



# Building Women's Political Careers: Strengthening the Pipeline to Higher Office

Findings and Recommendations from the Achieving Parity Study

Denise L. Baer, Ph.D.  
Heidi I. Hartmann, Ph.D.



INSTITUTE FOR  
WOMEN'S POLICY RESEARCH

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## About This Report

This report was prepared by the Institute for Women's Policy Research (IWPR) for Political Parity, a program of the Hunt Alternatives Fund. The report analyzes results from interviews with experienced candidates and officeholders and several focus groups with elected state legislators, young elected officials, and congressional staff members to investigate how women make the decision to run and how they develop their political careers, with a focus on seeking or achieving higher office. The report is a part of IWPR's larger body of work on examining women's roles in civic and political leadership.

Political Parity, a nonpartisan program of Hunt Alternatives Fund, supports research that tests innovative ideas and defines effective strategies to elect more women in these roles. Political Parity published a separate report and executive summary combining results from this qualitative study, the Achieving Parity Study (APS), and an original quantitative survey of state legislators, The Female State Legislators Survey (FSLs), conducted by Lake Research Partners and Chesapeake Beach Consulting. Both studies examine the motivators and obstacles female candidates and elected officials consider when deciding whether or not to run for higher office. All Political Parity publications are available at [www.politicalparity.org](http://www.politicalparity.org).

## About the Institute for Women's Policy Research

IWPR conducts rigorous research and disseminates its findings to address the needs of women, promote public dialogue, and strengthen families, communities, and societies. IWPR works with policymakers, scholars, and public interest groups to design, execute, and disseminate research that illuminates economic and social policy issues affecting women and their families, and to build a network of individuals and organizations that conduct and use women-oriented policy research. The Institute's work is supported by foundation grants, government grants and contracts, donations from individuals, and contributions from organizations and corporations. IWPR is a 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization that also works in affiliation with the women's studies and public policy and public administration programs at The George Washington University.

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**Institute for Women's Policy Research**  
1200 18th Street NW, Suite 301 Washington, DC 20036  
Tel: 202/785.5100 Fax: 202/833.4362  
[www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org)

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No project of this size can be completed without the efforts of a large team. At the Institute for Women's Policy Research, several interns, researchers, and other staff members contributed to collecting background information on potential study subjects, recruiting subjects, scheduling and arranging interviews and focus groups, and assisting with the development of the protocols and with the execution of the focus groups and several of the short interviews. They also transcribed interviews, checked and corrected interview transcripts, kept and managed the confidential records for all participants, and provided general research assistance on the project, including data analysis and editing and fact checking the final report. The interns included Namalie Jayasinghe (American University), Livia Baer-Bositis (Northwestern University), Kathleen Rogers (Muhlenberg College), Drew McCormick (School for International Training), Bethany Nelson (Baruch College, City University of New York), and Yuko Haro (Harvard University). Independent researcher Catherine Silvey; IWPR Mariam K. Chamberlain Fellow Rhiana Gunn-Wright; IWPR Research and Program Coordinator Youngmin Yi; and Elyse Shaw, Special Assistant to the IWPR President; IWPR Communications Manager Caroline Dobuzinskis; and IWPR Communications Coordinator Mallory Mpare also helped with recruiting, focus group organization, data analysis, fact checking, or final report preparation. Ms. Silvey, Ms. McCormick, and IWPR Affiliated Scholar Dr. Jane Henrici provided drafts of the literature review and the descriptions of the three focus groups. The IWPR team was led in its early stages by Dr. Barbara Gault, Vice President and Executive Director and in its later stages by Dr. Henrici. Both Drs. Gault and Henrici contributed to the research design and methodological issues throughout the project. Dr. Gault also provided leadership and guidance throughout the entire project.

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IWPR consultant Denise L. Baer, Ph.D., served as the principal investigator. She designed the project, wrote the protocols, and conducted all the interviews and focus groups. She also conducted the data analysis and took the lead in writing the final report. IWPR President, Heidi Hartmann, Ph.D., co-authored the executive summary, introduction, recommendations, conclusion, and methodological appendix and edited the report for consistency. She also provided overall guidance to the project from its inception. In addition to all the IWPR and Hunt Alternatives Fund staff members, consultants, researchers, and interns, and the outside reviewers, the authors would like to express our deep gratitude to all those women who generously volunteered to participate in focus groups and interviews and shared their insights into running for office. They did so with dedication and commitment to IWPR’s Achieving Parity Study. These women took time out of their busy schedules to tell their stories, describe their experiences, and provide their best advice on how to double the number of women in elective office. We promised them confidentiality and so cannot thank them individually. It is our hope that this report gives voice to the tremendous leadership and public service that these women provide every day, and that it helps to produce the changes that they would like to see for women in political office.

# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## Major Findings and Recommendations for Action

The Achieving Parity Study conducted at the Institute for Women's Policy Research and Funded by Hunt Alternatives Fund consisted of administering 45 interviews (36 in-depth and 9 brief interviews) with experienced candidates and officeholders and convening several focus groups (totaling 24 participants) with elected state legislators, young elected officials, and congressional staff members (a group from which federal office holders are often drawn) to investigate how women make the decision to run and how they develop their political careers, with a focus on seeking or achieving higher office. In some cases, focus group participants also responded to a shorter interview. All the interview and focus group participants were ensured confidentiality. All sessions, which occurred between June 2012 and January 2013, were transcribed and analyzed for common themes; in some cases mentions of common factors identified by the women interviewed were counted.

The recommended action steps summarized below are largely drawn from the responses of participants to a question about what they think it would take to double the number of women in higher office by 2022, a goal set by the Hunt Alternatives Fund's Political Parity Project. The recommended action steps also include suggestions from the authors' analysis of participants' other responses and the existing literature.

### Overview of Major Study Findings

The political pipeline whereby women campaign for and build long-term political careers is gendered and has significant gaps and barriers for women. The Achieving Parity Study finds this is the case for both established officials who began their careers as much as twenty to forty years ago and young women elected officials who started their careers within the last decade or less.

The money barrier for women candidates running for higher office has three major, distinct aspects – all of which are gendered. The first is learning how to ask. Women do express discomfort or reluctance, but this is one aspect that is overcome readily and early with training. The second aspect is developing a relationship with donors so that if you ask, they will respond. This requires personally meeting them or having an introduction or other connection that matters to both the potential donor and the candidate. The third aspect is having access to good call lists (reliable and untapped donors). This requires more support from the political parties and women's organizations, as well as experienced officeholders or other power brokers who have developed these lists over time and will share them with selected candidates. The last two of these aspects are often described as sponsorship, in which a well-connected, experienced political leader provides moneyed connections and other substantial help to aspiring candidates. Some women candidates are “change” candidates and they find making these connections more difficult. Increasingly, running for higher office requires having or building a national network, because of the expense and sophistication of such campaigns. Change candidates can often make good use of these national networks.

Mentoring and sponsorship by women elected officials and other leaders as well as a broader use of

networks and women's caucuses are stressed as much needed tools to better support women elected officials who seek to become credentialed and positioned to run for higher offices. Political parties, in particular, were reported to be nearly absent in recruitment for women. Not only did 50-70 percent of those interviewed say they had never received a suggestion to run for higher office from political party leaders (51.4percent) and power brokers (71 percent), but political party leaders are also relatively rare as mentors or kitchen cabinet members. While public officials are the most common category of mentors or kitchen cabinet members mentioned, these are typically not current male elected officials or even party leaders. Instead, public officials are either female elected officials or former or appointed male elected officials. This suggests that what party support is received is primarily provided by individuals on their own initiative and not by the party organizations or current elected officials in a formal recruiting role. Women and feminists are the second most often reported mentor and the fourth most common kitchen cabinet member. But the need for more help from the women's movement and women elected officials is stressed. In particular, study participants recommend opportunities for networking across levels of office holding to facilitate moving among levels. Most national networks for women officeholders are organized laterally; they are for women mayors, state legislators, or members of Congress. Thus they are static and they do not help women advance to higher levels.

Campaigning-while-female is relatively common: almost nine in ten Achieving Parity Study participants say women's campaign experiences are different from those of men. It occurs where women receive inappropriate and sexist treatment not just from the media, but also from political groups, peers and colleagues, donors, and the parties. Campaigning-while-female includes a range of comments and behaviors from a focus on hair and clothes, to women's role as mothers (suggesting mothers should not serve or should run for school board only), to sexual harassment. Although campaigning-while-female occasionally includes comments from constituents, constituents are not the major source. Sexual harassment by colleagues and donors, for example, is reported to be a problem.

Campaigning-while-female is separate and distinct from discrimination – instances where women candidates and elected officials receive fewer resources than is true of comparable men. Discrimination includes smaller donations, reduced party financial support, failure to provide promised party services, fewer opportunities to sponsor legislation, fewer speaking opportunities, having meetings refused or phone calls not returned. In some cases, women report being “bullied” by political party leaders, their peers, or other elected officeholders in an effort to dissuade them from running for or serving in higher offices.

Nearly three in four study participants say they have experienced discrimination in politics. And, of those who say they did not experience discrimination in their life before politics, half say that they experienced discrimination after getting involved in politics. This means that politics takes place in a more sexist arena than that which women have experienced in the private sector. The biggest barriers women face are systemic and structural, including informal party-based recruitment processes followed by inadequate support.

Career orientations for women are diverse, in flux, and malleable. Overall, women are initially attracted to running for office less as a career than as a way of providing public service. Issue mobilization is an important route to politics, as well as the realization that serving in office is a

major way to have an impact on issues. Younger elected women tend to be more interested in holding higher offices, probably reflecting the doors opened by the first substantial wave of women office holders, and experienced women candidates provide advice to young women that emphasizes strategic career-building. Experienced women candidates and women state legislators and officeholders provide detailed, long-term, strategic advice for ambitious young women in their twenties that is quite different from the trajectory that they themselves followed – which suggests the potential for a groundswell of interest in and support for new ways of doing recruitment and training for women.

Politics is a two-person career and this is unlikely to change in the near term without substantial changes in public policy, family life, and political institutions. Men in politics are typically married and can usually count on their wives to do the bulk of family care as well as provide other essential support to their political careers (campaign work, joint and solo appearances, access to help from additional family members and networks). The gendered nature of office holding is extremely challenging for women. The women in this study volunteered a number of types of ways that they work around the challenges facing them. These include running as a single person, having a husband (or in some cases another close relative) as their campaign manager or at least active in politics, having a husband who is a stay-at-home Dad or agrees to share family care responsibilities, having a home environment where someone else (e.g., the candidate's parent or parent-in-law) materially helps with child care, integrating the children into public life (e.g., raising them in the Capitol), or pursuing office holding that works because it is either local or part-time. These work-arounds limit advancement to higher office, since several of them may not be able to be transplanted to Washington, D.C., or would prove less functional in a more visible executive office or other more demanding political role.

Women do differ and will likely continue to differ on how to combine children and family with their plans for elective office. Some women, for example, will be happy to campaign and serve with babies given their commitment to work while mothering and their high comfort level with multi-tasking. These women see viable pathways to combining office holding with mothering that make sense for them and their partners. Other women wish to wait until their children are older. Some women want to be the ones to put their children to bed at night, while others worry about the exposure of their children to being attacked or seeing their mother attacked in the media when political controversies arise. Yet others dislike the additional family stress created due to the rigors of elective office holding and public service. And yet, there are some women for whom becoming a mother was the inspiration for public service and office holding. This variability is important because it suggests that a one-size-fits-all recruitment approach might omit women with differing perspectives on how to combine their family life with public service. While it will surely help to have family-friendly work environments for women officeholders, that alone will not necessarily change the personal choices women make. To provide a more welcoming environment for women will require changing how the political parties and members of the public react to women who enter politics in different ways at different life stages, whether they begin politics when single or childless, as mothers of young children, or later in life. These career paths must all come to be viewed as pluses rather than negatives.

Higher office holding is different. The considerations that women candidates and elected officials have in mind when considering running for or holding higher office are distinctive and separate from

an interest in politics or running for that first office. Women recognize that running for higher office is more demanding in nearly all ways. Further, women report making strategic decisions when they choose to either pursue or decline an opportunity for moving up. Typically, the reasons women give for their decision reflect their knowledge of “campaigning-while-female” as well as their realistic assessment of their chances of success and the requirements such a run is likely to place on themselves and their families, as well as an acute awareness of political timing and opportunities.

Ambition is not an issue or a deficit with these women. Most women self-recruited for their first office or campaign, and only one in four say others recruited them for their first office. Women candidates and elected officials display considerable interest in and indeed drive to run for offices at all levels, including higher office, have made personal and professional and financial sacrifices to engage in public service, and are distinctly political personalities who enjoy campaigning and have developed effective strategies for political success. These political women enjoy politics and in contrast to some statistical studies in which women have (on average) lower self-confidence than men, many of the study participants say that their self-confidence is one of their best assets.

Campaign training is highly valued, but primarily for the political skills that are learned rather than providing the impetus or inspiration for running. Nearly nine in ten of those who participated in training before running said it was extremely helpful in learning the nuts and bolts of campaigning. They also suggest that training should be expanded and enhanced to be more woman-centered to address campaigning-while-female, to provide a better understanding of how to work within political parties, to learn how to build women’s pipelines and leadership skills, and to assist women in developing national (for local candidates) or local networks (for congressional staff) and to develop more sponsor relationships for aspiring candidates and more peer-to-peer networks among women nationally, especially for those who seek higher office.

Overall, the organized women’s community is repeatedly mentioned as both important in terms of providing leadership as well as an important way of mobilizing women to politics outside of the usual avenues. This is an area where women’s organizations can have a growing impact. While there were gaps cited in terms of support from the women’s community, and young women elected officials in particular felt distant, there is a hunger for more support from the women’s community as well as from women elected officials.

While in some geographic areas, the political parties and the political culture are quite supportive and egalitarian in terms of recruiting and electing women, in contrast, in other jurisdictions, the political parties put up tremendous barriers to electing women, according to study participants. Weaknesses in the parties suggest the need for effective change to originate outside of the parties, for example, in the nonpartisan women’s movement. The women’s community could also create opportunities to make recommendations to the political parties and provide training to political party leaders on how to best recruit and support women candidates and elected officials.

## **Recommended Action Steps**

Elected women officials and experienced women candidates look to the women’s community for leadership, and provided numerous, concrete ideas for ways to double the number of women in

elective office by 2022. They are also eager to become involved in recruiting, training, and mentoring relationships. While the local farm team is said to be graying in some states, in others, these women are creating state-level organizations to encourage women to run for local and state offices. But there remain large gaps in developing national ties, strengthening the pipeline, and in supporting elected women who have progressive ambitions for office holding.

The action steps recommended by the participants, in turn, will require more research, organizational changes in the women's community, policy advocacy of reform initiatives, new approaches to public awareness, new methods of encouraging mentoring and sponsorship, as well as developing new training and recruitment models.

Here is an overview of the ten major types of action steps recommended by the study participants.

1. **Launch an Organized Effort to Build the Pipeline and Improve Strategic Race Placement.** To double the number of women in elective office will require a broad scale approach where the women's community simultaneously reinforces and expands the pipeline by recruiting and training young women (who will be running for local rather than state or federal offices in most cases), local elected officials, and all women regardless of viability (since women may run again), and expands the range of issues that it uses to assess and evaluate women candidates so that all women can be supported even if there is not 100 percent agreement on all the issues. In addition, the study participants strongly recommend mapping potential races and open seats well in advance of openings and working to place women as credible candidates in competitive races early on before male candidates occupy the field in advance of openings. This will require learning how to "claim" a seat even before it becomes open, which should also be included in training. Building the pipeline also requires that candidates have an awareness of the importance of timing – running for the right office at the right time for one's personal circumstances and political life.
2. **Expand and Enhance Existing Training.** Training was the second most important set of recommendations emerging from the interviews and focus groups. This includes developing woman-centered training to address campaigning-while-female, explaining how to select the office for which to run and how political pipelines work and can be managed to credential a candidate for the next race. In addition, new models of training that stress long-term leadership development as well as ten-year plans for women in the pipeline were recommended. Other content recommendations include teaching women that politics is power and not to fear the consequences of political conflict and providing targeted training to specific types of candidates – existing officeholders, congressional staff members, women over 50, CEOs, attorneys, young women elected officials, etc. Training should also include an introduction to national networks and potential mentors and sponsors for elected officials. Finally the timing of training should be extended so that training is also available outside of traditional recruitment cycles.
3. **Provide for Mentoring and Sponsorship of Women Candidates and Elected Officials.** This action step not only includes developing mentoring programs as well as helping both the mentee and the mentor to understand the mentoring process, but also

developing an awareness of the importance of sponsorship—which seems to be more common in the male networks that many identified as existing at all levels. Sponsors introduce rising candidates to moneyed connections and provide material support to help them succeed. Another aspect of mentoring and sponsorship is helping to get women appointed to offices to provide credentials in between election cycles. This is especially helpful for women who have recently lost an election. And elected women officials can work to identify women in the community as well as staff members who might follow them in office.

