

YWCA GENDER INCLUSIVE TASKFORCE REPORT ON MAINTAINING THE SINGLE GENDER POLICY MANDATE

Prepared by



eliminating racism
empowering women

ywca

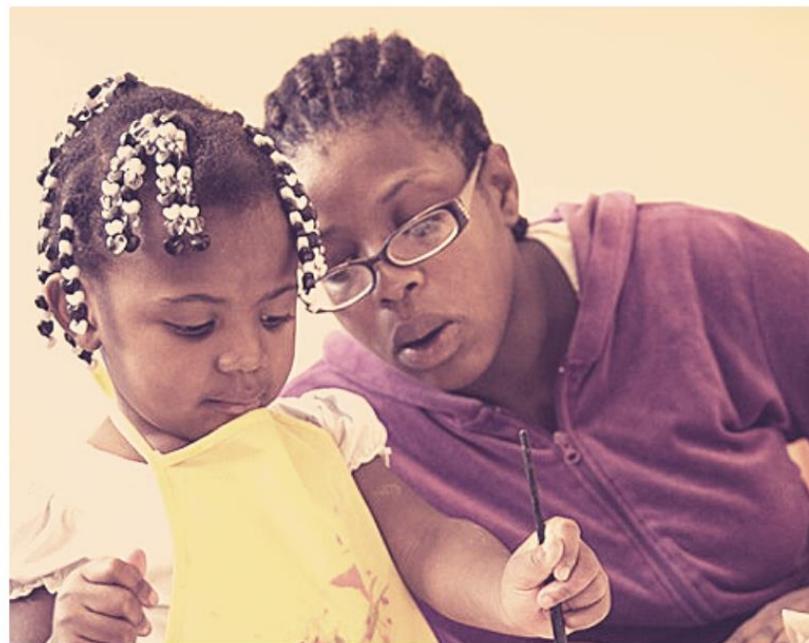


TABLE OF CONTENTS

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY	3
Introduction	3
Data Methodology	3
Interview Protocol	3
Data Analysis	3
<i>Introduction</i>	4
<i>Summary of Findings</i>	4
DATA SUMMARY	7
Implementation of YWCA Mission	7
Rationale for Not Pursuing Exceptions to the Single-Gender Board Policy.....	10
Broader Ecosystem Considerations	12
Organizational Change Process	13
Board Composition	14
Board Diversity.....	14
Change Over the Last 5-10 Years.....	15
Community Representation	16
Strategies for Recruitment and Engagement.....	17
Challenges to Board Diversity	18
Men’s Involvement with the Organization.....	20
Gender Power Dynamics and Board Culture Changes	21
Considerations for Bringing Men On Board	22
Intersection of Race and Gender.....	24
Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity	24
Benefits and Challenges of Maintaining a Single-gender Board	25
Additional Thoughts.....	28
RECOMMENDATIONS	30
CONCLUSION	33

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Introduction

As the YWCA reassesses its policy on single-gender governance, it is useful to remember when and why the YWCA was founded, who it served originally and why, what has changed culturally since the time of its founding and what still needs to change, and — ultimately — how the YWCA can play a role in creating the needed change. Throughout this report, the excerpts from conversations with YWCA chapter executive leaders nationwide present thoughtful reflections on each of these factors and their significance for the future of the organization.

Data Methodology

For this portion of the analysis, Morten Group conducted nine individual interviews. All of the nine interviews were with leaders of YWCA organizations that have never petitioned for an exception to the single-gender Board policy. These interviews provided insight into the perspective of executive leaders of local chapters that the national organization identified as most passionate about defending the single-gender Board policy. For this part of the analysis, there were no conversations with similar national organizations whose work focuses on women and girls that have considered and ultimately decided not to expand governing access to individuals identifying as men.

Interview Protocol

The interview areas of exploration were comprised of an interview protocol based on question items designed to explore the following areas: 1) Introduction and description of how the YWCA's mission is implemented by the organization; 2) Rationale for not requesting an exception to and maintaining its single-gender Board policy and practices; 3) Internal and external inputs to the organizational change process; 4) Board of Directors composition; 5) Board recruitment and engagement strategies; 6) Men's involvement within the organization; and 7) Benefits and challenges to maintaining a single-gender Board of Directors.

Data Analysis

Participants were recruited using targeted sampling, determined by the national YWCA. All nine interviews were digitally recorded, with permission of the interviewees, to enable verbatim transcription of direct quotations

used in this report. Thematic analysis was used for analyzing data to enhance understanding of factors that influence organizational policy positions and practices. For the sake of brevity, the entirety of all the responses could not be reflected in this report. The themes and quotes included in this document were selected based on the following criteria: 1) Participant replication of more than 40%; and 2) Themes that emerged which were important to the mission alignment of YWCA USA.

Introduction

Since the interviews were specifically conducted to collect the rationale, methods, and outcomes of participants' experiences, this report will provide longer direct quotations than are often found in similar documents. This is done in order to retain primary thoughts, reflections, and comments. Comments are edited for length, thematic inclusion, and amplification of the data descriptions. Although a targeted sample, the executive leaders' responses have been de-identified as much as possible; individuals are referred to as "executive leadership" or "leaders" throughout the report.

Summary of Findings

DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Because much of the conversation for this study centered around race and gender it is important to acknowledge that, of the nine executive directors interviewed for this study, one-third were Black women and two-thirds were white women. Nearly half (4) of these YWCA leaders have been in their positions for two decades or longer, while two [both African-American] have been in their roles for less than a year. For the leaders who were newer to their positions, since they had not been a part of earlier conversations within these local chapters around these issues, they were asked to describe their understanding of the situations from their personal experience only – either through their involvement with their current or other YWCA chapters or from their conversations with leaders and stakeholders of their current chapter.

REGIONAL REPRESENTATION

The interviewees hailed from rural to urban areas distributed throughout the country, from New England to the Pacific Northwest, including the South, the Southwest, and the Midwest.

MISSION IMPLEMENTATION

The executive leaders described a broad range of programming that they use to implement the YWCA mission in their communities. While all leaders are passionate about the two-pronged mission of the YWCA - eliminating racism and empowering women - it is clear that some regions and/or communities are more comfortable with the latter than the former. A fair amount of work remains to be done to operationalize a fully intersectional implementation of the YWCA's mission, and many local chapters asked for guidance and support from the national association in order to advance the process.

