences are large collections of powerful women that can either run or fund political campaigns.
- **Watermark** - A community of executive women who have risen to the top of their fields—coming together to connect, develop and advocate for the advancement of women in the workforce.
- **UN Foundation, Council of Women World Leaders** - A network of current and former women prime ministers and presidents.
- **Higher Heights Leadership Fund** - Building a national civic engagement infrastructure and network to strengthen Black women’s leadership capacity.
- **IGNITE** - Works to build young women’s political ambition and train them to run for office.
- **Progressive Women of Silicon Valley** - Their mission is to advance women’s causes on local, national and international levels.
- **No Ceilings: The Full Participation Project** - Part of the Clinton Foundation, looking to advance the status of women and girls.
- **Rank Choice Voting** - Helps make democracy fair, functional and representative by developing the analysis and educational tools necessary to win and sustain improvements to American elections.
- **Representation 2020** - A project of the nonpartisan group FairVote, focused on reducing structural barriers to women’s electoral success.
- **It Still Takes A Candidate: Why Women Don't Run for Office** - Book by Jennifer Lawless on gender inequity in politics.
- **Girls Just Wanna Not Run** - Report that explores the gender gap in young women’s political ambition.
- **Running From Office** - Research-based book by Jennifer Lawless on why young Americans feel completely alienated from contemporary politics.
- **Women in Politics** - Documentary film profiles female political representation over the last century.
- **Miss Representation** - Documentary film exposes how mainstream media and culture contribute to the underrepresentation of women in positions of power and influence in America.
- **Jackie and Jill Robinson Effect** - Stanford study explores the hypothesis that successful female candidates may need to be more ambitious or qualified than their male challengers to overcome gender bias.
- **Living Room Conversations** - Citizens and leaders with divergent views use social networks to build relationships as they talk about critical issues.
- **More Women Can Run** - Book by Sue Carroll and Kira Sanbonmatsu about gender differences in pathways to legislatures.
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<td>1. Appoint women to all commissions and boards; aim for 50% female representation.</td>
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<td>2. Collect data to reveal gender representation in municipal staff, boards and commissions, including top positions.</td>
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<td>3. Ensure all such positions, institutions and initiatives have fair representation of women at the table.</td>
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<td>4. Encourage quotas in the private sector for equal representation on corporate boards and decision-making bodies.</td>
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<td>5. Enact ranked choice voting systems to elect more women and candidates of color.</td>
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<td>6. Institute a task force for women so that policies are gender-neutral.</td>
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<td>7. Review all municipal policies to ensure they are fair to women.</td>
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<td>8. Provide childcare stipends for parents; offer onsite daycare at City Hall.</td>
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<td>9. Offer mentorship programs and opportunities for women and people of color.</td>
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<td>10. Ensure pay equity so everyone is paid equally for equivalent jobs.</td>
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<td>11. Ensure gender and racial equality is embedded in the culture and goals of your administration.</td>
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<td>12. Promote educational campaigns in your city to encourage women and people of color to run for office.</td>
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