4. **Enhance Public Awareness.** Public awareness recommendations mention working to increase respect for women among the general public, as well to develop more awareness of female role models through the media. This includes creating more political space for different types of women, whether running in their twenties, running as a second career, or running when unmarried. There are also suggestions to use targeted efforts to make political leadership more attractive to potential women candidates—targeting, for example, to encourage girls to consider public service through girls’ organizations, and high school and civics courses, as well as youth leadership opportunities and opportunities to meet women leaders.
5. **Increase Understanding of Fundraising Complexities.** While research suggests that established women candidates raise as much money as men do, in these interviews and focus groups women still express unease with aspects of the process. Candidates can easily learn the “ask,” but getting beyond that is more difficult. Candidates must develop personal relationships with major donors and they must expand their lists, especially if they want to move onto higher office. Sponsors can be extremely helpful in this list building. Beyond endorsements, it was recommended that more fundraisers be sponsored for women candidates and elected officials.
6. **Provide a “Campaign-in-a-Box” Approach for Campaign Support.** Participants strongly believe that women candidates need campaign assistance beyond endorsements. These recommended action steps ranged from providing material help through discounts for campaign services from trusted suppliers and other campaign resources helpful to women who are learning how to manage a campaign themselves as well as learning how to be the candidate to providing women with ways to manage their family care responsibilities while campaigning.
7. **Recruit and Ask Women to Run.** It was recommended that recruitment be continued and expanded. While most women in this study are self-starters for their first office, it was also acknowledged that asking and encouraging women to run is a vital part of doubling the number of women in office. Expanded recruitment for higher offices could also help in terms of ensuring that state and local candidates are introduced to national networks. In addition, recruitment could be expanded to target women who are already leaders; especially in the issue-advocacy community because issues mobilization was a common way the Achieving Parity study participants entered politics.
8. **Advocate Institutional Reforms.** Three areas identified for potential reforms include campaign finance reform, using gender quotas to increase the number of women running, and working with the political parties to create better ways for the male-dominated party

networks to work with women candidates. These suggested reforms have the potential of addressing two problems faced by women candidates. The first problem is the fundraising barrier for higher office holding which has been exacerbated because some state and local races now have local campaign limits that have diminished personal fundraising networks critical for higher offices. The second problem is that there are more candidates and more incumbents that are male than there are office opportunities. The parties need to change the way they work with candidates to be more open to parity for women candidates.

9. **Create a Village Among Women’s Organizations.** From the lowest levels of office holding to the top, women’s organizations sometimes seem fragmented or distant. One set of recommendations suggests an increase of the type of coordinated effort led by the Political Parity Leadership Team. Others suggest a new national network that goes across levels of office and introduces women to those who work at other levels. This type of national network is increasingly useful to those seeking higher office. Others recognize that all women’s organizations need to get involved in electing more women to office; they need to make it a higher priority
  
10. **Make Campaigning and Office Holding Family-Friendly.** Changes here could involve expanding the idea that “children are off-limits” for media criticism during campaigns (a norm which is widely accepted at the presidential level) to creating an awareness that some women enjoy campaigning with their children to providing family-friendly schedules and on-site day care for political events and legislative sessions.

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# INTRODUCTION

The Institute for Women's Policy Research undertook the Achieving Parity Study to fill the research gap identified by the Hunt Alternatives Fund on why some women choose to run for high-level political office, while others do not.

This research is particularly timely because women's progress in holding elective office – and particularly in terms of higher offices – has slowed in the past twenty years since the 1992 Year of the Woman, which doubled the number of women in Congress overnight. Even after the elections of 2012 which increased the number of women serving in the U.S. Congress, women are still only 20 percent of U.S. Senators, 18 percent of U.S. House members, 10 percent of Governors, 24 percent of state legislators, and 17 percent of mayors of cities over 30,000 in population (Center for American Women and Politics 2013a). In terms of city councils, as of 2010, women's representation on councils of 15 of the largest cities in the United States ranged from a low 13 percent in Los Angeles to a high of 47 percent in Dallas (Philadelphia Research Initiative 2011).<sup>1</sup>

Women have in the past decade achieved near parity in the United States in only two offices – school boards and judgeships. For example, in 2010, women comprised 44 percent of school board members (an increase from 2002 when women were only 39 percent overall) and are now the majority serving on boards in medium and large districts (Hess and Meeks 2010). Because one must have a law degree to become a judge, the fact that women are about 30 percent of attorneys, and are about three in ten (30 to 31 percent) of state Appellate, Special Jurisdiction and Supreme Court judges and 26 percent of general jurisdiction state court judges overall reflects near parity (National Association of Women Judges n.d.).

It was once thought that as women's lives and careers became more like those of men, women's progress in serving in elective office at all levels would soon follow. With formal barriers against inclusion of women in the political parties eliminated in the 1970s, and with women achieving relative parity in educational attainment such as law school graduation (40 percent by the mid - 1980s and near parity today), parity in political office holding inexplicably remains elusive.

Researchers have found that declared women candidates are as successful as men, but so few women declare. The gender gap in candidates has been explained by women's lack of ambition, but ambition represents only one possible motivation for women candidates. Moreover, ambition itself may be affected by other circumstances. Can gender differences in ambition explain the rapid increase in women holding political office in the 1970s-1990s and the more recent flat-lining in numbers? The recent flat-lining suggests that new circumstances or barriers have emerged that need to be addressed in order for women to continue their progress toward political parity.

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<sup>1</sup> Among city councils overall, the most recent data available are from 2001 and show that about one in four (25 percent) small city council members are women, and slightly more than one in three council members in medium (36 percent) and large (36 percent) city councils are women – figures that had changed little between 1979 and 2001(Svara 2003).

The Hunt Alternatives Fund's program entitled Political Parity seeks to double the numbers of women in high political office by 2022. High office includes statewide elective office and national elective office.

## **Literature Review**

A number of studies examine the challenges and strategies for female candidates running for office. Duerst-Lahti cautions us to remember that we are recruiting women to serve in institutions created by men (2002). Current research focuses on four different samples of women in the political arena: (1) state legislators (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2009); (2) women candidates (Carroll 1994; Burrell 1994; Lawless and Pearson 2008); (3) potential candidates (Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010); and (4) convention delegates (Baer and Bositis 1983; Baer 2010, 2012.)

These studies have reviewed a number of important factors for female candidates, including motivation to run, difficulties in political recruitment, differences in party environment and possible disparate treatment within the parties, and funding.

### **Motivation and Ambition**

Research has explored extensively the factors that motivate women to seek political office, including personal factors such as race and gender, as well as professional factors and women's attitudes toward office (Lawless 2012; Lawless and Fox 2005, 2010). Lawless and Fox surveyed thousands of potential candidates -- women and men who hold occupational qualifications (e.g., law, business, education or activists) to run for office but who have not yet taken the plunge (2005, 2010). They identified a gender gap in political ambition among citizens and found a persistently lower likelihood that eligible women will run for political office. Lawless and Fox explained that fewer women run primarily because they have less confidence in their qualifications, are less likely to be encouraged to run in both professional and personal circles, perceive a more difficult electoral environment, and have more demands in terms of family life.

A study of women's political careers, their decisions to run and not run, and their choice of office can further illuminate the role of motivation and the factors that affect ambition and women's electoral success.

### **Political Recruitment**

Available research notes that political party culture is especially important for recruitment. Women are less likely to decide on their own to run for office, and need to be encouraged to run for office (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2012). This means that the parties' interest in recruiting women is especially important for increasing the number of women in office. Lawless and Fox (2010) found that women are much less likely than men to have been recruited to run for office by party leaders and activists. Women interviewed for the study often said they lack the large scale networks that are helpful in entering electoral politics. Conditions were worse for Republican women than Democratic women.

Sanbonmatsu (2002) argues that political party organization and leadership have a strong influence on the incentive structure facing female candidates and that one must understand the dynamics of the parties in order to understand the pattern of where women run for and hold state legislative office. Democratic and Republican women come from divergent social backgrounds (e.g., Republican women are more often married and more often self-identify as "housewife"; Baer 2012).

Recruitment is just one step in the political pipeline, though a very important one. A study of women's political careers can help identify where exactly the recruitment process (often thought of as a political pipeline) is gendered and unfair, confronting women with significant gaps and barriers.

## **Party Environment**

Unfortunately, it is still the case that politics is in many respects an "old boys' club," a network dominated by men who make most of the important decisions. Although women have increased in number and been included in the "club," they do not seem to have often achieved the same trappings of power and influence as men. In other words, it may often be a case of "politics without power" (Cotter and Hennessey 1964; Goetz 2007), where the inclusion is only pro-forma.

Each party in today's political environment represents a different culture of recruitment and structure (Lawless and Pearson 2008). The Democratic Party tends to be pluralistic and polycentric, while the Republic Party is unitary and organic (Freeman 1986, Baer 2010). The more diffuse nature of the Democratic Party with more portals to entry may contribute to a larger number of women running and winning higher office as Democrats than as Republicans.

Weaknesses in the parties may point to the need for effective change to originate outside of the parties, for example, in the nonpartisan women's movement.

## **Funding**

Fundraising and training support have been recognized as crucial to increasing the number of women in political office (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2009). While women have been shown to raise as much money as men (Burrell 1994), women continue to express greater concern over their abilities to raise sufficient funds (Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh 2009).

Sanbonmatsu, Carroll, and Walsh note that networks are especially important for fundraising. Mentoring for women can be especially helpful in this regard, as it can provide the support and networks needed to fundraise and achieve leadership positions.

A study of women's political careers can shed light on when fundraising is a primary concern and what women candidates can do to best meet this challenge.

## **Why Focus on Women's Political Careers**

As the studies reviewed above reveal, existing research provides a variety of findings that do not definitively answer the question of why gains for women have been stalled. For example, ambition appears to be a broad and complex phenomenon that can arise from a variety of factors, including cost-benefit assessments, as well as personal motivations, policy interests, and external supports (including both positive and negative recruitment). One limitation of focusing on ambition as a restrictive factor for women is the presumption that it is an internal trait that is unchanging rather than resulting from strategic considerations that reflect realistic opportunities.

The Achieving Parity Study chose to study how women build their political careers, including how women considering entering politics think about their political options, in order to better understand the variety of factors that contribute to a successful political career and the barriers that must be overcome. Past research has shown that women who run for office tend to run later in life than men typically do, which limits their ability to accumulate experience and political power (Dolan, Deckman, and Swers 2007, Burrell 1996). Successful careers seem to require candidates who are self-starters and think strategically in selecting the best opportunities for which to run (Jacobson 1989). Running for office is not a decision that stands alone. It requires a number of sacrifices and commitments that may affect family life and personal reputation. The multilayered nature of this decision and its impacts make it critical to examine political careers over a lifetime. The research conducted for this study examines the in-depth factors affecting political careers not adequately addressed in existing research.

Investigating women's political decisions can contribute to improved understanding of the causes of the declared candidate gap and the ways in which women can become strategic candidates. This new knowledge can lead to effective social action, greater organized support for women candidates, and appropriate party reforms.

# RESEARCH QUESTIONS, DATA, AND METHODS

## Research Questions

The Achieving Parity Project is designed to address the following research questions:

- What motivates women to leadership, public service, and elective office?
- What barriers stand in the way of women once they have made this decision?
- What factors make a material difference for women who have embarked on a political career?
- How important are these factors for women developing political careers and seeking higher office?
- What are the change factors (drivers) within the control of women's organizations and the political parties?

The Achieving Parity Study's overall research goal is to develop persuasive evidence of the root causes of the declared candidate gap between men and women in the United States and to develop recommendations that can close that gap and substantially increase the number of women officeholders especially at higher levels.

## Data and Methods

The study used a qualitative, mixed methods research design, consisting of both in-depth interviews and focus groups. Participants for in-depth interviews and focus groups were nationally recruited and selected to provide a range of perspectives (including different party affiliations), geographical regions, demographic characteristics (including age, race/ethnicity, family status, and education), and a mix of women who were considering running, had run, or served in office at the time of the interview.

Experienced women candidates who have run for the U.S. Congress and for state and local offices were selected for interviews to better understand why women do and do not run for office, including how women construct political careers. The in-depth interviews provided for the inclusion of a wide array of factors related to recruitment, running for higher office, and the development of political careers.

Focus group participants were selected from three sources to explore specific areas of interest: state officeholders (because of the importance of state office as a pipeline to higher office), young elected officeholders (to explore the motivations and experiences of women who started their political careers early), and congressional staff members who have considered running for office (to explore the motivations and considerations of those who are well placed to enter a race but have not yet done so). Nine of the young women elected officials completed brief interviews.

Thirty-six women completed in-depth interviews and twenty-four women participated in focus groups, for a total of 60 study participants.

The participants are drawn from twenty-two states and the District of Columbia and are geographically representative of the nation, with 30 percent from the Northeast, 17 percent from the Midwest, 27 percent from the South, and 27 percent from the West. They are demographically diverse: 60 percent are white; 22 percent are black or African American; 9 percent are Hispanic or Latina; 4 percent are Asian American or Pacific Islander; the remaining participants are multiracial or unknown. Of all participants, 92 percent have had candidate experience, 65 percent have held office, 62 percent are current officeholders and 70 percent of these intend to seek reelection. Three-fifths had held political party offices. Of the 36 who completed in-depth interviews, 28 percent are Republicans and 72 percent are Democrats (fairly similar to women's party affiliation in the US Congress where 24 percent of women are Republican).

For officeholders, the study participants represent a range of time in office (more than half have served six years or more), type of office (including party office) held, and recruitment routes (see Appendix B for additional demographic and political information about the study participants and Appendix A for the methods for recruiting them).

While such a small sample cannot be representative of the national population of women candidates and officeholders, the characteristics of the study participants are consistent with the random sample surveyed in a companion study conducted by Lake Research Partners with Chesapeake Beach Consulting (LRP/CBC). See Appendices B and C for comparisons between the two research studies. Furthermore, because the study participants are women with significant office and candidate experience who come from a wide range of backgrounds, it is safe to say that the factors that identify as affecting their careers are important and substantial factors that need to be considered in developing responses to the declared candidate gap and in helping women build strong political careers. As well, these issues should be addressed in future quantitative studies.

## **How to Read the Tables**

Because the interviews were semi-structured, the data in this report are presented in two types of tables. One type provides for percentages and frequency distributions when the questions had a fixed set of responses. A second type of table records responses to open-ended questions where respondents could provide multiple answers. For these questions, the qualitative data was coded across both interviews and focus groups to identify themes. The multiple responses to these open-ended questions were then counted in order to provide an indication of the overall importance or priority of the responses, producing a rank order of the importance of specific factors. This second type of table provides the number of mentions across interviews and focus groups. In a few cases, it was possible to calculate how many of those interviewed took a similar position or identified a similar problem and this is also indicated where appropriate.

One value of qualitative research is that it permits the study participants themselves to prioritize and place their own weight on the various factors as they perceive and experience them in real

life. Qualitative research can provide important insights that may not be revealed in survey research. For that reason qualitative research is often used to inform future quantitative research.

One point to remember in reading the tables is that in some cases, individuals might give a similar answer to different questions. For example, the same individual might say that how one dresses is an aspect of campaigning as a female, as well as area of discrimination, and also constitutes a personal challenge. This typically is not done in quantitative research where one item is measured only once. In qualitative research, such repetitions when volunteered provide insights into the importance or priority that such a factor has for the individual in multiple areas of one's life. Thus, qualitative research has the advantage of providing a more textured portrait of the real-world experiences compared to quantitative research, while quantitative research using properly selected random samples has the advantage of producing findings that can be generalized to a specific population (for example, all women state legislators). There is no significance testing in this report. This is because there is no population to generalize to since the participants were not randomly selected.

## **FINDINGS**

The following discussion provides a detailed analysis of the major findings organized around the central questions of concern to the Hunt Alternatives Fund and Political Parity – how women come to politics and make the decision to run for office, to what extent women view their work in politics as a career, the kinds of mentors and kitchen cabinets they have, what decision factors matter especially in running for higher office (internal, political, and cultural factors), the value of training, women’s campaign experiences including the burdens they perceive in raising money, the degree to which women experience discrimination including having fewer resources in their political work, and what characterizes these political women in terms of their strategies and personal characteristics. This discussion is followed by specific insights added from the specialized focus groups, and a summary of the recommendations made by the Achieving Parity participants on how to double the number of women in politics.

### **Running for Office and Developing a Political Career**

To better understand the barriers and motivations for political women who do run for office, study participants were asked both about their initial interest in politics and their motivations behind the campaign for that first office (see Table 1).

#### **Initial Interest in Politics**

When asked how they initially became interested in politics, experienced women candidates say that even before considering a run for office, they come to politics in different ways. The most common source of interest in politics was through issue-based mobilization. More than two in five (44 percent) of the study participants say that they were motivated by a specific issue. This supports the conventional wisdom that many women are often mobilized by a desire to achieve specific policy goals. It is noteworthy that in this study, women cite a diverse array of policy interests, including both traditional women’s issues (children and family issues, education, environment, food policy, parks and zoning issues, women’s rights) and other policy areas (national security, the war in Iraq, economic issues, budget issues, small business and business issues, the role of the Supreme Court and legal issues, juvenile justice, and economic inequality and poverty).

The next largest group, nearly one in five grew up in politics and became involved through family or friends. This is interesting and encouraging for women from these types of families to run, as women are equally likely as men to be born into political families and communities.

More than one in ten cite women’s issues and representing women as their major motivation for involvement in politics. The women’s movement continues to be an important way of mobilizing women to politics outside of usual avenues. This is an area where women’s organizations can have a growing impact.

While political parties were traditionally closed to women beyond “lickin’ and stickin’,” nearly one in ten of the experienced candidate and elected official participants say they got involved by working in campaigns or through community organizing. This is also an area where women’s organizations can work to recruit potential women candidates.