RATIONALE FOR NOT PURSUING POLICY CHANGE

Each of the leaders interviewed had strong opinions on the value of and, indeed, the need for maintaining a single-gender Board. The challenges regarding fully actualizing the organization's mission demonstrate that more work is needed in addressing the diversity within people who identify as women before another gender can be added to the conversation. The main reasons put forward by the executive leaders included: 1) The YWCA is in a unique position to provide a women-only opportunity for leadership development; 2) Women leadership in the Board contributes to the YWCA's mission of empowering women, and there are not enough opportunities for women to serve on other Boards; 3) The arguments around access and finances only serve to underscore the ongoing need for the single-gender space that the YWCA provides for focused leadership development; and 4) Men have plenty of other opportunities to participate in and support the work of the YWCA, but they do not need to play a part in the organization's governance.

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE PROCESS

The executive leaders described a variety of approaches to organizational change, but all were rooted in substantive engagement of a broad range of stakeholders as well as deep introspection of values and fidelity to the YWCA's mission. A few leaders described helpful "mock audits" instituted periodically by the state or local organizations that are fundamentally challenging yet powerful reassessments and realignments of their work.

BOARD COMPOSITION

The composition of the Boards varied substantially, from membership size of 16 to 55 and women of color of 10% to nearly 50%. On average, most of the local chapters surveyed have Boards of 20 members or less, including 25%–33% women of color. Within the single-gender mandate, the executive leaders explained that their Boards are constantly seeking to enrich the diversity of their governing leadership to increase meaningful

participation of communities that traditionally occupy a small minority of Board seats. They spoke of actively seeking increased diversity including but not limited to LGBTQ identity, age, race, ethnicity, faith, and profession.

ACHIEVING BOARD DIVERSITY

In order to make progress towards increasing Board diversity and inclusion, the executive leaders described a variety of resources and tactics they found helpful. Tapping into local organizations and service providers for specific communities was a common strategy. Some leaders expressed challenges to moving away from the traditional YWCA Board membership of older wealthy white women and explained their attempts to overcome them.

MEN'S INVOLVEMENT WITHIN THE ORGANIZATION

All the interviewed leaders expressed their appreciation for and, indeed, the necessity of men's involvement with the organization; however, they were deliberate in drawing a line at inclusion at the Board level. Too much work remains to be done, they argued, within the realm of diversity among women to make space for men. They further shared that men's allyship is always welcome and encouraged, but the governing power must remain in the hands of people who identify as women.

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF MAINTAINING A SINGLE-GENDER BOARD

It was obvious the executive leaders interviewed for this report see more benefits to maintaining a single-gender Board than challenges. The deliberate intersectionality of the YWCA's mission was repeatedly emphasized as a unique and essential opportunity for leadership development that only the YWCA can provide. The only potential challenge that some executive directors reluctantly addressed was access to financial resources, but most leaders used this as an opportunity to argue even more fervently for the need for the YWCA to maintain its singular position as an incubator for women-led leadership and development in this area.

DATA SUMMARY

Implementation of YWCA Mission

While all of the interviewed leaders are passionate about the mission of the YWCA, the degree of implementation for the two prongs of the mission statement varies greatly. That is, some local chapters are very driven and deliberate about implementing the racial justice angle of the YWCA’s mission, whereas others admit they do a better job with women’s empowerment.

The primary work areas described by the executive leaders interviewed mainly center around empowering women. Much of their work involves providing direct and wraparound services for survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault, including counseling, housing, court and legal advocacy, adult education, and employment services. There is also a significant amount of primary prevention work, including youth programming on leadership, healthy relationships, and exposure to various careers.

“It [the mission] is our guide. It is the lens through which we look at every action – policies, programs, community work...from our Board to our policies to our programs it guides everything we do. We believe that it’s implementable and that the reason the mission is eliminating racism on the top is because...that’s where we have the most work to do. We’ve always done a great job of empowering women but not as great a job of positioning the organization in the work of racial justice.”

“[As for integrating racial justice], it’s a kind of a small town, pretty Caucasian....We don’t have a separate program so we just try to take a look at everything we do, from our personnel policies to our housing policies, through a racial justice lens whenever possible....We’re better at women’s economic empowerment and crisis services than racial justice.”

“When people ask what are you doing to end racial injustice...I have always felt pushed to say, oh, well, we have this program....But it has to permeate everything that we do. It has to be part of the culture of the organization, the policies, the procedures. It starts with our Board, the services....Are they person-centered? Are the people delivering those services culturally competent? Do they have the access to ongoing training and opportunities for learning...feedback, support? When I explain our work to people, we have to answer 3 questions: 1) What am I doing right now to help the person in front of me? But it doesn’t end there. 2) What

am I doing to ensure that the systems they interact with don't revictimize them and respect them? 3) What are we doing to change the culture...the attitudes?"

"I'm personally drawn to the mission because of both prongs of our mission. I experienced strong racial bullying growing up in a very white environment, growing up as a victim with horrible self-esteem to who I am now. I thought about what helped me change — what would I have needed at that time? I created a program for middle school-age women of color whose school counselors had identified as experiencing bullying or self-esteem issues related to race. We brought in university women and rock star women of color they could identify with and be inspired by to talk about things like how to do your hair. Seeing successful women of color broadens their horizons and can help you reframe what it feels to be Black. It's the most intentionally inspired of our programs."

Across the board, the executive leaders are very confident in their ability to implement the empowering women part of the YWCA's mission — providing women with “resources that allow them to take control of their own futures.” As one leader put it: “what do they need in order to be whole when they leave us? That is their journey.”

Several interviewees, however, described a level of discomfort at the Board level that impedes their ability to advance the eliminating racism part of the YWCA's mission.

"Largely, people [in this community] don't think there's a race problem, my Board of Directors included....On the eliminating racism prong of our mission, we've done very little....Honestly, we don't do enough on that prong of our mission."

"There is pretty general agreement that the organization has not been focused on eliminating racism....One Board member said to me...‘we've been so great at empowering women, but not as great at eliminating racism. We haven't really gotten to that yet, because it's very thorny.’...And so I said, ‘well...what does that mean for women like me [a Black woman]?’ And, just...crickets."

