

## Women on Boards in Pittsburgh: A History of Perseverance & Power

The Pittsburgh region has a robust history of men and women standing up for board diversity. Many organizations, profit and not-for-profit, have engaged in the topic of board diversity as advocates and resources. Some of these organizations include Carnegie Mellon University, Duquesne University, Deloitte, Ernst & Young, CORO, Leadership Pittsburgh, and Leadership Washington County. We are proud to honor those who have carried the torch and made great strides.

**In 1974**, the **Executive Women's Council of Greater Pittsburgh (EWC)** was first established to promote the professional development of women in the workforce, and to increase the significant decision and policy-making positions held by women in the region. In **1984**, EWC began a major push to place women on influential boards. It began to achieve greater success in influencing placement on governmental and not-for-profit boards, although women continued to lag behind in the for-profit sector. For the next 22 years, EWC published a directory of professional “board-ready” women in the Pittsburgh area. In **2006** EWC received grants from the State of Pennsylvania, the Women and Girls Foundation, and Pittsburgh Celebration of Lights, to create an online database of “board ready” executive women in the region. EWC also hosts educational programs and workshops designed to prepare professional women for board service.

**In 1999**, the first **African American Leadership Directory** was published by The Building One Economy Leadership Initiative fueled by the Working Together Consortium/ Building One Economy, the Urban League of Pittsburgh, the NAACP, the United Way of Allegheny County, Duquesne University’s Nonprofit Leadership Institute and BoardLink Program. The directory included biographical sketches of 270 professionals, and resulted in 80 additional African Americans appointed to policy-making boards of 45 not-for-profit organizations and six for-profit corporate boards over the next few years. Today the Urban League continues to work diligently to increase African-American representation on the most powerful boards in Pittsburgh.

**In 2004**, the **Women and Girls Foundation (WGF)** joined the fight, leading change at the systemic level. WGF brought together a coalition of over forty individuals and organizations (including YWCA, Women’s Law Project, EWC, New Voices, National Organization for Women, National Council of Jewish Women, PUMP, Disability Rights Law Center and many others) to advocate together. First WGF commissioned Carnegie Mellon University to conduct benchmarking research. Then the coalition led a “Pennsylvanians for Fair representation” campaign which was successful in passing legislation at the city and county levels mandating a fair, open, and transparent process for announcing board vacancies. After the legislation was passed, women and minorities went from holding less than a quarter of governmental board seats at the city and county levels, to now having over 50% of these seats. This fair representation continues to this day.

**In 2006**, WGF partnered with the **Pittsburgh Post-Gazette** to publish a study of the representation of women in the corporate boardrooms and executive suites of the top 50 publicly traded companies in Pittsburgh. At that time, overall women held just 8% of these board seats (while the national average was 17%). And of the 50 companies, 26 companies had zero female directors serving on their boards. WGF then launched a “zero no more” campaign. This included efforts to connect local companies with national search firms and national resources, like Catalyst, specializing in board diversity; the publishing of op-eds locally and nationally articulating the business case for board diversity; honoring companies that excelled in board diversity; and engaging in shareholder advocacy to encourage increased board diversity. By 2016, the total women serving on these corporate boards went from 44 (in 2006) to 114 and the overall average reached 18%.