Less common routes to initial political engagement that were volunteered by study participants include working as a congressional staff or aide, getting mobilized by another group (e.g., a political faction, such as Ron Paul volunteers, for Republicans, or a labor union for Democrats) or being appointed.

**Table 1**

**How Experienced Candidates Got Their Start in Politics and Public Service**

**How Did You Become Involved in Politics Initially?**

- Issue-Based Mobilization–44 percent
- Grew Up in Politics, Family and Friends–19 percent
- Women’s Issues–14 percent
- Campaigns, Civic and Community Organizing–9 percent
- Congressional Staff or Aide–7 percent
- Other Group Mobilization–5 percent
- Sponsored/Appointed–2 percent

**What Motivated You to Run for Office?**

- Issue-based Mobilization and the “Eureka” Moment–14 Mentions
- Self-Recruited–12 Mentions
- Recruited or Appointed–9 Mentions

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to questions 15 and 16 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research long interview protocol; question 20 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research young elected officials brief interview protocol; question 1 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research young elected officials focus group protocol and questions 1 and 4 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research state legislators focus group protocol.

## Running for that First Office

Most of the experienced women candidates in this study were self-recruited. This may be a surprising finding given that the focus in the women's community on recruiting women for office has been to encourage women who had not yet thought about running themselves. However, the high degree of self-recruitment is consistent with general research in political science on candidates, which finds that most are self-starters.

The reasons provided by those who self-recruited vary. For some, it was an interest in women's issues (e.g., being horrified to find how few women there are in government, outrage at the treatment of Anita Hill,<sup>2</sup> or being inspired by Hillary Clinton's campaign for president). For others, it was simply the right time or they felt ready as they had always wanted to run for office.

The largest group of self-recruiters, however, was composed of those who "got angry" over an incumbent's failure to respond or represent the district well, or had a "eureka" moment during which they realized that their issues were best addressed through policy. For example, according to a current self-recruited politician, a mayor who had previously served in the state house:

*I guess I came to the conclusion that representing children and fighting the system case by case was never going to make a difference. And that it has to be at the legislative level to make a real change. (older, over forty, local executive officeholder and former state legislator, South, serving six to ten years)<sup>3</sup>*

In this case, the "eureka" moment came with a ten-year plan:

*When I made that decision, I had three very young children, I was in my mid to late 30s, and I just had ...my first visit to our state capitol, and I went there to lobby on children's issues and women's issues, and it was just watching women legislators at work, and it was like ... immediately...that eureka moment. That's what I need to do, but I decided I was going to wait until my children were older. So I actually put together, like a ten year plan, so I'm going to run in ten years, and what do I need to do to get from here to there, and that's when I started taking some campaign training courses, I got more involved in advocacy organizations, and continued to go to [the state capitol] every year as an advocate. (older, over forty, local executive officeholder and former state legislator, South, serving six to ten years)*

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<sup>2</sup>Anita Hill became a national figure in 1991 when she testified at the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court Justice Clarence Thomas. Her testimony, which alleged sexual harassment by Thomas when he was her supervisor at the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission, is credited for starting a national debate on sexual harassment. The effort to suppress her testimony became a cause célèbre in the women's movement.

<sup>3</sup> To maintain the confidentiality of the participants, we have identified the participants only by age (over forty or forty and younger), type of office held (if any), region of residence, and length of service in years. Local officeholders could hold city or county council or school board offices (and others), and local executive officeholders (mayors and others) are also identified. State House and State Senate members are combined to ensure confidentiality.

The “eureka” moment during which one connects real change to policy change is still something that motivates young women elected officials, and in this instance created an aspiration view of public service as a career:

*I think I decided to do politics as a career when I worked at a homeless shelter in college. And my job was to find these primarily single mothers, who worked two or three minimum wage jobs, a place to live. ...I realized how messed up the system was, and how my little shelter in my little corner of the world was just putting a temporary Band-Aid on the system, and I wanted to go change the system.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)

Others, however, got “angry” and went straight to politics, often without training:

*It's not a level playing field, so it's not equitable, and those things make me-- I don't know if they make me-- I know, as a teenager, it was angry, now it's inspired, motivated* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)

*And it just made me so angry, because it was so unfair. So I wanted to be on the side of the decision-makers allocating the resources and setting the priorities* (older, over forty, U.S. multiple higher office candidate, Northeast)

*It didn't matter [to existing leaders] that it was corrupt and that angered me to the point of deciding to run to fix it.* (older, over forty, state house candidate, Northeast)

Yet others simply felt ready to run because they had always had the intention to run for office, or had other long-term preparation. One participant, for example, was a longtime League of Women Voters (LWV) activist and leader who had written the LWV's *Know Your County* study for her chapter.

Only one in four (26 percent) of the study participants say they were recruited to run for office. For some, it involved being appointed to an office, and for others it involved being persuaded by a woman elected official. For most, however, being recruited did not mean that they lacked prior involvement in politics or public service. For one young woman elected official, a current city council member, it was both mobilization on specific policy issues as well as recruitment that motivated her to run for office:

*...all of the above. ....I had been working in it [my district] since I was a teenager, and so you know, understanding how the community used to look, and where it's at, whereas at that particular time, you know, seeing there's a lot of issues and this, from working with different residents and groups and also learning more about how local government works. So there was that. I was also asked repeatedly to run, by the same people I've been working with over the years, and I was supported by them, and also my family. It was, so it was different combination of, like, issues, the particular issues, for me, it was food access and also just, you know, drugs, and then and again, I remember Marie Wilson [who does]....the White House Project training, was one of my first ones, and she was sharing that, I think there was some statistic, that for women, they say they had to be asked, like, three times before they would even consider, and I'm like, wow, that was definitely my story.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving six to ten years)

## Women’s Understanding of Politics as a Career

Conventional wisdom usually positions state legislatures as a stepping stone to higher office. One of the mandates of the Achieving Parity Study was to consider how women construct political careers. There are several aspects to this: women’s self-understanding of politics as a career, what a political “non-career” looks like, and how career-oriented pipelines work in practice.

To inquire about how women approach politics and public service, the study participants were first asked if they saw it as a career, and then asked them to share what they meant by their use of the term “career” (see Table 2).

**Table 2**

### **Do Experienced Women Candidates See Politics or Public Service as a Career?**

- Nearly half (48 percent) do not see politics or public service as a career
- A few understand that it can be a career, but have caveats
- About four in ten (43 percent) do see politics or public service as a career
  - Nearly half (45 percent) of those who say it is a career still view it as public service

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to questions 5, 12 and 13 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research long interview protocol; questions 16 and 17 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research young elected officials brief interview protocol; question 3 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research Congressional Staff focus group protocol and question 2 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research state legislators focus group protocol.

The majority (53 percent) of Achieving Parity Study participants do not see politics or public service as a traditional career. This proportion is relatively similar to the LRP/CBC figure of 63 percent who said they disagreed with the statement “I see politics as a career.”

The following are typical of this type of response:

*I think it’s service, and I think you offer what you have to offer and you move on. ...one of the greatest challenges and problems with the process is ...that people have made this a career and...the means to earn a living...that is not... what it should be about. I think this is one of the reasons that you see so much corruption today...because people see,...politics as a means to...gain fame and wealth, and that’s not what the process was supposed to be about. (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving five years or less)*

*...I see it more as a passion. ...I feel like there’s this amazing privilege to be able to do this; because it’s so extraordinary to be in a position where you can challenge your own*

*government, challenge democracy, ask questions, put a voice to the underserved or to issues of injustice. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving six to ten years)*

*I really don't think people should have political office as a career. I think it's really better if you have a profession and some time to serve in government. (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, Northeast)*

*...there's many ways to be in public service. You could be an elected official, you could, you know, serve in a lot of capacities, you could be an advocate in the legislature, you could do tons of things. I don't know that elected office should necessarily be a career. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)*

Overall, among those women who said that they did see politics and public service as a career, nearly half (45 percent) said they still view it as public service.

Nonetheless, among some women, elective office in a career choice, and this does appear to be more common among young women elected officials.

## **What a Woman's "Non-Career" in Politics Looks Like**

If the majority of women decline to describe their work in politics as a traditional career, does this imply a lower commitment or a less-demanding level of work? According to the participants in the Achieving Parity Study, the answer is a resounding "No." Women interviewed in the Achieving Parity Study reveal themselves as facing threats to their personal safety and that of their families and making financial and personal sacrifices to work often more than full-time or 40 hours per week (in some cases with an out-of-town commute to the state capitol) for a relatively poorly-paid job without the employment safety net they perceive their male counterparts in the political pipeline to have.

## **Experiencing Safety Risks and Personal Public Attacks**

A surprising aspect of the public service work described by the Achieving Parity Study participants is that it can be dangerous. These safety risks can include being a victim of stalking:

*I had a stalker too... I'd go to a public event and he'd be waiting for me at my car...and he said that he was extremely angry about my vote because it made his wife leave him... he was deranged. So I did turn this guy into the police. They checked out to see if he had a gun permit. And they must have talked to him because he stopped following me. But that was pretty scary. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving over twenty years)*

*along with being very popular,[a] young Latina in my city, also comes with the fact that I have a stalker, a bona fide stalker that I had to go to court and get a restraining order on. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, South, serving six to ten years)*

Quite a few participants mentioned threats as well. Some of these threats came from opposing campaigns during election season. One woman challenger who ultimately won her race, received threats from an opposing campaign that tried to pressure her to drop out three weeks before the election:

*late in the campaign, I received a threat from one of my opponent's campaign managers that they had something [on me] and if I didn't stop attacking them then they were going to... [release it]. And I'm thinking 'what?' ...it was a very serious threat. And it is at the point of the campaign where I'm so exhausted, just emotionally, physically, just exhausted. ...I was just beside myself. I'm freaking out now, you know, my campaign manager is like 'calm down' and I said to my husband 'I was like, I don't know what it is. I have never cheated on you. I don't know what he's got. I'm sure it's terrible. I have a past, everybody has a past. You know? [laughs]' Um, and this was like, I was just so upset. ...[but] we just took that leap of faith to not [drop out] ...[but it was]...literally three weeks from the elections [and I was worried that]...maybe I should drop because I am so scared of whatever this invasion of my privacy is going to be. Terrified. And so, we're like ok, fine, you're not going to scare us...and I still kept running, and I still won and nothing ever came out, and maybe they never had anything, maybe it was just a trick because I couldn't have thought...for a while, I was like 'What could it be? You know, I got a 'D' in calculus. I got, you know'[laughs]. It was really hard for me because I couldn't...I've been married since I was twenty-two. There's really not, like much they could have on me [laughs]. I am [lucky] [continues to laugh]. Scared the daylights out of me. Maybe it's something on my mother. Who knows? You know, who knows what kind of hurt they are going to bring on you in this cruel political world?' (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving five years or less)*

Some campaign threats became public as the candidate became a public lightning rod for change. Here, running-while-female can result in the treatment of a woman candidate as a symbol of change for women, which may be more common when running for higher office:

*...If I had run for state senate, I don't know that [they] ...would have bothered to make me the polarizing figure that they did while I was running for Congress. I probably wouldn't have got the hate mail and the death threats. (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, West)*

Other threats took the form of death threats that women elected officials experienced due to controversies over their votes in the state legislature:

*I had the death threats, 'We'll come and burn down your house' threats. I wouldn't wish that on anyone. That was very difficult. I was [worried about my family]. I evacuated [my children]. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving over twenty years)*

## Working Long Hours Year-Round in Public Service

The interviewees were asked for a year-round average of the number of hours per week they worked in politics and public service and whether this changed in legislative sessions or campaign season. The results indicate a grueling schedule of both official duties during sessions as well as community outreach, responding to constituents, and attending public events on a year-round basis.

Of current officeholders – none of whom currently hold higher political offices – nearly two-thirds (63.0 percent) work 40 or more hours per week in public service, and nearly one in five (19 percent) work 60 or more hours per week in public service. These proportions increased slightly during legislative sessions or during campaign season, where about one in four (26 percent) worked more than 60 hours per week.

More than nine out ten (94 percent) non-current officeholders remain active in public service. They report spending (on average) as many as 30 hours per week on related activities. Six out of ten of non-current officeholders are working about 20 to 30 hours per week in public service and the remainder spends 20 or fewer hours involved in politics and public affairs.

## The Economic Need to Work Multiple Jobs

Overall, many of the Achieving Parity Study participants have other careers. More than six in ten (63 percent) have a job for pay outside of their public service, and this is true of the majority (52 percent) of current officeholders as well. This is comparable to the LRP/CBC Study, which found that 48 percent of current state legislators had jobs for pay outside of their legislative service:

*... I have been in politics now for thirty-two years which is, like an entire career. ... and it does not pay well so I have also had to have another job on the side which is very difficult. To juggle the two jobs...In [my state], you can't live just on the legislature. The pay is too small. It's \$28,000 for a starter and if you are leadership, you can get a couple thousand extra. But, ...that is very low. So you have to have a second job. Most people do unless they're independently wealthy or retired. They have to have a second job. And then you try to squeeze it in, try not to get fired from your second job. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving over twenty years)*

*I have other jobs because the legislator is part-time. I'd say I have five jobs but that's my primary job I have other jobs because the legislator is part-time. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving over twenty years)*

*And I do know of colleagues that struggle financially. I have a colleague that is a city commissioner or city council member and she's also the barista across from the state capitol [where] her office [is] just to make ends meet. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Midwest, serving five years or less)*

## **Party Support and the Role of Mentors and Kitchen Cabinets**

Women candidates are not experiencing appropriate levels of party recruitment for running for office. Half (51 percent) of the Achieving Parity respondents report that they had never received a suggestion from a political party leader to run for higher office. When asked about power brokers, seven in ten (71 percent) say that no power brokers in their state had encouraged them to run for higher office. This suggests that there is a distinct lack of institutional party support for women running for office, which is especially surprising during an era when party legislative campaign committees now exist alongside county and state parties to actively recruit and fund candidates for the U.S. Congress and state legislatures.

Mentors and kitchen cabinets are helpful for candidates and elected officials to ensure that they are staying in touch with constituents and other campaigns, learning the informal rules of the game, as well as potentially providing access to other resources including donors, funding, and validation with other power brokers. Most of the Achieving Parity participants do have mentors and kitchen cabinets, but a number do not. About a third (30 percent) of the participants say they do or did not have a mentor, and more than one in ten (14 percent) say they do or did not have a kitchen cabinet in their campaign (see Table 3).

**Table 3**

**Use of Mentors and Kitchen Cabinets  
Among Those Who Had Mentors or Kitchen Cabinets**

**What Types of Mentors Did You Have?**

- Elected, Appointed and Former Officials–57 percent
- Women and Feminists–19 percent
- Political Party or Party Factional Leaders–15 percent
- Family–12 percent
- Other Mentions (mentioned by less than one in ten participants) included campaign consultants; political supporters and volunteers; advocates, activists and lobbyists; and unspecified individuals).

**What Kinds of People Are In Your Kitchen Cabinet?**

- Elected, Appointed and Former Officials – 61.3 percent
- Campaign Consultants – 35.5 percent
- Friends and Colleagues (non-political) – 19.4 percent
- Women and Feminists – 16.1 percent
- Professionals from Nonprofits – 16.1 percent
- Family – 16.1 percent
- Political Supporters and Volunteers – 12.9 percent
- Other Candidates – 9.7 percent
- Political Party or Party Factional Leaders – 9.7 percent
- Business Leaders – 9.7 percent
- Other Mentions (mentioned by less than one in ten participants) included issue experts; advocates, activists and lobbyists; labor leaders; spiritual leaders; and out-of-state advisors)

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to questions 36 and 37 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research long interview protocol

Interestingly, only about 5 percent of the Achieving Parity participants volunteered that they had had a mentor who doubled as a sponsor – someone who materially aided in their election through appointment or provided other validation support in addition to advice. Of the seven out of ten Achieving Parity interview participants who report they had had a political mentor, the majority (58 percent) say that one of their mentors was an elected, appointed, or former elected official. The types of elected officials cited when analyzed by gender (data not shown) tend to be current women elected officials or former male elected officials. Generally, current party leaders are not common mentors.

For a distinct group of these women, the women's movement played a role in helping them learn the ropes – the second most commonly reported mentors are other women in the community and feminists, cited by nearly one in five (19 percent) of the Achieving Parity participants. Political party or factional party leaders are the third most common type of mentor, cited by less than one

in five (15 percent). Family is the fourth most common mentor reported by about one in ten of the Achieving Parity participants (12 percent).

Kitchen cabinets perform a different function – they assist the candidate’s campaign and demonstrate the candidate’s level of community support in contrast to one’s opponents. Kitchen cabinets are more common than are mentors, with nearly nine in ten of the Achieving Parity respondents reporting having or having had a kitchen cabinet. Elected officials comprise the most common type of kitchen cabinet member, cited by three in five (61 percent) of the participants. Even here, however, many of those officials cited are nonelected and former elected officials rather than current elected officials. Consultants are included in kitchen cabinets by one in three (36 percent) of the Achieving Parity participants. Friends and non-political colleagues are next most common. Tied for fourth place are women and feminists; nonprofit professionals; and family. Political party leaders tied for eighth place along with other candidates.