"Now that we're starting to focus on racial justice, some of our Board members are having a hard time with it. They kind of have waited to do any kind of racial justice training with the Board....I have a consultant now that's going to be working on that....We're bringing folks on, and they're saying they're committed to

our mission, but they clearly don't understand what eliminating racism means...I really do think we need to dig in a little bit with this and do some training and...some honest dialogue. Because if we've got folks on the Board who don't buy into this, that's a problem...We're going to do a training; I hope that they [the Board] decide it's mandatory. Because I can see people not even participating, which would be problematic."

"The primary challenge...is that a majority of the women who are not women of color, and in fact including a couple women of color, have had very little exposure to race, and problems related to race relations, and problems related to privilege. And as a result, whenever we talk about it there is a very significant level of tension in the room. The one or two times we've tried to have that conversation in a really substantive way there was a lot of defensiveness. And, because I'm a Black leader, I have always brought in outside facilitators for that conversation, so it's not just the 'angry Black woman' who is facilitating the conversation. In both cases those facilitators were white...and that reaction still existed."

Many of the interviewed leaders expressed a desire for more leadership and guidance from the national YWCA on issues of racial justice.

"We would need to be educated certainly before we would do anything that would be helpful to the community around...education on racial justice. We would be perceived as poseurs, I'm sure. It's not our specialty."

"The racial justice committee of the Board...post pandemic...they want to start — we've done this before and it hasn't been really well received...I'm looking for model programs for white communities, basically...around white privilege, and hopefully integrating some history of policing in that."

"We are an association with 200 local associations. Our national association is BIPOC led, but we have a mixture of white- and BIPOC-led local associations...There may be different types of guidance and coaching that needs to be done depending on whether it's a white-led or BIPOC-led association."

Rationale for Not Pursuing Exceptions to the Single-Gender Board Policy

All of the interviewed leaders acknowledged that discussions had taken place at the Board level about the single-gender policy exception when it first came up at the national level or in recent years when YWCA USA asked them to look into it, but none of the local chapters included in this portion of the study had ever petitioned for an exception to the policy. The executive leaders described numerous reasons why their organization never pursued the single-gender Board policy exception, but several common themes emerged.

1. The YWCA is in a unique position to provide a women-only opportunity for leadership development.

“Our organization is not supportive of bringing men into our governance structure. Philosophically on a regular review, it’s pretty well understood in our community that the YW has a single-gender policy for very good reasons....Historically that’s where the YWCA at the national and the local level’s strength has lied [sic] – when you look at where YWCA stood out over time and was ahead of the curve, it’s because we support women and especially women of color.”

“We had always educated at Board orientation about compensatory purpose. The Board voted unanimously to stay single gender for women and women-identifying people and felt it was crucial to continue to reach out to women from non-majority cultures....Our job is to build women leaders and send them out to help other organizations after they leave us.”

“There was discussion about the possibility of adding male members to the Board and how that might change the dynamics....I wouldn’t say that it was necessarily fear that it would change, but a recognition that there was a potential that it would change it. Perhaps in some ways it would be positive change, in other ways I think they felt like there was a risk to what was some established strengths on the Board around communication and — and just the voice of women being lifted up....The general feeling was there was no impetus to change....I still feel like it’s very important to lift up women’s leadership and that that has been a real strength of our organization.”

2. Women leadership in the Board contributes to the YWCA’s mission of empowering women, and there are not enough opportunities for women to serve on other Boards. Several leaders explained they have a waiting list [often mostly white women] for their Board that makes it challenging enough to achieve

diversity within a single-gender Board, and allowing men to take up some of those spots would reduce the diversity among members identifying as women.

“Some communities...essentially say, ‘we don’t have enough influential women in our community. We need these men on the Board.’ I just don't believe it is the truth...When historically women have had difficulty accessing leadership roles on Boards, I just don’t see any reason why we ought to give our Board seats to men, when we know for certain there are more than enough qualified women to sit in these seats...If we look at corporate Board membership...this is not an issue that women have overcome.”

“People ask us to be on our Board, so we have a waiting list. I don't think that we would take a spot that a great woman with leadership potential could have and not offer it to a woman....That really hasn’t been in our sights, because we use the Board as leadership training and, just, profile raising, and we only have so many slots. And I don’t think in the current environment we would be willing to give one of those up to a man. We’ve discussed it at the Board...and I can't say that anyone has expressed any interest in changing our female-led volunteer leadership. And I would have to say there’s been no discussion of it at the community level, and no one has requested that we look at that either.”

3. Several of the interviewed leaders expressed frustration with a common argument put forth by proponents of incorporating men into the YWCA’s governing leadership. The arguments around access and finances, they explained, only serve to underscore the ongoing need for the single-gender space that the YWCA provides for focused leadership development.

“I don’t see any scenario where we would do that [allow a man to join the Board]. Someone would have to show us why that would be important, and I have not been able to get an answer that I understand to that question...If it’s a financial reason, then I’d have to push back on that because women, certainly in the United States, have access to at least as much, or the finances of the family, as men do. If it was financial, I’d push back. If it was access, I would push back. I mean, women are more than 50% of this community. I don’t see a good reason to do it.”

“It was also said that women couldn't do major fundraising in the financial world — our project is a \$26 million project with funding at all levels. Obviously we have male allies and male supporters and friends, but it is important for us to show that women could succeed and perform at those levels.”

4. Men have plenty of other opportunities to participate in and support the work, but they do not need to play a part in the organization’s governance.

“We don’t want men’s voices to be louder than our voices. So we’re being cautious there. We don’t have any issues around having male volunteers or any other type of involvement. But governing? We’re not there yet.”

“When people ask in the community why don't we have men on the Board, I and the Board feel very comfortable saying why. Male allies say, ‘no, this needs to be women based. They need to grow their leadership without us there.’”

Broader Ecosystem Considerations

A few local chapter leaders mentioned external circumstances that forced them to address the issue of the single-gender Board policy, but the Board leadership still held firm to their belief that a single-gender Board is integral to implementing the YWCA’s mission.

*“When all of the issues came up about the Boy Scouts and how the Boy Scouts wouldn’t allow homosexuals to be leaders in their organization, the United Way put together a task force. And the Boy Scouts were very smart, and they drew the YWCA in and said that we discriminated because we did not allow men in our membership, voting, and our Board. The second time that we engaged in that, when Catholic Charities, around the whole adoption issue of same-sex couples could not adopt, the Catholic Charities organization, the United Way task force drew the YWCA in. And **we have always been able to fight it and remain single sex and not discriminatory because of the inequities in power and in policy around the lack of women and people of color in leadership positions around business, Boards, staff, in companies, our public policies, our municipal and state and federal governance.** So YWCA has several times reviewed the policy and opted to remain a single-sex governance organization.”*

“Each year when we go through the United Way review they ask about it. We always say we address it through committees and other things. The Board has always been very staunch that they want it to remain a women-only organization.”

“Sometimes it comes up in grant applications. We always explicitly declare that it is an intentional decision to provide opportunities for women to learn and have leadership roles.”

Organizational Change Process

A few local chapters participate regularly in mock audit activities sponsored by the state or other local organizations that help them identify and make needed changes to their policies and practices. Several leaders also said they regularly seek guidance and resources from YWCA USA and other regional or national groups when considering major organizational changes.

When asked about the data used to drive decision-making processes, many of the executive directors explained how data are used to determine changes to services and programming and to build support with funders. Several leaders explained how changes to their policies and programs were driven by a deep analysis of the organization’s mission and how their work is helping to further it.

“Our YWCA recently went through a two-year organizational development and strategic planning process, very formalized....The community foundation and a group of other foundations every two years adopt a cohort...to take them through their process....Every single piece of this organization was taken apart and analyzed and put back together and analyzed....We have definitely evaluated our governance, our operations, our human resources procedures, our finances have been finely diced, our programs have...all been put through a model to determine if they make sense in terms of financial efficiency and [are] mission-based....We re-evaluated some programs, we hired someone to be an efficiency expert and constantly work with the Board...and we made quite a few changes actually based on that.”

“We believe data is the key to us being able to fight for those policies we want....We are...constantly assessing the data of who’s accessing our programs, gaps, barriers, examining racial, LGBTQ

disparities...We are deliberate in health equity work as part of [all programs]...don't just provide services but make sure we're eliminating inequities.”

“Looking at the work we do through those [racial justice and equity] lenses really helped us redefine and refocus energies to meet those needs...We went from serving two women from minority groups to now more like 43% of our service population.”

Board Composition

The size of the Boards of the local chapters interviewed ranges from 16 to 55 members, though most have 20 or less. Two of the executive directors interviewed do not have a single African-American woman on their Board, but approximately a quarter of their Board members are women of color. Two Boards are composed of nearly 50% women of color, while only one was about 10% women of color. The majority of Boards in the surveyed local chapters have about 25–33% women of color.

Board Diversity

The leaders interviewed explained that they are deliberate in seeking diversity in their Boards across many areas including age, race and ethnicity, faith, profession, geography, and expertise. Some of the executive directors surveyed are pleased with the degree of diversity they have achieved, whereas others acknowledge challenges in attracting and retaining Board members with diverse characteristics.

“It certainly would be helpful to have representation from the LGBTQ community, helpful to have various religions. [In this region] people are very much into faith, and I think having some diversity there is also helpful, up to and including people with no faith...It helps in terms of being well-rounded and helps in terms of thinking of all the different kinds of people who could come to the YW for services.”

“It's an asset because there's no other Board in the community that is that diverse. When [the local] business journal did their study, they said the YW busted the curve — the community [overall] has 30% of women in leadership positions...I was asked to do workshops in the community around race, equity, Board and

decision making. We're seen as an organization that can help other organizations address racial justice in their work, Board, and leadership. We're seen as a place to go to recruit, develop workshops, do training."

"As the Board began to address diversity relative to ethnicity, some of the potential issues I was concerned about did not happen. The Board was welcoming and treated new Board members as peers. That felt seamless and was a real asset...Age diversity [was] not as much [of a smooth, seamless transition] — people weren't openly hostile, but...if you have someone that's your daughter's age coming across as what you might feel is disrespectful...I love this about them, that young women are bolder. I was bolder at their age than I am now. They have challenged the Board to have a broader perspective about racial and social justice issues."

"One previous member said every woman can open a door — not necessarily to a bank vault or the White House, but every woman opens the door to her community, and serves as an ambassador for her community — so that's what we want to cultivate."

Change Over the Last 5-10 Years

When asked about changes within the Board over the last five to ten years, racial diversity and age diversity were the most common responses. Several leaders also mentioned shifting away from careers traditionally represented on boards, like lawyers, to a more diverse representation of vocations.

"We went from a 25–30% women of color Board to 50%, and we're moving towards higher. We've focused on young women. No one in the community looks at that except for real grassroots organizations that serve only youth. The Board has grown to having voices at the table for communities that face the most disparities...We were intentional and deliberate about the nature of needing the voices to guide and drive our organization, and that has made our makeup change over five to ten years."

"From ten years ago, we are more racially diverse. Over the past five years, I think it's held pretty steady, not a lot of change. We did have four attorneys on the Board at one point. We're moving away from that."

“When I was on the Board [10 years ago] we had one — there were maybe 22 people at the time — and only one woman of color at the time. We’ve also had a diversification of age, race, and capacity to give. Historically it was white women in [this city] who were married to men of means.”

Community Representation

Executive leaders expressed various challenges, and some successes, in diversifying their staff and leadership to more accurately reflect the communities they serve.

“Back in the late ’90s we took a deep dive into our organization and realized that we were not serving the diversity of our community. And I should add that this is a small rural area. It’s a white majority community, definitely, with a really strong and growing Latinx population....The first thing that we did was to put our resources into personnel so that we had people who looked like the communities we were trying to serve here. And we hired a fantastic woman...to start our primary prevention work with young Latinas....That became a school-based program...delivered by young college women, targeted to girls who live in two cultures. And it’s been so interesting to watch how the high school graduation rates, that were so abysmal in the ’90s, have really turned around. And our young women of color are really leading the charge. They’re among the valedictorians and salutatorians, they’re the campus leaders. It’s just been amazing to see how things have changed over the 20+ years since we’ve run the program....We just created a boy group for [this program], too. It’s a great opportunity to bring men in, led by a local college boy.”