The gap in mentorship and sponsorship by the political parties was revealed even more clearly in the response to the question asking what level of party support they would expect to receive if they ran for higher office. While nearly three in five (58 percent) say that they would expect some level of party support, of these, only one in five who expected party support say that they expect to receive it at all party levels (local, state and national). The rest of the responses are split in ways that reveal significant gaps in how the parties support higher office recruitment. About one fourth (28 percent) report they expect to receive either only local support or only state and local support respectively. About one in ten (11 percent) say that they expect to receive only state level support and another one in ten (11 percent) expect to receive local and national support, but not state level support.

## **The State Legislature as a Gendered Political Pipeline**

As discussed previously, state legislatures have been traditionally viewed as the major pipeline for higher office. For example, in the 112<sup>th</sup> Congress, former state legislators comprised 41 percent of U.S. Senators and 51 percent of U.S. Representatives.<sup>4</sup> Given the overwhelmingly “male” nature of the U.S. Congress (Duerst-Lahti 2002), the Achieving Parity Study can provide insights into the nature of the political pipeline for experienced women candidates.

In the United States, there is considerable variation in the ways in which state legislatures are structured. According to the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), only four states (the “Red” states) have a legislative workload that is about 80 percent time and legislators who are paid about \$69,000 annually. Combining this group of states with another group of “Red-Light” states (six states) results in a total of only ten U.S. states with professional legislatures.

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<sup>4</sup> National Conference of State Legislatures, February 2012.

This is an example of a state legislator from a “Red” state considered by NCSL to be the most professionalized:

*[I work on average about] forty to fifty hours a week. It's nearly all weeks of the year with some exceptions. [My state's] considered a full-time legislature.... We're in session, generally Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, three weeks out of four, most months of the year. We do take a pretty long summer break. Like, July and August generally are off, and, in between session years, December. From legislative session we're off. But, of course, we always have constituent work, constant public appearances and other things that keep us busy even when we're not in session. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

In another 23 states (the “White” states), legislators have a workload of about 70 percent time and are paid about \$35,000 per year. Consider how this state representative from a “White” state describes her workload:

*In [my state] we have sort of a unique schedule where we're considered a-- we're a part-time legislature, and they call it a citizen legislature. And sort of the idea is that we are full-time legislators part of the year. So January through June is our full-time session. So I'm in the capital five days a week, and I'm still doing events in the evening and weekends. So it can easily be 60 hours a week. And then when we do the budget, maybe a month of the year, it's 100 hours a week; we work 'til three in the morning, kind of crazy schedule. And in the off season-- I definitely have the luxury that as a mom the summers are supposed to be our legislative quiet time. So then I can-- I'm writing newsletters or articles for the local paper, and I might be working more like 10 to 20 hours a week. So in [my state] it has this ability to sort of be up and down; and elections [are] their own monster-- right?-- election season, aside from the legislative work. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving six to ten years)*

The most part-time legislatures (the six “Blue” states) operate at about 54 percent time and legislators in those bodies are paid around \$16,000 per year. Another group of less-professionalized legislatures include “Blue-Light states (11 states). Consider the experiences of this state legislator from a “Blue-Light” state:

*This notion of part time legislator is just ridiculous, ...a lot of my colleagues do have quote unquote full-time jobs over and above their legislative work. So at the time that I ran for office, I [had a full-time job as] community relations director for \_\_\_\_\_ [where I fell] ...under the provisions of the Hatch Act, and so, [I had to] ...quit my job at \_\_\_\_\_ [to run]...for the seat. I promised my husband after the first campaign that I would find contract work and that just never happened [laughs]. Um, so, um, so this is my job. And I tell people, cause they say, 'Well, it's the summer and you're probably just really relaxed and doing whatever' and I'm like going 'No. We work day in and day out and the thing is... you are a legislator twenty-four seven really. ...you get an email at ten o'clock at night with somebody with a concern.' It is hard and maybe it's just harder for some of us than others to just ignore it. You know, that's probably my biggest frustration from my family that there really isn't a boundary and I would probably have to work really hard*

*to find boundaries between myself and my constituents and my work. Um, because, you're always on [wherever you go] ...Grocery store. You go to the post office...people inevitably say, 'Oh, I need to talk to you about what's...this that and the other.' Church. You know. You go to church. And I've intentionally started going to a service that is a smaller, more intimate service because the larger ones, it just becomes the town meeting for me. ...this is really my work. This is my job now. It's very all consuming. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving five years or less)*

One challenging aspect of the state legislature as a pipeline is that a number of women mentioned is difficulty finding supplemental employment or a second job. Second jobs that do not present a conflict of interest and allow one to be absent for legislative work are rare. Here is how one woman state senator explained the problem in her state:

*...the pipeline is definitely male oriented. There is a hierarchy: white men, white women, black men and black women. Black women are at the bottom of the totem pole here in [my state] because our Hispanic population, though it's growing and burgeoning, ...it's not a part of the [political] equation. It's a white man's world in [my state]. It's a white man's world inside the chamber. And you just have to break into the boys' club; and they will let black men into it 'cause it's a man's world too. But it's a pipeline for men; they take care of the men [in terms of a second job]. ...in this state they'll put a man in a place to run for state rep or senator. And I've seen this with some of my colleagues who came in the House with me, or after me; they just picked them up in some instances literally out of the cornfield, with their boots and dust and dirt on them, and they let them run; and then they give them a job at the bank. Then the next thing you know they got on a suit and they're driving a Mercedes Benz. That does not happen for the women; not even for the Republican women. It doesn't happen in [my state]. And that makes it difficult for us 'cause most women have children, whether they're married or divorced, and if they choose to do this with a family, it makes it difficult for them to provide for their family. And we won't even talk about the time that needs to be spent with their family. So the pipeline-- there is one in [my state]. It's a white male pipeline; and once they put you in, they'll take care of you all the way up to the Governor's Mansion. And if you're a woman, you're not going to get that kind of protection. And if you mention it, they'll go, "Yeah, yeah we should do something about it." But it won't happen. I even talked to some of the women's groups, Planned Parenthood and NARAL and some of those others, about giving the women jobs like the unions do. You can be a man working at Boeing, and you can become a [union] rep and then you can go work your [legislative] job. That happened at Ford. It happened at Chrysler when we had a Chrysler plant. But the [economic job] protection for women is nonexistent in [my state]. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving five years or less)*

One woman state legislator with extensive service commented on the collision of the changing demands of professional careers overall and the tremendous demands placed on state legislators. These factors are combining to make state legislatures less attractive as a political pipeline for women:

*We lose women...now women who are career oriented are learning that they really only want to spend ten to fifteen years in the legislature if they come in young because they have to make the transition into another field and if they wait too long, from my own personal experience, it's hard to do that because our skill set is not really respected by the non-profit world unless you were*

*doing it before or, um, the foundation world or academic world. So I know a woman who just quit after ten years because she wants a career in academia and she said, 'Well, they don't really think very much of me being a legislator so you know I need to focus on my career in academia now.' ...we need to get women in the pipeline and get them elected but ... we also need to retain them. ... We need to make sure women's skill sets are respected for a post-legislative career so that they feel secure in being a legislator for a while. Since so many legislators are part-time, women almost need to have some kind of career going on in so they continue it or go back to it. ...women are worried about things like job security and... employability because we're all in the work force. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving over twenty years)*

These concerns about employability and pay were also expressed by other women. An additional deterrent for women considering running for state legislative office included the commute to the state capitol and its impact on family time. Consider, for example, this description from a young woman who left the state legislature for an elected city position, who is interested in running for higher elective office and has a long-term plan to do so:

*I'm a single mom, and I wanted to be closer to home. Running back and forth to the state capitol every week, as my son got older, he's five, got to be a little bit taxing on me and my family, and I just wanted to be closer to home. And the other reason, the office was open, so it was an open seat, so it was a good opportunity to run citywide and be able to make the transition to an executive. (younger, under forty, local executive office, South, serving five years or less, prior state legislator)*

## Deciding to Run for Higher Office

Achieving Parity participants were asked several questions to probe in-depth their decisions to run for any office, and then higher office. It is noteworthy that for each question, experienced women candidates and elected officials reveal a different set of priorities, suggesting a much more complex decision-making process than has been realized heretofore (see Table 4).

In fact, the major finding here is that women are quite strategic in making decisions, considering the nature of the job, the level of office, the nature of the competition, and the alignment between their own interests, skill sets, and constituency base. These are all factors that may be helpful in developing future training for women that focuses on the level of office and provides different scales of campaign structure, rather than a one-size-fits-all training module designed simply to inspire women to run for office.

## Interest in Current Office versus Running for Higher Office

The Achieving Parity Study participants display a relatively high level of interest in running for higher levels of office. The share is somewhat higher than was true for the LRP/CBC Study, for three reasons.

First, the Achieving Parity Study participants were intentionally much younger. Indeed, the young elected women officials had higher levels of aspirations than the other study participants.

Second, the question asked in the IWPR protocol is more inclusive, inquiring whether there was possible interest as well as serious interest. This wording seemed more appropriate for a small sample and it also reflects what might be a two-stage decision-making process split between initial interest and actual preparation to run.

Finally, state legislators in this study tend to report what might be called “static” ambition (intending to seek reelection to the current office) rather than “progressive” ambition (intending to seek higher office). This may reflect a sense of being effective in the current office, as well as a hesitancy to take the political risk of running for a higher office when one has found a personal work/life balance and a secure tenure in the current office. Consider the following:

*it's so funny because I love doing what I'm doing. I love the level of where I'm at and I think it's partially my personality. I have a really hard time with change. And so, a lot of people keep asking me, 'So when are you going to run for the senate seat? When are you going to run for whatever? You know, you would be great in higher office.' I just...it terrifies the heck out of me. Absolutely terrifies me.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving five years or less)

*I am a committee chair and am very effective at what I am doing now. Why would I give that up?* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving eleven to fifteen years)

Overall, the Achieving Parity Study participants display the highest levels of interest in legislative positions:

- Over two-thirds (68 percent) are interested in, have run for, or have held State House, State Senate, and U.S. House offices.
- A majority of participants are similarly interested in the U.S. Senate (55 percent), City Council (52 percent), or County Council (52 percent).
- Nearly half (46 percent) are interested in running for Lieutenant Governor, but only about one-third (34 percent) are interested in holding the Governor's seat.
- Similarly, about one-third are interested in serving on a County Commission (39 percent), as Mayor (37 percent), or Governor (34 percent).
- About one-quarter express interest in serving on School Boards or as a state Secretary of State.
- Many fewer (fewer than one in twenty) are interested in other executive positions such as sheriff, judge, or other statewide positions.

## **Factors Considered in Running for the First Office versus Higher Office**

Family factors, being able to answer the “why me, now” campaign narrative question (including polling to see if it is a viable race), the opportunity structure (i.e., an open seat, the opponent from the other party, the tenor of the times politically and economically), being able to put together a campaign (e.g., staff, getting folks excited about the campaign), feeling ready or needing more preparation to launch a campaign (e.g., needing a better grasp of the issues or needing to know the steps to follow), and party problems (e.g., will I get party support?) are factors that appear to be relatively more important in running for that first office.

It is noteworthy that these concerns would seem to suggest a straightforward pipeline, when, in fact, there appears to be a complex set of paths followed by these experienced candidates. While we did not specifically inquire about the exact sequence of steps followed, a diverse pattern of recruitment routes did appear:

- About two-thirds ran directly for either a state (34 percent) or local (31 percent) office as their first office.
- About one in ten ran directly for a federal (in this case the U.S. House) office.<sup>5</sup>
- About one in twenty (6 percent) ran for local office before moving upward to state office.
- Somewhat fewer than one in twenty (4 percent) ran for local office after serving in the state legislature.
- About one in twelve (8 percent) ran multiple, unsuccessful campaigns (one was ultimately elected to state office after seven unsuccessful campaigns for multiple offices).

Somewhat fewer than one in twenty (4 percent) were appointed to that first office.

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<sup>5</sup> This figure might have been higher, but we did not specifically recruit women who had run successful campaigns for the U.S. House (i.e., current or former members of Congress) since our research goal was to provide a broader picture of the recruitment pipeline and why women do/do not run for office at all levels.

## Fundraising and Higher Office

Fundraising only emerged as the top factor when considering barriers to running for higher office. This is consistent with the LRP/CBC Study finding that fundraising was the top barrier to running for higher office. However, it is significant that this factor did not emerge as a high priority factor in the initial decision to run for office.

In describing campaigning and fundraising for state and local offices, most participants described their approach as grassroots. State and local offices can often be considered part-time or part-year and may be winnable through a grassroots, small-scale campaign that is self-managed by the candidate and a few volunteers rather than professionals.

## Higher Office Means a Different Scale of Campaign

In addition, campaigns for higher offices become more remote than the direct, person-to-person politics upon which some women thrive:

*the higher up you go, the more apparent that (the distance from voters) becomes...because the more isolated you become, the more disenfranchised I think you become with the people who vote for you. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

Many noted that running for higher offices, whether Governor or the U.S. House or Senate, required an entirely different scale of campaign – one that they could not manage themselves and one where they had to both hire a professional fundraiser and spend a significant portion of their campaign time on fundraising. For example:

*I love the policy work so much that if we could really be representatives and if we could really focus public policy and what I'm hearing is, 'No. You have to spend most of your time raising money. and it's just like, 'No. I have absolutely no desire to be in that. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving five years or less)*

Even though nearly all had successful fundraising experience, fundraising was still perceived as a barrier in running for higher office. At the congressional level, many stressed that this involved fundraising at another scale than they were used to or familiar with:

*[In federal races, t]he grassroots gets you nothing. What you need to do is ...to start building a chest years ahead of time, and you have to start working out of state, because that's where the money's going to be, and you got to go to corporations, and even if they're going to avoid you... They don't care what your stance is. ... when it comes to the big money, everyone sticks rigidly to the parties. I'd have to find the corporations-- and the corporations are-- what do they care about me? I'm not a sexy race, as you would say. So I would think it would be a foolish endeavor. (older, over forty, state house candidate and local officeholder, Northeast)*

**Table 4**  
**How Experienced Women Candidates Decide to Run**

Relative Importance Of Factors	Should I Run?	For Higher Or Lower Office?	What are my Biggest Barriers in Running for Higher Office?
<b>First</b>	Opportunity Structure – 15 Mentions	Prefer Federal Level Over State and Local Levels – 16 Mentions	<b>Fundraising, Financial Considerations</b> – 20 Mentions
<b>Second</b>	<b>Personal / Family Factors</b> – 15 Mentions	Costs of Competition and Polarization – 15 Mentions	Party Organization and Recruitment Barrier Issues - 11 Mentions
<b>Third</b>	<b>Fundraising, Financial Considerations</b> – 14 Mentions	Preference of Executive Over Legislative Office Functions – 11 Mentions	Perceptions of Viability and the Requirements of the Campaign – 6 Mentions
<b>Fourth</b>	Answering the “Why Me, Now” Question – 10 Mentions	<b>Fundraising, Financial Considerations</b> – 10 Mentions	<b>Personal / Family Factors</b> – 5 Mentions
<b>Fifth</b>	Need More Preparation to Feel Ready – 8 Mentions	Nature of the Federal Issue and Policy Arenas and Constituencies – 9 Mentions	
<b>Sixth</b>	Political Support and Campaign Organization Concerns – 7 Mentions	Distance/Closeness to Constituencies – 7 Mentions	
<b>Seventh</b>	Party Problems and Challenges in Viability – 5 Mentions	<b>Personal/Family Factors</b> - 3 Mentions	
<b>Eighth</b>	Feelings of Success and Effectiveness in Current State or Local Office – 4 Mentions	People You Work With – 2 Mentions	
<b>Ninth</b>	Prefer State or Local Office Holding – 3 Mentions		
<b>Total Number of Mentions</b>	81	74	49

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to question 28, 32, 34, 35, 39 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research long interview protocol and questions 3, 6, 7 and 8 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research state legislators focus group protocol.

## Biennial Elections Comprise another Disincentive

Another concern is that House races are every two years, a shorter term than in most state legislatures – a factor that magnifies the concerns surrounding the frequency with which large sums must be raised:

*Money, money, money. It costs a lot. The thing that I don't like in talking about Congress is that it runs just every two years. What I do like about it is that if-- again, I'm not interested in federal office, but this is if I were, I like that it's a smaller geography than, say, Senate. But I think the major obstacle would be financially—it's just extremely expensive to do that.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving eleven to fifteen years)

## The Level and Type of Office Reflects (in part) Personal Preferences

One clear factor that emerged is that women candidates and elected officials do make key, substantive distinctions between national vs. local issues and between executive vs. legislative offices. In part, these are preferences that reflect established political personalities and a deep-seated knowledge of what one enjoys and feels competent doing as an officeholder.