“For demographics in our shelter, there is a striking visual difference among our staff...it’s a striking visual difference, but it’s a familiar one that we’re all used to seeing, that at the top, we have — wherever there’s any kind of decision-making power, that’s held with white folks, white women. And then, at the very bottom, in the lowest-paid work staff, are primarily people of color....We have such a need to have bilingual staff....Visually, you can see that a lot of residents are people of color. And so we always have to have bilingual staff on shift at all times....That continues to be low-paid staff, but a need. And then, of course, as you go up the org chart, in the hierarchy, there are the people making decisions who don’t have the full understanding of the experience of both residents and staff, because they can’t speak the language.”

“One challenge that has just bubbled up in the last couple years is that at times we've been close to 50% BIPOC Board members. And every year, when we have a nominations process to nominate new Board members, for the last eight years we have always prioritized BIPOC as a priority area. And we're — just in the last two years — starting to get some pushback on that. Some Board members feel like we are diverse enough and that it shouldn't be a priority at this time. And of course we would quickly lose our diversity, I think, if we didn't continue to have that as a priority...For our community we do have a fairly diverse Board...Some Board members feel like, 'well, we're doing really good — we're a 94% white community, and we have 60% white people on our Board. If we want to reflect our community, why aren't there more white members on the Board than BIPOC members?' I never felt like it was that people wanted to deny access to BIPOC people, they're just like...this is good enough.”

ACHIEVING BOARD DIVERSITY

Strategies for Recruitment and Engagement

The interviewed leaders described a variety of dimensions of diversity that they consider in recruiting a well-rounded Board. Types of diversity include age and race, of course, as described above. But additional areas of consideration included LGBTQ identity, geography, religion/faith, veterans, and various professions, including teachers. Certainly financial resources, connections, and the ability to “bring dollars to the table” are important as well.

Many interviewees explained that they use committees as entry points into the organization. Others talked about the value of orientation, Board socials, and other activities to build an emotional connection with the organization and a feeling of cohesiveness among cohorts. While many local chapters are making explicit efforts to increase the diversity of their Boards, they also expressed concern about making sure their efforts were intentionally inclusive.

“When we're talking to folks, we're talking to people that we're hoping can give us access to that diversity, making sure we're reaching out, obviously to not only the white women's network, but various networks.”

“We are looking for not the same old, same old people who are on multiple Boards. We’re trying to find the up-and-coming leader, the person who doesn’t think of herself as a leader....We are interested in women who are interested in developing their leadership, whatever that means for them. We focus on what they can bring to the organization. You don’t need to have it all figured out, but will you walk with us?”

“There seems to be not enough engagement with people of color...in that we do have people on the Board who are Black, but they’re not necessarily engaged in the same way. They don’t engage in the same way with the YW....Some possible reasons for that [are] the other group has been around a while and they all know each other, and there may be other reasons where people just don’t know each other well enough....You start to see the same people. Many of them have happy hour together, dinner together, go to one another’s beach houses together — they’re very close. So there’s a close culture of folks, a good 30 of them are consistent, almost always at everything. There’s another group of people who are mostly Black...we’ve seen once or twice this year. It might feel a little bit to the larger group like they are outsiders.”

“We’ve had conversations about not wanting to tokenize anyone on our Board. We’re looking at what is meaningful participation, meaningful representation, meaningful support for people to join our Board.”

In many of the conversations with executive leaders, they mentioned specific resources that they found helpful in recruiting and engaging diverse Board members. These included best practices from national organizations, including the YWCA USA, and others like Board Source and Charity Strong. Specific books were referenced, including *Leading Diverse Communities* and *Policy vs. Paper Clips*. Others mentioned specific networks with whom they have developed relationships to tap into more diverse communities, including local associations for Latinas and LGBTQ service providers. Another organization mentioned a regional “30 under 30” list that helped them identify potential younger Board members.

Challenges to Board Diversity

While most of the interviewees acknowledged Board diversity as an asset, almost all of them expressed challenges to achieving greater diversity. Conflicting perspectives and/or stereotypes of different generations,

lack of racial and ethnic diversity in the local community, and the YWCA's historical function as a place for older wealthy white women all make for potentially uneasy transitions, as some leaders explained.

*“In our last staff retreat we had someone who specializes in helping people understand how different age groups work and communicate....We have everyone...from age 15 to age 80. So there's always an issue with that, and I have to constantly remind myself of that...that not every 30-something is that stereotypical....That's one thing that's really helped with the training...how different decades feel about other decades....We have to check ourselves and try not to stereotype...because it's really about the mission, it's not about whether you're better at TikTok than me....The pandemic has kind of raised our level. It might be the great...equalizer in a lot of ways, because I would have never gotten my management team...to do constant Zoom meetings...[but now] I have 70-year-olds that are better at it than the 30-year-olds....We have tried to understand and educate ourselves about checking ourselves within the Board and also the staff to make sure we're not doing that stuff. **That's why you have a diverse Board. Otherwise, if you all thought the same and were the same age and had all the same backgrounds you wouldn't move ahead.**”*

“For African-American women, our challenge is that every Board — we have a very low African-American population here. It's about 8%. So every professional African American is being asked to be on Boards. So that is a problem here. We have a lot of organizations, everybody wants to show diversity, and so finding the people is trickier — not to say it's not possible. It's just tricky.”

“It's mainly an older white women Board [in a community that is 70% Black] who have been with the YW for generations. Big donors, big supporters, big volunteers are not going anywhere. They love it.”

“In the last five to six years we have focused on diversifying the Board racially. Historically it was mostly a white Board. But with that comes the struggle with having women who have networks and capacity to give. How do you manage that fine balance of diversifying but also finding people who have capacity and networks to do the fundraising we need to do?”

Men's Involvement with the Organization

The interviewed leaders spoke of men's involvement in all levels of the organization, from volunteers to staff, from users of YWCA services to donors and high-level advisers. The executive directors even spoke of awards granted to men who are active in their work, though some local chapters are more supportive of such honors than others. At least one local chapter engages men in Board subcommittees.

“We certainly have male leadership...who have put their money in and their time in. We have men on most of our committees — program committee, domestic violence committee, finance committee. Really nominating and governance in the Board are our sole gender-specific areas. Men use our services in wellness, health equity, obviously childcare, domestic violence — we have no barriers to serving men through all of our programs and services....Men are our partners in fundraising, program assessment and delivery, and financial support....We always say it takes ‘a few good men.’”

“We certainly have high-level male advisers. We do an annual Great Guy award through our domestic violence program, where we honor one to three men a year who join with women to fight violence against women and girls.”

“One year we had a guy who had done a particularly amazing amount of work for us as a volunteer. We were in a particularly benevolent mood and thought it would be great to honor a guy this year — I thought the Board was going to eat me alive. ‘No, we are not going to do that!’ That discussion would have been very difficult for a man to be a part of. I can see that we would not have had that discussion if we had men on the Board.”

“We do have a group called the Good Guys...a group of men who were approached to buy tables at fundraiser luncheons. They wanted to get more substantively involved. For a few years they essentially were helping be a voice for why gender-based violence was not just a women's issue....I guess you could consider that a committee, but it was more kind of like an auxiliary. A Board member said men have wallets too, we should be targeting them to buy tickets at the luncheon.”

The executive leaders stated that men's involvement is appreciated at all existing levels, and their allyship is always welcome.

*“It’s a foregone conclusion that men are our partners and that in order to get in — let’s be real — in order to get into businesses and Board rooms, we need male allies. **In order to address race and racism we need male allies. Kind of like being a white woman; we need to be allies to address racism.**”*

“It’s never an issue that anybody has weighed in on...[The men who work here] have probably much different personalities than many men I’ve encountered in other environments, and so I think that a lot of the harmony has to do with their level of respect for the women that they work with and their lack of arrogance.”

CONSIDERATIONS FOR GENDER INCLUSION

Gender Power Dynamics and Board Culture Changes

One of the biggest concerns with the issue of male involvement in YWCA Boards is how it would change the dynamics of the group. Leaders provided illustrative examples of how conversations differ when men are in the room and how that can be an impediment to progress. Some referred to research that demonstrates how girls perform better in all-girl schools as an illustration of the value of single-gender spaces.

*“One of the concerns is that...women share space with men all the time. **There’s something about an all-women space that gives women the opportunity to not be interrupted and not be overpowered...the microaggressions that might happen in a setting when you have men and women.** Clearly we also need to talk about all the gender identity in between those two ends of the spectrum...I do think they think about it still as a binary...For them, this is an empowering women’s space...If you bring a man into this space, how will the dynamic change? How will the power structure change? That was a major concern for [our Board].”*

“I’m on a lot of Boards — and I know people don’t want to admit this, but...it’s my experience. When there are women and men on Boards, it’s still — I’ve seen this — and I’m not a shrinking violet — women don’t speak up, women don’t do what they do on my Board. They just don’t...My single-gender Board is a great leadership training venue, and we use it as such. And then they go off and are really successful on other Boards or in other positions, and I think it has a lot to do with our focus on that.”

*“I think if we had men on our Board right now we'd be coming up with a different solution to the whole racial justice question. We'd be looking at that through a different lens...I just feel like it would be a different discussion...**With the men of our community I think it would be more — it would just be harder to come up with a solution. You could come up with a quick — they'll come up with some quick actions, but I don't know that you would come up with a long-term, sustainable solution. With women only on the Board, there's more of a tendency to hold back and figure out something that you can do that's sustainable.**”*

Several leaders discussed gendered power dynamics that exist regardless of whether men are in the room.

“One or two times during my tenure here, when we've had older Board members who basically came up as professionals during the '70s — where they had to fight and be more manlike to fit into the cultures that they were working in — and they brought that to the Board. It was problematic. And it changed the dynamic of decision making.”

“Everybody recognizes that you are a stronger organization if you have everybody in the room. For me, it doesn't really matter — I'm going to act the same either way. For many people, they feel that if there's a man in the room it changes the dynamics...If the national office said we have to invite men, then I'd say, OK, we'll invite men. I'm committed to having the voices of everybody represented. But, even if you have everyone represented, it's often true that the loudest voice in the room often controls it. It's often the same when you have a female who has a strong opinion, so it wouldn't be much different having men in the room.”

Considerations for Bringing Men On Board

While each of the leaders interviewed for this report reiterated their desire to keep their Board single-gender, when pressed to consider what changes would be needed to implement men's membership in the Board they advised proceeding with caution.

“We would really need to be open to honest conversations, and having conversations certainly with any male candidate who we were bringing on, but also just identifying what it is — what part of the culture we want to retain, what areas we may want to change or build on, and then paying attention to those and really encouraging everyone and creating a way for everyone to be able to voice concerns if those things are changing.”

“I get it. It’s eventually going to happen.... Two years ago, or even a year ago, if you had asked me how do I feel about this, I would have said, oh my god, no, don’t let it happen. Things since January or February of this year have had a little bit of a different perspective for me. Right now it’s important, but it’s not the end of the world, when so many other things are the actual end of the world. You know, I have sick employees. I have sick residents. These are the things that are important. The thing that I’m concerned about is the timing. I think we’re in a place where we’re going to have some challenges for YWCAs to stay open and to continue. I really do. I think we’re at a tipping point as an organization, and I’m not sure a shift like this, which has so much legacy around it — I’m not sure it’s a great time to do that.... And my biggest concern, personally, about doing it is not having men on my Board, as much, which probably won’t happen while I’m here, but having men on a national Board, because I think that sends a message — that message just totally turns me off, so I would be more concerned about having men on the national Board than at the local level.”

Other leaders had some practical advice to facilitate implementation if men were to join the Board.

“When we talked about this before as a Board, they would need to go through the same process — we would treat them exactly as we do women. We don’t have an application, but we have some pretty deep questions about why you want to do this, and here’s what our mission is, and it’s about the elimination of racism, how are you with that? It’s about the empowerment of women.... I don’t see anything that would change if men were to be involved. They need to be committed to the mission. We use the luncheon as an opportunity to see how they function in a group — as a Board you really need to function as a group. So if someone doesn’t work well in groups, how could we engage them in a better way? It’s the same for dynamics with men as well.”

“I think there should be a certain percentage, maybe, that we consider, so that — if there are concerns about their voices drowning out the message, the mission — because it’s a women’s social justice organization,

then we would want to keep a certain percentage of that — similar to what they did in [another city], maybe 30% so you get the benefit of their participation. They [men] need to be allies. Similar to what we would do around racial justice work, we want them to be allies, but we don't want their voices to be louder than the people leading the work.”

Intersection of Race and Gender

The issues of the intersections of race and gender came up frequently throughout the interviews, often in support of the position of maintaining a single-gender Board. The comparison of male allies for fighting sexism and white allies for fighting racism was a recurring theme, but always with the emphasis that the voice of the allies should never be louder than those who are leading the work.