Those who prefer working at state and local levels indicated an interest in the grassroots approach and focus on problem-solving that allows for the development of close ties with constituents. Typical were these comments:

*I like local politics....I'm a grassroots person...I believe in quality of life issues, and since I started with my neighborhood, I wanted to make sure that quality of life issues were addressed. I wanted to see that-- I focus in on zoning issues and making sure the character of the neighborhood did not change.* (older, over forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving more than twenty years)

*my passion for what I believe I have the ability to help change is at the state level. I don't think I can bring enough to the Congressional conversation to make a real difference.* (older, over forty, state house candidate, Northeast)

Another group cares about issues that can only be dealt with at the federal level:

*the things that I have most wanted to work on, were things that could only be dealt with at the federal level.* (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, West)

For others, deciding which office to run for depends on the motivation to run. For those women who are motivated to run based primarily on issues and issue-based mobilization, the level of office and the associated policy powers does make a difference. As one young Democratic elected official put it, running for office is not power for power's sake:

*I wouldn't mind [running for higher office] but I don't go in this with political aspirations. I go in here to try to make the most difference that I can in the community*

*that I live in. And if it takes me to Washington then that's where I'll go.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder and state house candidate, Midwest, serving five years or less)

This particular policy-motivated interest in the federal level includes conservative women, as well. For example:

*that the local governments basically are following the rules in balancing budgets and doing what they have to do. That the problems we have are on the federal level. And that's really where my expertise on policy is.* (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, South)

Women candidates and elected officials also make a clear distinction between legislative and executive positions. For example, one state legislator stated her preference for legislative environments where she can focus on policy change:

*...it's more of a management-type job and I'm mostly an issues person...It's a very different type of job and I'm really not a management person, I'm an issues advocate, that's what I do.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving over twenty years)

There are those who prefer executive positions precisely because of their managerial and executive focus:

*Being mayor is the best political office one could possibly hold...you can make a huge difference in a city and affect so many people, and it's an executive position versus a legislative position, which I much prefer. ...Being a member of the House of Representatives, of the Congress is awful... You're raising money nonstop, and you're trying to get elected nonstop, and you're voting on legislation, so that office has zero interest to me. So I tend to lean toward the executive jobs like governor and mayor.* (older, over forty, former local executive officeholder, West, serving six to ten years)

*For me I actually like the executive function more than I do the legislative. Part of me being in the city and being in state legislature because I think you can't be an effective executive if you don't understand the legislative process.* (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving six to ten years)

## **Family Factors can also Affect Personal and Strategic Choice**

It is interesting to note that family factors are of the highest priority more often when considering the run for that first office than they are in considering a run for higher office. For some, prioritization of family over running for office is based on a preference to do more hands-on parenting:

*I wanted to put my kids to bed myself.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving six to ten years)

*My family was my priority, and, frankly, if I had younger children, I would never have done it because I kind of anticipated it would be all-consuming. ...And I have admiration for women with children at home who take this on and are able to do both, because I just knew that I couldn't be divided like that. My kids were...a priority for me. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

One concern that some expressed was a concern that their children would get personally attacked if their mother were an elected official. Typical is this comment:

*There's a reason I haven't run for other higher office because my children are small right now. ...I don't want to bring too much attention to my children right now in their formidable ages. In my community, they would get attacked. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, South, serving six to ten years)*

Not all women are deterred from running and serving with small children. For many, it was an easy and indeed family-friendly choice:

*I had kids when I was a legislator. ...I was also the first one to do this...I actually brought them to the Capitol while they were babies...They kind of grew up [in the state capitol]...their whole life, that's all they know... We used to joke that you can raise a child on hors d'oeuvres. Just bring the child with you and they wander around and they graze themselves. But you see when they were little, this was a great job because I was out every summer. And so I had the whole summer to play with them. It was perfect. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving over twenty years)*

*Thinking back, it was my husband's idea that I run for office. I had been involved a little bit in party politics in a variety of ways. I'd been active in my community. ...And I was pregnant with our third child and I had been laid off from my job. ...And he said, 'Well, you know, you don't have anything to do for the next couple of months.' Having two toddlers and being pregnant is called having nothing to do to my husband and, 'So, why don't you run for the legislature?' And so I said, silly me, 'Ok.' So I did. My campaign slogan was 'She Will Deliver.' ... I remember that older women in politics advised me not to run until my children were grown. And I had bristled. And I, you know, I can multi-task. I can do both. And, you know, I am going to be working anyway. So I did start. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving over twenty years)*

It is also possible that the nature of personal and family concerns changes when considering higher office. Some women mentioned that it was time away from their spouses and the sacrifices their spouses had already made for their service now that their children were grown. For those with younger children, the schedule demands of higher office can be an added factor:

*...I saw [the campaign schedule for a congressional candidate] his schedule and I saw where he was driving and how much he was gone from his family and also how much that campaign cost and how much money he was going to have to raise and that I think is a huge deterrent. I think probably for someone who wants to be able to spend time with her family at least for me...[my statehouse district and the campaign] stretched our family as*

*thin as it could be and I can't imagine it about 20 times bigger so that's a big deterrent.*  
(older, over forty, state house candidate, Northeast)

## **Becoming a Mother Can Inspire Public Service**

Family factors can also be a positive motivating factor. Four of the respondents stated that it was the birth of a child and becoming a mother that motivated them to engage in public service:

*I wanted the best for my children. And so, maybe it's always been in my background [inspiring me to service] (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving six to ten years)*

*...once I'd had my children, I felt like, "Oh, my god, I really need to make an impact. So it was more like necessity in some ways to be able to move to a different level of impact on the community. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving six to ten years)*

*My son was just old enough to get out there kind of out of Cub Scouts into Boy Scouts and we started going to political events for the Obama campaign and like everything else in our family we do it together. So when my son was [born it became] part of who we are, we do everything together. (older, over forty, state house candidate, West)*

*The first thing was....that my son \_\_\_ was born. And I did what I think all new parents do...step back and [say]... "How do we give this child the kind of life we want him to have?" .... when \_\_\_ was a couple weeks old, my brother \_\_\_ marched into Iraq, the initial invading force. And I remember holding \_\_\_ when I was packing a care package for \_\_\_, and realizing that there was no set of traces where I could make as an individual parent that was going to be sufficient to give my son the kind of life I wanted him to have, if we didn't change the direction of the country. (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, West)*

## **Having a "Put-Together Life"**

Finally, another factor that might discourage women from running for a higher office is the need for candidates at that level to have personal lives that can withstand heightened public scrutiny:

*So to run for a higher office you need to be put together. You need to have your whole life put together. (younger, under forty, state house candidate, West)*

This is important because at lower levels of office, to some degree, there is less public scrutiny of one's personal life than at higher levels of office due to more professionalized media coverage, more diverse constituencies, and more competitive campaigns.

## The Value of Training at all Levels

**Table 5**

**Who Received Training Among These Experienced Women Candidates?**

- 40.0 percent Participated in Training Before Running
- 31.9 percent Ran After Volunteering in Campaigns or Working in Politics
- 28.9 percent Went “Straight to Politics” Without Training

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to question 10 and 11 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research long interview protocol and questions 14 and 15 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research young elected officials brief interview protocol

Women's organizations have provided campaign training as one tool to increase the number of women running for office. About one-third (35 percent) of the women state legislators in the LRP/CBC Study say they had participated in campaign training as one of a number of possible steps to prepare for running for higher office.

A relatively similar proportion of the Achieving Parity Study participants (40 percent) participated in training before running for office (see Table 5).

Of those who participated in training before running, nearly nine in ten (88 percent) said it was extremely helpful in learning the nuts and bolts of campaigning:

*I took it mainly to kind of update my skill set. (younger, under forty, local executive office, South, serving five years or less, prior state legislator)*

*it really helps with debunking some of the myths where it's just like, oh, I didn't know that. It doesn't mean the work ethic changes, but it helps you, I think, make a more informed decision. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving six to ten years)*

*It was very helpful and there was places I received very important information about how to structure a campaign and how to fundraise. (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving six to ten years)*

In addition, one in four (25 percent) of those who participated in training before also did so afterward, and the majority (56 percent) of those who did not participate in training before did so after running for and losing their first office. Overall, about three in four (74 percent) of the Achieving Parity Study Participants engaged in some form of campaign training, whether taken before or after their first campaign:

*The first time I ran, I ran pretty much on my own. It was very grassroots. I didn't raise a lot of money. I had almost all volunteers on the campaign. ... I was kind of naïve in*

*thinking that if you have a message that resonates with enough people, they're just going to notice and they're going to vote for you. So I lost my first campaign. (older, over forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving five years or less)*

The study participants were asked to provide the names of organizations that provided the campaign training and they identified an array of names of existing women's organizations, including new models that had been developed at the state (e.g., Emerge) and national (e.g., Vision 2020) levels, as well as other types of organizations (e.g., party or party faction, labor or union group, gay and lesbian organization) that also provide campaign training. Many participants had taken multiple trainings.

The most common type of group named as being the provider of training before running for the first office was a national women's organization. In fact, this was true for half of the women who took training before running for office.

For those who took training after announcing their run and commencing their campaign, however, the most common source of this training was a state party seminar. This was true for about one-third (36.8 percent) of the study participants who went straight to politics without training. The major reason provided for taking this training was the need to learn how to put a campaign together in the election year.

While the timing of the campaign announcement and the training was not a specific focus of the Achieving Parity Study, several of the women mentioned that the training provided by the state party after their announcement was too late to impact strategy, and that the state party had some specific arrangements with official party consultants that did not provide the "best deal" for issuing mailings, targeting voters, and other services needed in a grassroots campaign. Since a lot of women's organizations providing training tend to do so in the recruiting period in the year prior to running, they may be another time window during which they could provide woman-centered training for announced candidates who are new to the process.

## **Campaigning-While-Female**

Some observers have concluded that discrimination against women candidates no longer exists, neither in the media nor in the political realm. It is widely accepted that once women have entered the political arena as party nominees, they seem to have the same level of political success as male candidates. However, it is not clear whether women have the same type of campaign experiences as those of their male counterparts. This is an area in which we first asked women whether they thought men and women had similar or different campaign experiences, and then asked for examples.

Almost nine in ten (88 percent) of Achieving Parity Study participants say women's campaign experiences are different from those of men (see Table 6).

Study participants identified a number of factors that affect women's campaigns for elective office in ways that differ from their male colleagues.

## Table 6

### What Experienced Women Candidates Say About How Women's Campaign Experiences Differ from Men's

- Women's Qualifications are Questioned More – 11 Mentions
- Women Face Questions about Children and Family Relationships – 9 Mentions
- Women Encounter a Focus on Looks – 8 Mentions
- Women Face a Higher Burden in Raising Money – 7 Mentions
- Informal Male Networks Pose Barriers – 6 Mentions
- Social Norms Create a Double Bind – 5 Mentions
- Locker Room Feel to Campaigns – 3 Mentions
- Campaigning a Gender Learning Curve – 4 Mentions
- Women Have a Distinctive Approach to Leadership – 2 Mentions

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to question 5, 22 and 32 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research long interview protocol.

### Women's Qualifications are Questioned More

The questioning of women's qualifications for office holding was the most common problem encountered when "campaigning-while-female." The fact that this emerged as the most commonly-cited difference between women's and men's experiences is most troubling as it undercuts the assumption that as women's lives increasingly resemble those of men with respect to educational attainment, labor force participation, and other factors, that women's and men's political careers will converge. The problem is that there seems to be a double standard, so that even women with business experience or with law degrees and litigation experience continue to be questioned as leaders:

*But if a guy says he's done something, the assumption is he's correct unless proven otherwise. If a woman says she's done something, the assumption is she hasn't unless she can prove to everyone beyond any shadow of a doubt she has. And that different standard particularly comes out in politics. (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, West)*

This was described as something that affected the informal party recruitment processes as well as other informal networks, not only how the media reported on perceptions of qualifications. Below is an extended story that exemplifies how "inside buzz" can work to marginalize women. The following story comes from a woman who won her primary in a field of ten in one of the states ranking in the top quintile of women's representation in state legislatures:

*You know, part of it was the kind of media coverage I was getting, and part of it was just the buzz, part of it was the insider buzz. It was just because, it was very easy for people to marginalize me from the gate. And I didn't know why, because on paper, I was an*

*extraordinary candidate. And I will tell you, this is where the teachers union [endorsement] made a huge difference for me....[which is] not the same corrupt political machine that you see in some other political organizations. I ...had check, check..all the things that voters look for. And I had a ton of money in the bank. And I was tough and working hard and had a proven track record.... They were looking at those things. ...the [national newspaper] which did not endorse me, was not. The [local newspaper] which did not endorse me, was not. ...I worked as a professional environmentalist for years but I would never have gotten the environmental organization endorsement without the teachers' union...because they would have said 'she's gonna lose.' ...having one of the advocacy groups that was willing to look at my qualifications first which was incredibly helpful. And they had fair and open interviews which not all the groups do. The [national newspaper] called me for two minutes. They already knew who they were going to endorse. It was just routine, they probably had their endorsement written. ...when the [local newspaper] did a profile of every candidate running for the seat and they usually do one a week but there were so many in my district they ended up doing two a week of the ten so I was actually on the same page as this other guy, nice guy, really like him, who was similar to me in that his children were the same ages as mine. But I had a lot more professional experience and community work that's related to legislature and policy work. But for some reason my profile was "[city name] Mom Running for Office", let me tell you about my kids and his profile was "lawyer with this and that" and it didn't even mention his kids. They were right next to each other, on the same newspaper, on the same day. So it was so striking, it was so apparent. Like, there is a box that you can put women candidates in and they are putting you in. And I am Patty Murray, I guess, I am whatever box, I'm mom running. I'm mom candidate, which I am, I mean I work for [large women's organization] and I care about children. And it wasn't about my policy work related to children's issue or women's issues, which I had twelve years of, you know, it was about me being a pretty mom. And it was not helpful for me to gaining the kind of respect that I was trying to gain. It was very easy to marginalize that candidate. So I would say, overall, I felt extremely marginalized and that was hard, but it also fueled me and energized me and made me want to kick their butts which I did, and hopefully that will open their minds a little bit. (younger, under forty, state legislator, South, serving five years or less)*

The questioning of qualifications can even occur with women who have business backgrounds. A business background is common among men who make a lateral entry from outside politics into elective office. The questioning of women's qualifications, stemming from the "buzz" and then amplified in the media, can create a campaign burden that is extremely hard to overcome. This burden can become especially difficult when allegations are made late in the campaign and require an immediate rebuttal.

## **Women Face More Questions about Children and Family**

It is clear from this study that, while the ways in which political women combine family and work responsibilities reflect their personal preferences, the burdens that come with making choices in a nation with few supportive policies for working families could be eased with the

adoption of more family-friendly policies. Childcare could be more generously subsidized for middle class families as well as lower income families and be more readily available. Paid maternity and caregiving leaves could ease the income crunch for mothers (and fathers) serving in part-time legislatures who might lose critical income from their other paying jobs due to caring for a new child). State capitol buildings could provide onsite child care for extended hours as demanded by the legislative session. Regardless of the family-friendliness of U.S. society or whether women choose politics and public service as a second career (i.e., after another professional career or after children are grown) or as a first career (i.e., either before or with children and marriage and family), questions about family obligations should be posed to both women and men and not addressed mainly or only to women candidates. Yet, participants reported that this was often a serious problem.

A woman would often receive questions about why she was not taking care of her children or how she planned to do so – a question that is rarely, if ever, asked of male candidates. One candidate provided an example in which she was told that positions with the school board were better offices for her to run for than the office for which she was on the ballot.

There is also a presumption that women should be married. Women who were single felt an extra burden having to explain their single status and a lot more pressure around dating in a public fishbowl. One elected official who was a single mother stated that she felt that she could not mention her marital status on the campaign trail. Two of the respondents were “out” lesbians and felt that their declared sexual orientation might be a possible barrier if they were to seek higher office.

## **Women Encounter Appearance Stereotypes More Often than Men**

Appearance issues arise in two distinctive ways for women. First, women who may end up running errands in off-work times more often have to consider how they will present themselves to the public. The focus on appearance is possibly more challenging because in state and local office, one lives among one’s constituents and even when one is running errands, one is always “on.”