“I've been part of probably six or seven strategic planning processes. And we always start with, obviously, our mission, vision, the core values. We have certainly explored the eliminating racism, empowering women, and single-gender [issues]. We have unanimously always come to the fact that — until we address racism — we really can't address genderism or sexism or any of the -isms. And the inequity is very dramatic along race and gender lines and the intersection of that, so our Board always agrees unanimously that single-sex governance is really our niche that we need to continue....We have had major discussions around it, because sometimes women come in and say, why don't we have men on the Board? And once we have the deep conversation about the intersection of race and gender it becomes clear that that's what we stand for.”

Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity

When asked about sexual orientation and gender identity, the executive leaders all declared that everyone is welcome. Most of the leaders said they have had Board members who identify as LGBTQ, although they do not necessarily speak for that community in their role as a Board member. No one has had a transgender or gender nonconforming Board member yet (to their knowledge), but most leaders were confident that they would be welcomed and accepted by other Board members. A few conversations, however, made clear that some places are more prepared for this conversation than others.

*“Gender nonconforming and trans folk involvement — I don’t personally feel like that’s a challenge...I think that **‘gender neutral’ to me implies that we’re not thinking about gender — like colorblind — and I think, like, I don’t want to be gender neutral. There are patterns based on gender that we want to recognize, and we need to. But I think that, also in language...I just think that there’s more room in our mission. Empowering women is something that everybody should be a part of, as well as eliminating racism. Even if our programs are specific to supporting women and empowering women, I think there’s a lot of room — and the eliminating racism, and the way that those come together — for a lot of other people, other gender identities, to contribute....Understanding ‘women’ as including trans women is just, like, a start. Let’s just accept that. And then, if there are questions about nonbinary and whether or not any given organization wants to — feels like it’s part of the folks that they serve, that’s easy enough as well...I do think that when we say ‘women and nonbinary,’ we have to be really clear if we’re meaning women and femme identities....The research and the justification can be really clear in the way that those femme identities are devalued based on femininity....I think it gets really blurry if we say ‘women and nonbinary,’ and then we have, like, trans men. Like, those are people who identify as men, so that’s not who we’re talking about.”***

“We haven’t had any conversations around gender nonconforming or trans folks in the Board — primarily because this is [a conservative region]: we don’t talk about things like that. We don’t to my knowledge have a large trans population. We do have a fairly large lesbian population. We’ve had Board members who would identify in that way, but we just don’t talk about it. We don’t talk about much in that respect.”

“We wouldn’t disallow someone because of anything. I say that, but I think if there was somebody that came along that’s really a blowhard — all they do is start trouble — I don’t want them on my Board with a ten-foot pole. They may be a representative of that class that you talked about [gender nonconforming], but it would just be divisive. I don’t want a divided Board. People just get sullen and unhappy.”

Benefits and Challenges of Maintaining a Single-gender Board

Most of the conversations with executive leaders for this report revolved around the benefits of maintaining a single-gender Board, as articulated throughout the report. One of the most important themes that emerged,

however, was how the single-gender Board serves as a unique professional development space for women, especially women of color.

“Spaces that women can create are unique and powerful....Coming into the Board, I love being surrounded by all these women who are experts and have skills and different things, but come together for a common cause. I just think there's something special about the spaces in which women operate to make change in our society.”

*“Our Board is also a professional development for women in particular....This is an opportunity to engage young women in the community and help grow their professional development....**It's a deliberate effort...to ensure that diverse women in our community have access to those tables and that professional development as well....Our Board itself is a program of leadership development....**We are well into almost 50% of our Board makeup being women of color.”*

“I only see benefits. I think it's created that women's space that women just don't even take the time to build anymore because they're too busy. I think having that space where women can talk about the challenges that they face as leaders without feeling like they have to worry about what men in the room think — that's still important....Several Board members have said, ‘I grew wings at the YWCA that I never thought I would have.’...Having the space for women's leadership is so important. Even the [profession named here]...she's about the most confident and competent person I know — and I remember when she became our Board president I thought, what can we give to this woman who just appears to have it all going on? Well if you heard her heartfelt departure speech when she stepped down from being our president, I thought, who knew? Who knew that this experience leading a Board of women — of all women — would have meant so much to her? And she talked about how she grew as a leader here. And this lady negotiates huge contracts, manages thousands of people — but this experience gave her something that she didn't get elsewhere...navigating in that space on the issues that we're dealing with, and talking about racial justice in the context of women — pretty amazing.”

“I can't think of a time that it's challenged us. We have amazing, smart, committed women on our Board....I would never say we haven't had access to money because we always have, and it has nothing to do with that single-gender lens at all....We have a lot of smart, committed women in this community and a waiting

list of them who want to get on to help us through volunteer leadership. I don't see a time when we would have a lack of that. I don't think we're going to run out of women that would make an impact on this organization...I look at it as a leadership — either building, or, certainly people have come on that have already been in leadership positions. From the leadership-building perspective, there aren't too many places you can go or too many Boards you can go on that are focusing on building you as a leader. And we do...Right from the very beginning, with our training and our vetting and constantly training people to be really good volunteer leaders and leaders, generally.”

The only potential negative of a single-gender Board that came up in interviews with executives was financial, although many leaders challenged that perception throughout the conversation.

“It has benefitted us more than challenged us. However, I could have blind spots when it comes to our challenges as well. It has been a really good way for us to provide leadership opportunities for women in the community, however, it may have resulted in us not having the same level of male support that other similarly sized nonprofit organizations have. For example, our capital campaign started a few years ago. And when we were looking at our donor list...we realized that about 85% or more of our donors were women. So we were missing a large chunk of the community as far as financial support.”

“If you spoke with our Board members individually, we have some very reasonable and well-educated Board members, and they all know— we all know that — a diverse group of opinions gives you a stronger handle on potential solutions. The one reason that our Board members would sometimes encourage us to have men on the Board is because it's very clear that men are stronger at fundraising. All they have to do is to pick up the phone and call their friend...whereas with women there's a whole different dynamic...It's difficult sometimes to fundraise without men at the helm.”