*I also try very hard to always look the part, so I'm never running around in blue jeans, ...I always try to look like the position I hold. ...So that takes a little effort, and whether I'm driving into [the city] or whether I'm attending meetings locally or going to office hours or whatever, I'm always on, so to speak. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

Additionally, women faced comments about their appearance that had the potential to be quite destructive to their campaign messages and their projection of leadership capabilities:

*[the media] pick awful pictures and talk about your hair. They talk about what you wear. They talk about something that has nothing to do with policy in order to attack you and to tear you down. (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, South)*

*who would write up something about what I had on or my haircut or my voice. One line that I love is that I had a high-pitched voice that lacked authority...* (older, over forty, U.S. multiple higher office candidate, Northeast)

*I look young. I'm really short too. So people always gave me a hard time about how old are you for this office?* (younger, under forty, local officeholder and state house candidate, Midwest, serving five years or less)

For others, the problem is the lack of a standard professional image, that their “look” is not the widely accepted one for women. In fact, the stereotypes seem to set up a lose-lose situation. Consider these two comments, the first from a dark-haired woman and the second from a woman with blond hair:

*the fact of the matter is if you look around, whenever I go to a ...new place, I look around and the people who are leaders or in front of the camera, they're either blond or they're men. There are very few women, dark-haired women.* (older, over forty, state house candidate, South)

*they call me Barbie or...[a blonde television actress to make] jokes about the fact that I am blonde and young. ....we see this all over the blogs and in the letters to the editor and my friends hear it at dinner parties ...this insinuation that because I'm a woman and because I'm young and because I'm blonde, I lack substance or I'm not smart or I'm an airhead* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving six to ten years)

The focus on appearance for women is not just something that occurs due to media or reporting biases. It also includes one's colleagues. One woman campaigned for and won a leadership election, but not until after her opponent attacked her physical appearance:

*It was through his campaign against me that a lot of the issues of my hair and my dress [my] weight became an issue...I am ...statuesque. So I had a Chris Christie conversation only it was started by my opponent and it was a whisper campaign about whether I could be a good visual representation of the party.* (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving six to ten years)

## **Women Perceive they Face a Higher Burden in Raising Money**

A surprising finding in the Achieving Parity Study is that beyond other fundraising barriers, women candidates perceive that donors do not treat male and female candidates in the same way. This manifests itself in a variety of ways, participants reported. One way identified is that some donors simply do not show up for women candidates' fundraisers:

*And when it comes to the big boys, the big boys did not want me to run. ...no one showed up at my fundraisers and then they were shocked ...when I won the primary over their golden-haired boy. And then ...my political consultant said okay, now everyone's going to come. You're going to start getting support and money. No. The guys never came around to me. ...They didn't show up to anything. ...the money and the support and the back*

*slapping, it's for the men not the women. (older, over forty, state house candidate and local officeholder, Northeast)*

Another burden women identified is a lack of willing volunteers or sponsors to cover the ancillary costs of fundraising, reducing the value of the fundraiser:

*When they [men] do fundraising, ...they get somebody to sponsor like an event or something...and they will get somebody to take care of all of the ancillary cost for it. ...one of my constituents that has a beautiful home in the avenues and she's taking care of everything [for a party fundraiser]. The food. The wine. Everything. She's underwriting all of those costs... We got another gal to do the pro bono design. So everything's being done pro-bono in terms of the hard cost so that really what we bring in can be profit. It is harder to find that [for women]... Where as I know with the guys, it's usually is a little bit easier. We're not used to doing that. We're not... (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving five years or less)*

A number of women also noted that women receive smaller donations than their male peers:

*I find that men tend to max out when it comes to funding. ...women tend to, you know, get, what everybody else gets- the minimum. (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving five years or less)*

## **Women Identify the Biggest Barriers to Raising Money**

As noted, women in the Achieving Parity Study volunteered that women's campaign experiences are different from those of men in part because of greater difficulties faced in fundraising. To explore this question in greater depth and to identify possible reasons why fundraising might be such a big barrier for higher office and for building a political career, we directly asked the women what they themselves saw as the biggest barriers to raising money. The major conclusion is that for women elected officials and candidates, money in politics is a pervasive and greatly misunderstood barrier. Surprisingly, not many mentioned campaign finance reform as a public policy that could help them.

**Table 7**

**The Biggest Barriers to Raising Money for Women According to Experienced Women Candidates**

- Running a Change Campaign and the “Chicken and Egg” Problem – 17 Mentions
- Same Factors for All Campaigns Regardless of Gender – 12 Mentions
- Creating Donor Lists, Lacked Existing Network – 12 Mentions
- Making Fundraising Calls – How to Do the “Ask” – 10 Mentions
- Sexism Toward Women Candidates – 2 Mentions
- Women’s Organizations Do Not Provide Early Money – 1 Mention

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to question 44 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research long interview protocol.

In addition, it would appear that few women’s campaigns can typically afford to hire a full-time finance director and, thus, lower-level campaigns do not necessarily provide the kinds of campaign finance experience needed for a campaign for higher-level office.

It is noteworthy that while a number of women mentioned that it was uncomfortable to ask for donations, this was a skill easily mastered with training. Typical of this point is the following comment:

*...if you train confident women how to ask, we can ask. I know how to do that now. I went through... training and that’s the most important thing I got out of it. I know how to ask for money. I don’t like it. But if I understand it’s a means to an end, I can do it. ....we need the training on how to do the ask. But once you learn how to do it, you learn how to do it. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving six to ten years)*

Experienced women candidates did identify a number of factors that pose fundraising barriers for women (see Table 7). The most often-mentioned barrier was that women candidates tend to be change candidates. By definition, change candidates are not party insiders and do not have large existing donor bases:

*...people that come out of the public interest movement...basically don’t have rich friends. They have ideals and they’re interested in fixing things but they don’t have a lot of rich friends. So it’s harder for them to raise money for a congressional race... When I [ran for office], it was considered heretical. My own fellow activists, they were mad at me, oh they said, ‘You’re doing a bad thing, a terrible thing running for office because all the people in politics are evil. And if you join, if you run for office, you’re going to be evil too.’ (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving over twenty years)*

Beyond learning how to ask for funds, women also need to have donor lists that include names of individuals with whom they have personal relationships:

*you need a good list to [work from]...a good prospect list. It's probably helpful to have had those relationships with people who have money so you have personal relationships because it's more likely to get money from people you know. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving over twenty years)*

*...I can only repeat. You have to have the contacts. You have to have the lists and definitely some relationship. Maybe if you haven't met the folks you have to make that connection...Why would they want to contribute? You have to know who it is you're calling when you are going down that list. It takes a lot of discipline to be able to do it... (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving six to ten years)*

As one woman noted, having a list without personal connections does not help a great deal in leading to successful fundraising efforts:

*They gave me a list but I don't know if it was a bad list or what but the hardest thing is the fact that if there's an incumbent sometimes—I was told flat out well, you get elected and then we'll consider giving you money next time. I'm like how am I supposed to raise money if you don't give it to me? (older, over forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

In some states, political families dominate money as well as recruitment:

*... there's very little money forthcoming to a newbie unless you are connected with a family. Families are very, very strong in [my states's] politics. ...these political families hold multiple political seats and they share their war chests. So like the person I ran against there were four family members on the ballot. (older, over forty, state house candidate and local officeholder, Northeast)*

In other states, one or more power brokers dominate money and recruitment. Women in the Achieving Parity Study are leery of powerbrokers because of the costs of being sponsored by one. As explained by one woman:

*...a while back I got one of those calls from somebody in \_\_\_\_\_'s office asking about my interest in running for state representative, and \_\_\_\_\_ has pretty much a bad reputation in our state amongst some of us [such] that ... when or if I run for state representative, it'll be because I have money and I can do it on my own. I do not want to be owned by a power broker. (older, over forty, local officeholder, Midwest, serving five years or less)*

Women candidates also mentioned a number of factors that make fundraising difficult and are true for most campaigns regardless of the gender of the candidate. These reasons include, for example:

- The current stalled economy and the problem that donors at all levels, but especially small donors, do not have the ability to donate;
- Competition from other campaigns in the same district or region (existing donors getting tapped out);
- The challenges of campaigning in expensive and multiple media markets including both

- mainstream as well as specialized media (e.g., Hispanic);
- Recouping the cost of one's previous campaign and campaign debt;
- Running against a self-financed powerhouse; and
- Perceptions that you are going to win and are not in need of donations.

Two other gendered barriers that were already mentioned include how donors (including women donors) do not give as much to women candidates, that money tends to go to new candidates rather than helping those running for reelection, and that women's organizations who do contribute to women's campaigns tend to stress viability and electability rather than change and that many tend not to provide "early money."

## **Informal Male Networks Pose Campaign Barriers**

Informal male networks were named by a number of women as an important barrier. Typical statements from participants would say that these informal networks involved men looking to recruit candidates who reminded them of themselves, and that the "folks in charge" are men. Thus, women have to "fight harder to be included." These informal networks are invisible to those who run them and must be "called out" by women already in the pipeline whenever they can. For example:

*they always encourage the guys, but if you get a woman who wants to run, and she's strong, then we can fight for her endorsement or something. But it's still difficult. It's still pretty much somewhat the old boy network, and they support guys that they know. So we have to really fight to get a woman endorsed for public office (older, over forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving more than twenty years)*

*they were very clear that they were going to endorse a candidate that has raised less money, has less experience because he was male and had relationships with other men in the union over me (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

*...It's so embedded, they don't know they have it (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving six to ten years)*

*...what I deal with a lot is male sense of entitlement (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving six to ten years)*

## **Social Norms Create a Double Bind**

A number of women candidates mentioned that women candidates needed to comply with social norms in order to be perceived as credible. In part, this included being professional and dressing seriously (in suits). However, as some mentioned, this also included the “double bind” of having to present oneself as a leader but to simultaneously avoid being perceived as aggressive. For some participants, this was seen as one of the biggest barriers to running for higher office:

*the biggest barrier is still an overabundance in our society of the perception that a powerful woman is a negative. That ambition is a negative personality characteristic in a woman. That power and being female...are in some sense anti-feminine. That being strong....and being outspoken is being a bitch. And all the things which are positive about men doing it when translated to a woman...define her in a negative [way with]... really unpleasant social stereotypes. I don't know how to overcome that, (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, South)*

For others, this affected how women could conduct a campaign:

*there is a fine line in how you can attack. Women have to be very careful that they don't cross and with all due respect, the bitch line. That if they are too hard they're a bitch.. That's just the way it is..... You want to be tough but you don't want to be shrill because there's a different way that people look at it. (older, over forty) U.S. congressional candidate, South)*

What is interesting is that this “bitch line” is enforced by the men with whom political women work in campaigns and in politics. Consider:

*And I had several men tell me this. “You're going to have to learn how to be a bitch. You're going to have to learn how to play dirty.” And that is just not in my character. And I said, “You know, I appreciate what you're saying. I know why you're-- and I understand that. But I have to be true to who I am.” And I'm going to-- I'm you know-- you have to be tough when you're tough but at the same time, I'm not going to alter who I am and clearly try to hurt someone else for my own gain. (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, South)*

*...if you go across what's called the bitch line-- there's a couple of people who taught me about this. ...please do not mention his name...and he and Senator \_\_\_\_\_taught me about what's called the bitch line. Women cannot pass this line. You do this and you will either lose your seat or you will lose credibility. ... you can be a strong woman; that's not a problem, but you can't be a bitch... guys can have a completely different double standard on us (younger, under forty, state house candidate, West)*

## **There is a “Locker Room” Feel to Campaigns that Disadvantages Women**

It is surprising that these experienced women candidates report that they feel there is an element of the “locker room” to campaigning. This involves different standards for women that can be even more challenging for single women:

*Like a girl needs to be, from what I've seen you need to be like perfect like virginesque. A guy can be a Tom all he wants.* (younger, under forty, state house candidate, West)

In some cases, this can become sexual harassment at a level not commonly found in the private sector these days:

*I can personally tell you that I have showed up at a meeting and been sexually harassed. I have been propositioned. Uh... I mean, I can go on and on. It's disgusting. It happens* (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving five years or less)

The worry about being propositioned or having one's reputation damaged limits how women can campaign, network, and break into the “inner circles.” For example:

*it's like a boy club. But ...if a woman were to go out there and be as good as the boys or the guys and try to cut deals, especially in small communities, or especially conservative communities, her reputation would be marked. It would... make her look like, “Oh. She's a bar hopper.” ...But the men can sit there in that bars and make their deals. And, yet, I can't go out to the bars and kind of network with some of the guys the way they're able to do it. I couldn't-- I didn't fit that mold. I wasn't able to do that. It was those inner circles with the men.* (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, South)

## **Campaigning has a Gendered Learning Curve**

The Achieving Parity Study participants also describe what might be called a gendered learning curve to campaigning and politics. This involved a number of factors relevant to campaigning-while-female.

Campaign is grueling physically and mentally:

*Campaigning is physical and mental... walking your butt off. It's extremely competitive and it takes a lot of strength, a lot of stamina just to do that part of it, and it takes a lot of smarts, but especially if you want to have some kind of political message.* (younger, under forty, state house candidate, West)

*Physically, I'm older. Door to doors was really hard for me physically to-- I could not keep up the level that the young guys could do.* (older, over forty, state house candidate and local officeholder, Northeast)

Women must also learn how to campaign-while-female. When going door-to-door, for safety reasons, for example, one cannot always travel or campaign alone as a man usually can:

*Well, for me, I think when I am arriving or going to different neighborhoods, sometimes I have to have people with me, like an entourage. (older, over forty, local executive official, Midwest, serving sixteen to twenty years)*

Campaigns, and indeed, politics and political relations with colleagues, fellow activists and opponents are often conflictual, and this type of conflict involves a learning curve for women. Some women describe politics as “brutal.” For example:

*I think that many women do not like conflict. And if you're in a competitive district when you throw your hat in the ring, you're signing up for a lot of conflict. We get a tremendous amount negative mailers, and negative attacks, and things like that. ...I don't know that they're worse than [what] the men [experience], but I know some women just don't want to do it. You know what I mean? It's not the way they prefer to spend their time. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving six to ten years)*

*Politics is a rough business and I've come in with speakers, and then a speaker will change, and I'm immediately dumped for someone else. The first time it happens, it is really harsh...second time, you kind of expect it. ...the first time was devastating because I didn't know what I had done wrong but it was really that the new speaker had friends that had wanted to get the job and I was in the way so now I get it more. What they do is, the person that wants your job bad mouths you to the new speaker because they want the job and that's how the people get replaced by a new person and the new speaker rewards the people that helped them become speaker. So, I mean, I get that now but the first time it happened, I was kind of stunned. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving over twenty years)*

## Women Report they Experience Discrimination in Politics

**Table 8**

### **What Experienced Candidates Say about Discrimination in Politics: When Opportunities are Limited or Bias Experienced**

- Political Parties – 15 Mentions
- Legislative Colleagues and Peers – 9 Mentions
- The “Old Boys” Political Network” – 7 Mentions
- Fundraising Networks – 7 Mentions
- Structural Challenges When Running as an Agent of Change or in Non-Viable Districts – 2 Mentions
- Qualifications are Questioned – 1 Mention
- Media Coverage is Unbalanced – 1 Mention

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to questions 23 and 24 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research long interview protocol.

Study participants were asked if they had ever experienced discrimination or fewer resources in politics compared to their life before politics.

Nearly three in four (72 percent) study participants say they have experienced discrimination in politics.

It is interesting that of the remaining one in four women who say they did **not** experience discrimination in their life before politics, half (50 percent) say that they have experienced discrimination after getting involved in politics. This means that politics takes place in a more sexist arena that which women have experienced in the private sector.

The barriers have changed; today it is primarily informal processes rather than formal ones that make it harder for women in politics. As one woman who had achieved a state legislative leadership position explained it:

*...because the informal part, usually it leads you to the formal, so it's the informal recommendation that then puts you into the party organization, or it's the informal pipeline that recommends you to the labor organizations that then carry you. So it's the informal which usually-- because it's the same people in the informal pipeline are the ones who manage the formal pipeline, and it's not the pipeline itself as the point of entry. They're the most important, and because you can never get into the pipeline-- once you're in there, you know, you can move. There are always going to be problems, but it's, for women, it's that point-of-entry issue, and that point of entry is guarded by the informal relationships. (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving six to ten years)*

As shown in Table 6, political parties emerged as the most common area in which women found fewer campaign resources available to them. This ranged from a lack of informal access such as “not being given a through path” or being excluded (not being invited to meetings to make campaign presentations, being the only woman in the room), to party support being contingent upon the woman’s willingness to sacrifice her campaign principles, to being ridiculed (state house campaign committee “laughed at me”), to not being accorded the same level of formal party support provided to other candidates (congratulatory calls being delayed after winning election; lack of party financial support or promises to pay for fees without the check ever arriving).

Nonetheless, political parties were not described as monolithic. The Achieving Parity study made clear distinctions between local, state, and national levels of party. More often, party problems that were cited were linked to state levels, whether the state party or a singular political figure (a House Speaker, Senate President, or a Governor) dominated all recruitment. When state legislators identified party problems, it was due to a conflict over who was to determine the party agenda, the state party organization, or the membership of the state legislative party caucuses.

Notably, in one state, the party culture is one of gender equity:

*...at least in my state, [it's] no longer relevant...here was a time period, thirty years ago, where it was a little harder for women but...[my state]... in general is pretty advanced as far as treating women the same as the men. We have already had two women governors and one women speaker. And she was a tough speaker too. ...[and]....You can have really excellent male legislators working on female's issues.*  
(older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving over twenty years)

For the most part, these experienced candidates had little familiarity with the national party:

*You know, the only tie is that they have my address so they can ask for contributions.*  
(older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving six to ten years)

Discrimination also extended to work environments with colleagues. This occurred at all levels of the political pipeline and included women who were members of the state legislature and those serving on city councils. Examples provided include public behaviors (e.g., being disrespected by the Speaker on the Floor, inappropriate physical touching) to limited opportunities to gain policy credentials (e.g., limited to education or humanities committee assignments, a lack of opportunities to introduce legislation such as those provided to male colleagues), to informal problems with colleagues (e.g., unwillingness to negotiate despite a leadership position, being told that one did not have the right look or appearance to represent the party publicly):

*I would say every other day there's something that happens where I go into my office and I just close the door and I say "This would never happen if I was a man. This would never happen."* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving five years or less)

Also relatively common are mentions of the “ol’ boys club” that excludes women from decision-making through informal meetings, alliances, mentoring and sponsorship; differential treatment by donors toward women; and limited access to critical donor networks managed by parties and party leaders. A few women mentioned the structural problem of running as challengers in safe districts, a practice that seems to limit women (more than men) to predominantly non-viable races.

## **The Strengths of Women Candidates**

Because the flat-lining of women’s progress in elective public offices over the past 20 years has not been explained in the post-party-reform era, some commentators have raised questions about whether women have characteristics that make them less likely to take advantage of opportunities than men (have less confidence in their abilities to hold office) or have different preferences from men (e.g., women may be less interested in holding elective office than men) or different motivations (e.g., another old view that women are not fit for politics if they come to politics with motivations other than “power”). For example, as was discussed at the inception of the women’s movement, traditional political science looked at women’s participation as “unnatural practice” based upon a view that limited “appropriate” political activity to the stereotyped male role (Bourque and Grossholtz 1974). It is true (as discussed above) that there is a gendered learning curve to politics according to some of the women in the Achieving Parity Study. To investigate these factors in greater depth, the Achieving Parity Study seeks to develop a portrait of the political women who participated in the study.

An overwhelmingly strong finding in the Achieving Parity Study is that these political women enjoy politics (for some from childhood and for others once past the learning curve), that they practice an array of useful political strategies, and that they have developed effective leadership skills to advance their policy agendas.

## **Political Women Have Diverse Characteristics and Motivations**

Achieving Parity Study participants identify a number of things they enjoy or love in their political work (see Table 8).

### **Some Women Enjoy a Power Orientation**

A few women – and typically this is true, relatively speaking, among more of the younger women elected officials – are interested in political power. This quote comes from a former state legislator currently serving in local office:

*Congress is a high office and it is—it does have a lot of power to bring back resources to your community; then you are one of 435. And I do, I want to go back to that.* (younger, under forty, local executive office, South, serving five years or less, prior state legislator)

A power orientation is also something that some women learn through increasing exposure to politics. As one older candidate who was mobilized through the women’s movement puts it:

*I had learned the hard way that people weren’t going to give me things that they had, that they weren’t going to give up power and control.... So I wanted to be on the side of the decision-makers allocating the resources and setting the priorities.* (older, over forty, U.S. multiple higher office candidate, Northeast)

One young woman elected official clearly displays impatience with how some women do not approach politics through a power orientation:

*I always tell women that I mentor, as women we can't believe in, you know, the magical gate keeper. We have to just—you have to just go after it. And if I want to be a member of the legislature and I wait my turn, I'll be 80. You know, if I wait, right.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)

## Table 9

### Why Do this Work – What Experienced Women Candidates Say They Would Miss Most if They Stopped Doing this Work

- Camaraderie, Engaging People, Campaigning, Working With Great People – 20 Mentions
- Impacting Policy, Making a Difference – 19 Mentions
- Serving Constituents, Helping People – 11 Mentions
- Solving Problems, Getting Things Done – 5 Mentions

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to questions 48 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research long interview protocol.

## Successful Women Enjoy the Social Side of Politics

The Achieving Parity participants were asked what they would miss most if they stopped doing their work in public service (see Table 9). A finding that became clear in the qualitative research is that there is a type of personality that enjoys politics. As one longtime officeholder put it:

*Anybody can do it for a while, but to keep doing it and to be successful time after time,*

*I think, requires a real outlook on life.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)

The enjoyment of working in politics is predominantly social and involves camaraderie, being part of a team, and working closely with other people in one's community who share similar interests and goals. This was something mentioned by Republicans and Democrats, elected officials and unsuccessful candidates, legislative and executive officeholders alike. Consider the following responses to the question of what one would miss most if they stopped working in public service:

*...working with the people. I really enjoy bringing groups together and being able to make a difference.* (older, over forty, state house candidate and local officeholder, Northeast)

*... I love to talk to young people. I love to inspire people. If I don't get that opportunity to inspire younger people, then I feel like, you know, I've wasted my time.* (older, over forty, state house candidate, South)

*I often say, "What am I going to do when I don't do this anymore?" Probably the interaction with people, which I do so enjoy, and I'm sure I would do it on some other level, but it wouldn't be the same. I love the excitement. I love being in this place that things happen.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)

*The people. I have more fun during campaign season than I do any other time.* (older, over forty, local officeholder, Midwest, serving five years or less)

*I would miss the communing with people. I just love meeting people and talking to people about the issues. Yes, that's definitely what I would miss, the community feeling of helping people and sharing ideas.* (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, West)

*The contact with people.* (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, Northeast)

*...policy discussions... I really like being able to sit here and talk about issues and learn about them and teach other people, engage-- engaging people. That's my favorite thing to do, is engaging people in policy work.* (older, over forty, local executive officeholder and former state legislator, South, serving six to ten years)

*it's being connected to my community in a way that's different from just your regular voting and doing your everyday things but being connected and really to know what's going on and to share that with other people.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving eleven to fifteen years)

*Meeting people, working out problems, talking about issues, all of that is what I love.* (older, over forty, state house candidate, Northeast)

All of this suggests that women elected officials and those women running for office do share a common distinctly political personality.

## Some Women Focus on Using Power for Good

Some enjoy affecting policy outcomes, which may perhaps be a type of power-orientation although it is not power for power's sake. For example, according to a current women state legislator:

*I love being in this place that things happen. I like being able to make things happen that I think are important and succeed and see the results of that. ... You know, you have to be someplace where the power is and to be able to make good things happen.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)

To give another example from a woman who was often recruited, but never ran for elective office despite serving in many statewide appointed positions, power can be used to achieve equity:

*throughout my career, when I was put in places of power or I was empowered, like had a staff reporting to me, I reclassified jobs that made salaries higher for everybody who reported to me... I also promoted women and hired women, and I have cards and notes and letters from women who said, "You changed my life." I encouraged women to go back to school and get their education and gave them flex hours so they could do that. So I've kept the vow that I made to myself. I have pushed women. I have promoted-- I have hired women, and I still advocate and speak for women.* (older, over forty, appointed executive official, South)

Office holding provides a critical platform through which one can move policy. As one local officeholder compares her work as an advocate previously with being an officeholder today:

*What I would miss is ...the automatic respect that is extended to you because you're elected, so people will listen. ....I was an advocate and cared about the environment. And, yeah, I worked hard, we had some successes, but now as an elected when I speak many times the same thing that I was saying before it gets traction. It's quoted. They consider you an expert. You're an authority on the topic. That platform will be missed, but I would have to say that it's only because that platform makes it easier for you to move the issue or the agenda forward.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)

Other elected women and women candidates are also motivated by making a difference through policy, including, the "satisfaction of seeing a well-made decision," "fixing things," or "impacting" or "influencing" public policy. One woman explained it this way:

*there is something inherently gratifying about hearing [a guy] saying he [accomplished a policy change] ...when I know that that was all groundwork that I laid. There's something satisfying about watching the national debate about [topic X] given that in 2009 and 2010, I personally put together this little [topic X] reform coalition. You know, it's-- I mean I organized the fight around the \_\_\_\_\_, the stuff that*

*I fought for and worked on, had an impact and that's very satisfying.* (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, West)

Serving constituents is something that a lot of women elected officials enjoy. Typical of this motivation is the following:

*...When you can help one person who's trying to engage our government and they're frustrated. And help them feel like their government works for them, and their government is there. For me, personally, that is the most satisfying part of the job because it's real and it's tangible. And I would miss that the most because...it's just helping one person. And I literally could tell you 100 of those cases because I obsess on them. [gives example of a constituent]...And he was blown away and very happy and this is part of why I just got reelected because I do great constituent services. But that feeling of being able to help people when they're frustrated with their government and they think their government doesn't work for them and showing them that their government does work for them I really like that. And I would really miss that.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving six to ten years)

## **Women Use a Diverse Array of Political Strategies to be Effective and Taken Seriously**

**Table 10**

### **Strategies Used by Experienced Women Candidates to be Taken Seriously**

- Establish Credentials by Working Harder, Smarter; Doing Research and Homework First – 12 Mentions
- Be Pragmatic – 12 Mentions
- Develop Outside or Bipartisan Support – 11 Mentions
- Work Within Existing Gender Norms – 10 Mentions
- Show Leadership; Become an Independent Player – 10 Mentions
- Develop Effective Legislative Skills; Be a Political Player – 6 Mentions
- Be Strategic – 5 Mentions
- When Attacked, Take High Road – 4 Mentions
- Alter or Change Appearance – 3 Mentions

The Achieving Parity Study participants were asked what strategies they used to be taken seriously and to be successful in politics and public service. The responses were coded and then grouped according to theme (see Table 10).

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to question 25 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research long interview protocol.

What is noteworthy is that women elected officials and women candidates use a diverse array of strategies. Many of the strategies mentioned reflect the strategies used by effective legislators

and leaders, such as being pragmatic and listening to and including the views of others, working in a bipartisan fashion across the political aisle, taking the high road when attacked, and developing legislative and leadership skills. While this study does not compare women's leadership practices to men's, it is important to note that the same women who have campaigned while female and who have encountered discrimination, are also effective and strategic leaders and use leadership practices that are acknowledged as best practices among students of leadership regardless of gender.

Women also use a set of gendered strategies, in addition to those mentioned above, in order to augment their political effectiveness. These include three major types of gendered strategies that may be distinctive to women leaders, especially in a gendered political world where women remain substantially underrepresented: working harder and smarter, working within existing gender norms and expectations, and changing one's appearance to fit within existing stereotypes.

Many political women in the Achieving Parity Study are over-achievers and this is one characteristic that contributes to their success:

*I work harder than all of my [colleagues].. I have to have an above and beyond attitude ...that's how you sort of get through the back door and gain the respect of your colleagues is knowing everything about an issue... And being able to counter every question and really solidly address whatever issue it is I'm working on that session.* (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving six to ten years)

*I had to be smarter. I had to know my stuff better to prove my point, because I was a girl, and that's been frustrating.* (younger, under forty, state house candidate, West)

*I really want to know more than anybody else in the room about any subject that I'm going to need to talk about or explore. And so I do a lot of research, and am very proactive on issues, willing to jump in and chair a committee or start a new initiative, or be the one leading the fight.* (older, over forty, local executive officeholder and former state legislator, South, serving six to ten years)

*Working harder and smarter. Customer service. ...the reputation that we're earning-- when other people are too busy or don't want to be bothered or encumbered-- it's not beyond us: we'll make a phone call, we'll just-- we'll do anything. We'll do any and everything that we can in our districts, in our power.* (younger, under forty local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)

*And what I had started to do was to make sure that I did my homework. I read my packet. I knew what I was talking about. ... I had to become smarter than them to offset my age.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, South, serving six to ten years)

This commitment to work smarter and work harder in order to be successful seemed especially evident among elected women of color. This comment is typical:

*being a woman of color, ...I'm going to work double, triple time to make sure that people know that I have experience.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Midwest, serving five years or less)

Some women also mentioned that they have decided to work within existing gender norms and stereotypes:

*...there's a [delicate] balance there of being assertive and being aggressive and fighting for what we believe in, and still having to conform to old fashioned ladylike values which, I don't know exactly what that means, because I'm always carrying myself that way...* (younger, under forty, local executive office, South, serving five years or less, prior state legislator)

In other cases, women have used humor and even flirting to work with their colleagues and to ensure political success. The use of flirting was noted as one way to deal with and deflect sexual harassment and to be more in control of inappropriate male behavior. It is difficult to call men out when in public political roles since they are individuals one might have to work with in the future.

That political women use both gender-free political strategies as well as gendered political strategies indicates that these women are proactive, pragmatic, and strategic.

## **Women Bring an Impressive Set of Political Assets to the Table**

The Achieving Parity Study asked what personal assets women possess that make them successful (see Table 11).

## Table 11

### Prized Personal Assets for Experienced Women Candidates

- Leadership, Interpersonal and Communications Skills – 30 Mentions
- Self-Confidence, Knowing Myself, Being Action-Oriented – 17 Mentions
- Knowledge of Public Policy and Issues – 9 Mentions
- Have a Personality That Works Well in Political World– 6 Mentions
- Have Pre-existing or Untapped Donor or Constituent Networks – 5 Mentions
- Knowing How to Work in a Man’s World - 3 Mentions
- My Faith Helps Me to Deal With Discrimination and Set-Backs – 3 Mentions

#### Single Mentions

Family Support; Press Skills; Being Telegenic; Knowing I Was Fighting for Good Cause

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to question 26 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research long interview protocol.

Consistent with the finding that women value and excel in the social, team-based, and coalition-building aspect of politics, the most commonly-mentioned personal asset in the Achieving Parity Study is public speaking and communication skills.

Some women were accomplished and widely sought-after public speakers, while others liked to speak more informally, be low key, or show a human touch.

While some statistical studies have found women to have (on average) lower self-confidence than men, the Achieving Parity Study paints a different picture. Surprisingly, these women also often indicate that their self-confidence is a valuable asset:

*I have confidence. My self-confidence is- you know, if somebody decides to shoot me down, that’s called negative reinforcement. Just because you’re gonna shoot me down, I’m gonna prove you’re wrong.* (older, over forty, state house candidate, South)

*My parents instilled a great sense of self-confidence in me ...I would hear them talk about how smart I was... my father took me everywhere he went, so I was in a man’s world, if you will. We had... a family-owned store, so everywhere he went to get things for that grocery store, he would take me there...even cards with a group of men...in those smoke-filled rooms...He took me hunting with him. So I think that that gave me a lot of spirit.* (older, over forty, appointed state official, recruited never ran, South)

Other women use the words “relentless,” “ruthless,” or “curious” to describe their self-confidence.

Some women indicate that they bring special assets to their campaigns, such as untapped or pre-existing donor and constituent networks:

*In the US Senate race, and this was really one of my strengths actually in running, the first thing I did was to go to people that I knew had the resources because they were donors to women's causes and ask them to commit to a thousand dollars, which at the time was the maximum amount. And I had this little test. If the first 10 people I asked would say yes, I would figure I was on my way, and they did. (older, over forty, U.S. multiple higher office candidate, Northeast)*

Some women indicate that a prior profession either in business or in the courtroom provided them with skills that allowed them to be assertive or deal with conflict situations:

*One of the things is my business experience made me comfortable speaking in front of groups. ....generally speaking business experience was a valuable asset ...If you've been in charge of something then it's much easier to be a candidate than if you have not been in charge of anything. (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, South)*

*I just speak up.... I have a higher tolerance for conflict than most people. And [as an attorney] I'm used to that, just ritualized combat. You go into court, you win, lose, whatever. You shake hands and you go on. Most lawyers are that way. Not all of them, but most of them. And so you get used to taking a fair amount of conflict and you're gonna have it. And once you get elected you have it. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

One resource that some women find helpful is a sense of faith that enables them to deal with setbacks and personal criticism:

*My faith has a huge role in this process because I always believed that this is what I was supposed to be doing. (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving five years or less)*

*I have a strong faith in God that...[gives me the] inner strength to stand on your own two feet and not let people bully you even though they're trying to bully you. You just let it roll off. You don't let it wear you down. You just get inner strength from it. (older, over forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

*...At the end of the day, you hit a brick wall. Faith is what will take you through it or take you over it or around it or under it. What else do you have at the end of the day? There's no other tool that's available to me. And again, I don't think I'd be here if it wasn't for believing and trusting God that this is what he had for me to do so I can't give up on Him as being that source for why I'm here simply because somebody stopped me. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving six to ten years)*

## **Women Face Challenging Aspects of Public Service**

Despite learning to be successful in the gendered political world, these women identify aspects of their service that remain personally challenging. To assess what kinds of personal barriers women might volunteer, the Achieving Party Study participants were asked what aspects of public service they found personally challenging (see Table 12).

**Table 12**

**Personal Challenges Faced By Experienced Women Candidates**

- Juggling Personal and Professional Lives – 11 Mentions
- Stress on Their Families – 10 Mentions
- Fundraising Challenges – 9 Mentions
- Maintaining Professional Personal Appearance 24/7 – 5 Mentions
- Developing Political Skills – 4 Mentions
- The Mismatch between Their Personal Politics And The Party and/or District- 3 Mentions
- Understanding/Adapting To Nature of Politics – 2 Mentions
- Feelings of Isolation as a Woman Elected Official – 2 Mentions
- The Physical Demands of Campaigning – 2 Mentions

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to question 27 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research long interview protocol.

What is especially noteworthy is the absence of complaints about sexism among the responses to this question. In other words, these political women may reveal their encounters with sexism or discrimination when asked directly; however, these specific challenges appear to be viewed as features of life to address without complaining. As women continue to enter the still male-defined world of politics, public service, and governance, sexism, sexual harassment and discrimination appear to be the accepted (but heavy) price of doing business. As one woman put it:

*You just can't take it personally. I know it's a really hard [thing] to say don't take it personally. You've just got to put your feet back on the ground and keep crunching away. And that even though I've had to accept there's some bias. I've had to accept there's some sexism. I've had to accept there's a good old boy network. I've got to accept those things.* (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, South)

The participants reveal other types of challenges. It is noteworthy that fundraising challenges, which were mentioned here as personal challenges, are ranked only third. The top two challenges involve juggling and multi-tasking followed by the toll that their public service takes on their families:

*...time, the time factor, out every evening, going to different events...[and] scheduling. I may have, oh, five or six events all in the same evening, and trying to manage the time to make as many of these events as I can, to get around the city to make sure that constituents know and see me and, on a personal level, can shake hands and be in the same room with some of the people that are not at the office.* (older, over forty, local executive official, Midwest, serving sixteen to twenty years)

*I think the hardest thing for a woman, most women have control of their household [and who is where]...that kind of stuff, is giving up the control of your schedule. That was the*

*hardest thing for me. I had a scheduler and I had to learn that I do not schedule things [or control logistics] for myself. ...just get in the car and go. And you don't drive yourself anywhere either because they don't want you to be distracted about anything. And you need to be able to make fundraising calls in the car. (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, South)*

A number of women mentioned the family stress that ensues with the decision to run for office and hold public office. The hours are long and the responsibilities are heavy so that as one put it, “your children will miss you, your dog will miss you.” This is true even in supportive families and families with adult children:

*Because as supportive of a family-- a husband or a wife and children and everybody would be-- if you're away from home they suffer. And at some point in time they're going to say, "When are you coming home?" So this political thing really takes your time. It's a commitment to other people and their lives; and your personal life is going to suffer, it just is. And the fewer responsibilities you have-- especially in terms of relationships-- the better you are until you get yourself established; and if somebody can come along who knows what you're doing, then they can be a part of that. But it can be a home wrecker; it certainly can. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving five years or less)*

*My [adult] kids really want to act supportive. They'd get very, very upset when I was attacked, and my son, I had to tell him [not to read the internet], because he got so emotionally wrought by it. This time around, the kids tried to separate themselves emotionally and physically from the whole race. ... they're happy. They're proud of me, but they can't take the stress of politics. ... I would not have run if my kids were still in school, and they would have had to listen to the things that were said. So I think it's very hard to be a mother and to run because of the attacks that occur. (older, over forty, state house candidate and local officeholder, Northeast)*

Other, less common challenges include the challenge of maintaining a professional personal appearance on a 24/7 basis as well as the uphill learning curve of gaining political skills for those coming from another profession and going directly into politics.