“A challenge is access to large dollars....The challenge is not having the CEOs of top companies on our Board. But we have senior women from those companies on our Board, so they have access to the purse strings but not direct access to decision makers. Women have taken it on that they need to be as effective as men in fundraising. The challenge is access to power, but we make our voices heard...seeing not as much a challenge in not having men on our Board because we develop leadership and relationships to powerful men.”

“[The other side is] are we missing opportunities for maybe additional funding? Because...men are still are in spaces that women are not, and can they turn over rocks that women maybe necessarily couldn’t — as allies, and not necessarily let their voices be louder in the room.”

Additional Thoughts

A few of the executive leaders interviewed expressed concerns with the process that are worth noting.

“If it is the case that this entire process is only interviewing nine local associations out of 210, that feels very problematic to me....Since [Morten Group] was given the particular nine to talk to and not that you looked at the list and chose, that to me feels like leadership trying to stack the deck with the opinions that they think might come out of that group....I felt like it was important for an external group to do it [this survey], because this is — and will be — such a contentious issue. And again, I have to say, even if [Morten Group] was directed to nine organizations that have applied for the exception and those were handpicked, and these nine who have not and also have a strong opinion were handpicked — that’s still less than 10% of our entire local association body. And so it feels important to — and maybe this has been done and I just don’t know it — if feels important for at least a substantive survey, if not a one-on-one follow-up like this, to at least be sent to every local organization so that, whenever a report comes out, it truly does represent the entirety of the local association body, and not 18 or 20 organizations.”

“I worry about the timing of this. I know when you get huge social unrest and obviously a pandemic, an international crisis, seismic things happen. I don’t personally feel that the YWCA is at a place — I think making this change right now would be ill informed. Because I still think people are questioning who we are and what we are. They still don’t know what we do. And I think if they do have an idea of what we do, it’s a belief that we are a women’s organization. I know the racial justice piece is aspirational....We would aspire to be there, but we’re not there....We’re not the #1 place that people go to for racial justice. We just aren’t....But people do understand that we’re a women’s organization. And I think, even with seismic change, doing this right now would either be perceived as trying to take advantage and doing it under the radar or just kind of grasping at straws and, frankly, financial....In my community, it would be perceived as ‘we can’t get enough money with women so we’re going to bring on men.’ So I know that change is

inevitable, especially when seismic things happen — and this is certainly as seismic as things have been in my career — but I don't think we're at a stable enough place in our perception across communities that it would be a good idea to make this change right now. People would be even more confused about what we are than they are now.”

RECOMMENDATIONS

(taken from interview transcripts)

Mission and Vision Alignment

“The Board decided that eliminating racism was in everything that they — that we do. It was in all of our programs, and it was everybody’s responsibility....And what I’ve said is, if it’s everybody’s responsibility, then it’s no one’s. And if it’s a part of everything, then it’s a part of nothing.”

“Race equity work at the national level is really lacking. The national level could perhaps be a clearinghouse. There’s so much great work being done among affiliates. Some of the stuff that I have found aren’t really shared there....The national could have more of a focus and really show a deep investment in creating a really strong department that I think can act as a clearinghouse...not only for the work that all the YWCAs are doing, but I think also in networking to some of the other national organizations that are centering racial equity in organizational work.”

Organizational Change Process

“‘Gender neutral’ is probably not the language that I would prefer to use...because I don’t want to be neutral to gender....I think that our services and the people who access our services and engage with our organization are primarily female identified, and that I’d want our Board to represent that. So, although I’d want space for them, I’d want some sort of structure where the majority of folks on the Board [are female identified]. And, I mean, we...have enough research to show that women, in spaces where men dominate — where there’s more men, women’s voices aren’t [heard]....We know that, and so I think we have to attend to it as well and make sure that we create a space where women’s voices — they feel like that they can be heard and that they have value, and that we don’t shift into what every other Board looks like.”

“If there are other local organizations that are aware of the process, they will likely feel that it is — having been in this movement for a long time and knowing many of the personalities — they will likely feel this is window dressing and not authentic....**To me this is the one bedrock policy that distinguishes our organization from almost any other in the nation. And if we’re going to turn it over, it should not be the result of 18 handpicked local associations.**”

Board Composition

“I have several close friends that are males in the community. And when they say, ‘I want to be the first man on your Board,’ I say, ‘when women are equal in pay, when women are equal in power, and women are equal in access to health, education, and every single aspect of our community – you can be on the Board.’”

“There are some of us who find it to be...I don’t want to use the word ‘hypocritical’ – that’s too strong, but it’s accurate – that YWCA local associations are expected to have Board diversity, not just in ethnic diversity but age diversity. But at the YWCA USA level, we are not holding ourselves to that same standard. And the few times that there have been young women...that were nominated, we were actually screening them through the same lens that you would a 40- or 50-year-old hugely successful board member...That issue has come up.”

Implementation Strategies

“We invite men to join committees. Men are encouraged to apply for positions. We’re not a raging feminist organization. Men have the opportunity to engage, promote, and support the organization, just not to vote and make decisions. There’s no need for them to take those opportunities when there are other ways for them to show their support.”

“I think that we could consider – if we weren’t going to have men in a governing capacity – we might want to consider some sort of ally group, or an advisory group...where we do get regular input feedback. I don’t know what that looks like either, but maybe there’s something where you get the value of their experiences and/or opinions and things, but they’re not necessarily part of the governance of the organization. Until we can get gender equity, we’re still going to need to have men as allies in order to help us open doors...And then they need to step out of the way.”

“On a lot of issues, I look to the USA to be the guiding post. Some things will work here in our community and some things won’t. Having them put their necks out there at the national level really helps us at the local

level....[For example] going after racial justice funding might be more effective having the national organization go for that funding rather than smaller individual organizations.”

CONCLUSION

Throughout each interview and group conversation, the executive leadership provided honest, focused, and practical information to reflect their organizational journey. Gendered organizations are increasingly being asked to examine their existence through a gender-inclusive and diverse prism. Current social and political changes require a much more nuanced and contoured approach to living out the mission of these very important and unique organizations.

The YWCA USA holds membership within a particular cohort of organizations focused on the empowerment of women and girls with both shared and divergent experiences. Each leader offered candid recommendations and opportunities to support local and national alignment in moving the entire YWCA Association membership forward in the advancement of equity and gender justice. The YWCA USA is well-positioned through its membership to continue to expand upon the many programs and services offered to move its mission forward in support of individuals, families, and diverse communities around the country.