Other challenges that received a few mentions include the mismatch between some women's personal values and skills with the dominant needs or characteristics of the district in which they reside, the feeling of isolation as a woman leader, and the physical rigors and demands of campaigning.

## **Perspectives from the Focus Groups**

### **Women State Legislators**

Part of the Achieving Parity Study involved a series of focus groups conducted at the August 2012 National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL) Issues Conference in Chicago. These focus groups provided complementary insights to the results of the long and brief interviews, and quotes from these focus groups are included throughout the report.

As a group, these women all felt a strong connection to the women's community, even though in some circumstances they did not feel as well-supported by the women's community as they would like. In some cases, they had been founding mothers of state-level women's organizations focused on recruiting women to run for office.

The NCSL focus groups provide additional insights about several aspects of why women do or do not run for office (see Table 13). In particular, they provide a picture painted by established legislators looking "backward" and showing how they now perceive opportunities and challenges to the goal of doubling the number of women in elective office.

## **Initial Recruitment**

Overall, while the 1960s and 1970s did open doors for women to run for office, these state legislators (although not a random sample) had an interest in politics from an early age and were self-starters in running for their first office. They started as party outsiders and to varying degrees, have since become either insiders or determined outsiders within their party caucuses. In their discussion on recruiting women to office, most agreed that there is a political personality that is needed to provide the drive to be successful in politics and that training is helpful to provide information about the nuts and bolts of the campaign process.

## **Role of Family**

As discussed earlier, the experienced state legislators display a diversity of approaches to how they combine their family and professional lives – some running with and having babies while serving in the state house and others waiting until their children were older. However, all seemed to have the strong support of their family in their campaigns and in their political service.

## **Perspectives on Party Recruitment and Institutionalized Political Party Sexism**

Because women state legislators are also typically party leaders, they have a distinct insight into whether party-based recruitment systematically treats women differently. Some volunteered that there were issues for women in the pipeline. Consider this extended example in which a woman state legislator describes her belief that women who are asked to run without support are subsequently completely turned off from public service after the election:

*I think about some of the women that our party has asked to run for Congress in the past, and I am ashamed to say, what happens often times, they find a really dynamic woman who has been a leader in her community, etcetera. They say, 'Please be on the ticket.' but we're so predominately [other party], they think we are not going to win anyway and then they leave the poor thing out in the middle of the cold. You know, she signs up, she files, and then they don't fundraise for her, she's just a place holder on the ticket and then...I remember the woman who ran for third district the last time. ...afterwards, she said, 'I will never do that again. I will never do that again because they recruited me, they told me they would help and then I was left out in the cold.' And, we've got another wonderful woman running for first district, this time a proud West Point graduate, just [a] dynamic, dynamic woman but she is struggling like crazy to*

*try to get support and funding because it's like, 'Yeah, that's nice. Thank you for doing this,' but there's no rigor. There's no intentionality from the party to say 'this person could actually win if we would devote our resources to them and really help them along.' So I just get very frustrated because I think we get some really great women and great women candidates in these higher level offices to run but there just needs to be more depth in what war chests that are already established that—if we can find a great woman candidate—this is what's going to be there for her. Yes, of course, she's going to have to fundraise but, you know...institutional party support. And the men know how to do it too. I mean they have their networks. They get a great guy that they like and they're just, you know, throwing money at him like crazy and finding those different [donors], nationally and regionally...we just don't do that for the women candidates. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving six to ten years)*

## Table 13

### Insights from the Women State Legislators Focus Groups

#### On Women and Ambition

- Running for higher office is a strategic decision involving timing and strategy
- Politics and political success are tough – you need the drive to be in it for the long term
- Public service in state legislatures involves a lot of personal, financial and family sacrifice
- If I run for higher office, who will replace me?

#### Backward Perspective on Electing Women

- Younger women serving in state legislatures are facing new economic and career challenges

#### Relationship to Their Political Parties

- Some still feel a party outsider because of issue positions
- Others who were once considered an upstart have become an insider

#### Relation to the Women's Movement

- All felt a strong connection to the women's movement
- To fill a perceived vacuum, some have started some state organizations or are active in other groups

#### Family Support

- For those who are married, their husbands are quite supportive – either in politics or serving as a campaign manager
- The single parent had a very supportive, politically involved mother who campaigned for her

#### Diversity in Approaches to Combining Family and Career

- These women had diverse ways of combining children and a career in office
- Some waited or ensured that their choice of office fit their childrearing needs
- Others raised their babies and children in the state capitol

#### Fundraising

- Donors including those giving to the women's community are ignoring the needs of incumbents
- Fundraising involves developing a straight-forward ask which can easily be learned in training
- Working with donors involves a personal relationship that is critical to the "ask"
- Having a good donor list is critical to doing donor calls

Source: Authors' analysis of responses to questions 1 through 14 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research state legislators focus group protocol.

### Strategy as a Long-Term Focus and a Matter of Timing and Opportunity

All of the women state legislators shared insights as to their long-term, strategic focus on election to office as well as to higher office. There are a variety of reasons why women choose or do not choose a particular office, as indicated earlier. This can include a match with one's skill

set as well as timing with respect to one's personal life:

*I was asked one time to be a lieutenant governor candidate by one of the candidates whose now a, he's now a [member of Congress]. ...it surprised me that he asked me but I think he was trying to get a female running mate. ...I said no because I had..little kids at the time...and I didn't see how I could pull it off with ...a statewide office, you are on the road every single day, going from one town committee to another town committee. I must have been asked to run for mayor several times. And, I have not done that either...mainly because I don't think I would be very good at it. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving over twenty years)*

### **Deciding to Run and Choosing Not to Run are Long-Term Strategic Decisions**

Throughout the study, women interviewees and focus group members indicated that they had been asked to run for other offices after their first campaign or election. More experienced women elected officials, especially women state legislators, included a number of considerations in their decision. As this extended example demonstrates, strategic women candidates must deal with timing and also make strategic choices:

*During the 90s, I was definitely on the running for high office track [and ran for Mayor]. I went to a lot of trainings for it. ... I know a lot of politics is about being in the right place at the right time so I picked the wrong time. .... similar to running for congress, you spend most of your time fundraising. ...you're on the phone thirty, forty hours a week raising money. I worked...probably eighty hours a week for ten months. So then I lost. No incumbent mayor in the country lost re-election that year. It was good economic times and my constituents just said, 'Well we like him fine as mayor and we like you as senator so why switch?' And you have to make the case to fire the mayor. ... Although, that person never won \_\_\_\_ again. ...three years later [an opportunity to run for Congress] came and they say that it takes seven years to recover from a campaign that you lose. So I am only three years after [my loss] ...there was not this ground swell of support for me [and there were three other women vying for the seat]...so I decided that year instead of trying to become the queen to become the queen maker. ...So we had a meeting of all the women candidates and we said, 'Look, if we don't have a deal that we're going to support each other, then one of the guys is going to get it.' [We agreed that] whoever is ahead on the third ballot... then the other candidates are going to drop out and support that person. And that's exactly what we did and [the woman candidate is still in Congress]. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving over twenty years)*

The NCSL Focus Groups also provide insights into how family support can play into a long-term strategic focus:

*I tried to find a seat that I knew...I mean my husband and I very intentionally moved into a neighborhood that at one point, five, ten years down the line was going to be predominately progressive because I'm very progressive and liberal in my ideology and my political leanings and, um, and I wanted to be able to stay true to myself as well as represent others that are of equal like-mindedness so we moved into the avenues. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving five years or less)*

## **The Decision to Stay Put: Who Will Replace Them?**

The decision to “stay put” and remain in the state legislature was revealed as a positive decision for women who felt they were already providing leadership. One deterrent for women state legislators is a concern that gains at the state level might be lost if they do decide to run for higher office. This gives some insight as to why women sometimes do not run for office:

*I am the best person to keep this seat in [my party's] hands. If I don't run, what happens? I'm in kind of in a marginalized district but because I'm well known, because I door knock like crazy, you know, I'm confident about being able to keep this seat as long as I wanted but I really can't leave in good conscience unless there's somebody else that sort of poised to do it, take it. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving six to ten years)*

*I'm kind of in a similar situation. We've got [a potential open seat] ...and the biggest challenge I have had in trying to make that decision, who's going to follow me? (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, West, serving five years or less)*

## **Mentoring as a Two-Way Street**

Another insight from the experienced state legislators who are in a position now as leaders to provide mentoring is that mentoring is a two-way street. In other words, those who are being mentored must understand the role of being a mentee and how to work effectively with very busy political women:

*I had a woman who contacted me through \_\_\_\_\_, [that is] recruiting women, and she was in my district and wanted to talk with me. And I'm extremely, extremely busy. It's campaign year. I have a primary. I have this other job working for [a national legislative association]. Um, so I said, 'Oh, well the best way to talk to me is come and door knock with me' because I'm having trouble finding volunteers because everyone says, 'Why do I have to volunteer for you? You know, you're in.' She has yet to show up. She says to me, 'I'm really busy.' ...She wants to learn more about running for office. And she'd have me to herself for two hours' door knocking. And I'd probably take her out for a coke or a drink afterwards. You know I would have jumped at that opportunity. Instead of twenty minutes when I'm rushed in my office. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Midwest, serving over twenty years)*

## Young Elected Officials

Part of the Achieving Parity Study included two “virtual” focus groups conducted by telephone as well as some brief interviews conducted with a subset of the young women elected officials conducted in November and December 2012. More detail on these focus groups is provided in the Technical Appendix. The young elected official (YEO) focus groups provided complementary insights to the results of the long and brief interviews, and quotes from these focus groups and interviews are included throughout the report.

The YEO focus groups and interviews provide additional insights about several aspects of why women do or do not run for office (see Table 14). In particular, these young elected officials provide a “forward” perspective on how to double the number of women in elective office by 2022.

Young women elected officials exhibit a lot of interest (indeed “ambition”) for public service. Not only do these women attribute their interest in public service to their childhood, they also have high levels of interest in higher offices such as those in the U.S. House and U.S. Senate. In terms of future office holding, the nonrandom subsample of young elected officials are about 50 percent more interested in higher office than the experienced candidate group. For example, all of those young elected officials who participated in brief interviews said they are interested in running for and serving in the U.S. Congress.

Nonetheless, the way forward is unclear. They lack knowledge about how to prepare themselves to be competitive for higher offices. As one young elected official put it:

*I see the path – to say – Congress or Senate as being rather nebulous. For example, if a congressional seat comes up in my area, I know that there are going to be so many candidates that are going to be coming out, and seeking that position. It's just unclear to me, again, what that path exactly looks like. I mean, I'm a City Council Person. I have some name recognition, but I don't necessarily have regional name recognition. So to be able to get to that point, I think is something to think about, frankly. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving five years or less)*

## Feelings of Isolation

Young women elected officials feel rather isolated despite their commitment to serving in office while young. Consider these comments:

*But I definitely did sacrifice a lot. I think it's someone said that being a young elected official is an oxymoron, because when you're elected "official," you are no longer "young." (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving five years or less)*

*I feel like I've gotten old in politics, and it shocks me that people still tell me I'm really, really young. And I'm like, "I've been in this for almost five years now."... I don't know if it's a matter of [being] taken seriously, but they do doubt my ability to do the job because of my age. (younger, under forty, local executive officeholder, South, serving five years or less)*

*But you know, you can't wait till your kids are grown up, because then you don't have the time to go to those higher offices. You just don't-- you won't have that background and the experience, and you know, hopefully by the time I get to higher office, I [will have] been doing this for 16-20 years, right? And it's no question. ... But at the same time, there are a lot of people when I'm running for office [who] ask me how I do it, and how I have kids and a job. And it is hard. And it is not a system designed to be successful. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)*

## **More Diverse Political Identities**

The young women elected officials in the Achieving Parity Study have diverse, and even evolving political identities. This diversity and flux reflects changes in American society as well as differences among political generations of women. Several of the young woman elected officials identify themselves as biracial. Not surprisingly, the dominant identity is being “young” (in relative terms to their peers). This in part (as discussed above) reflects age-discrimination because many of these young women elected officials had achieved a high political professional status while young and, indeed, are accomplished elected officials with significant tenures. Due to sexism, some young women elected officials also saw a gender component early on:

*my gender was much more of a challenge than my youth. I'm a member of a full-time council, and it's extremely patriarchal. The folks that I work with knew that I was "smart," ...I was from the neighborhood, I had a masters degree in policy, and they really took me as a threat. ...I would term what happened to me in my first year [as] no less than psychological warfare, in which they really just tried every angle to sort of bring me down, and make me not want to be there. ...I had to stand my ground ten times more than any other male that I worked with. (younger, under forty, local executive officeholder, South, serving five years or less)*

The “youth” identity includes generational and life-stage elements. The generational elements appeared in the relatively high levels of “ambition” as well as a more prevalent orientation toward “power.” Lifestage elements occurred when there were other women also serving who reflected both a different generation as well as a different lifestage (older and not having young children, for example):

*age was the biggest factor. My board was primarily full of women before. They've seen women on the board. They hadn't seen [someone] so young. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Midwest, serving five years or less)*

*I think the biggest barrier I felt was not being a woman [like them]. I had a majority of women on my School Board. It was probably the age factor, and having to deal with them*

*feeling like I'm so much younger...there was not as much respect because of my age.*  
(younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving eleven to fifteen years)

*I'm the only non-grandma on Council. Because there are two other women that I work with, and they're both grandmothers, and literally today at a meeting, a female councilwoman literally said to me, "Grow up," and left the room in a huff because I disagreed with her on an issue. ...Not all female politicians are created equal.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving five years or less)

The life-stage aspect for young women elected officials also appeared for those who are also mothers. For example:

*[I am] a young woman and a mom. So two kids. And I definitely identify myself in that way as well. There's only about five of us in Colorado that have little kids that are elected right now, that are women. And so I purposely try to publicly model being a mom and elected for other women.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)

Some saw both age and gender as challenges:

*it was a combination of both age and gender. ...my first year, every time I would bring up an issue, I would kind of get, "That's nice, kid," type of commentary. And...[also another woman colleague and I on the city council] would have conversations just about some of the insensitivity issues that some of our colleagues would have around....a constituent complaint, or ...administrative decisions [that]... seemed to disproportionately pass women, and people of color, versus white men... [even some] of the new members...very much so, come from the old school of politics.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving six to ten years)

Yet, these young women elected officials are keenly aware that as they seek higher elected offices, that they will encounter more sexism:

*[Later on, age] is less of a difference. But the male piece, I want to go to State legislature, and I think it's a very macho environment. And you have to be very aggressive. And I'm concerned, because that's not the way I operate. You know, I operate more on one-on-one interactions and building relationships with people. And it's much more fast-paced. So I am concerned about-- I think the gender piece is going to be more important in my next step.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving eleven to fifteen years)

## **Relation to the Women's Movement**

Young women elected officials feel rather distant from the women's community and the women's movement. This is despite an interest in being involved. Some of this comes from the fact that these younger women did not grow up with the women's movement. To some, the women's movement was of their mother's generation, while for others, it is the experiences and

political involvement of their mothers that made a difference in their lives. They perceive a need for, and are interested in, representing women.

In addition, as noted above, women's organizations do not focus on young political women who are running for the local office. Those that do focus on young women seem to avoid political and elected women. The young women elected officials hope for material support (money and volunteer labor) from women's organizations in addition to training. For example:

*I've gotten...rhetorical support from women's groups such as endorsements from the local chapter of \_\_\_\_\_ ...but that hasn't really added any value, to be honest. Whether that's volunteers or fundraising, or marketing or anything. ...So I've never actually been able to gain any traction with [national] women's groups, because I'm [a local officeholder]. ...I will also say, I've been really disappointed with the fundraising efforts that I've made, and . . . the overtures that I've made to the female community here. [my fundraiser] told me women 'don't give.' .....I witnessed that firsthand when a high profile female attorney like arranged a whole little get-together for me at her law office. And I called her, and all the other women that came, and none of them would give me money. It was shocking. I'm like, "Why are we doing this?" So it was disappointing. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving five years or less)*

Furthermore, the cost of being involved in these organizations may be prohibitively high for young women living on modest official salaries who may also be supporting their families. They are concerned that the high cost may not result in substantial help from these organizations. Another frustration expressed by these young women is related to their hunger for recognition for their work as elected officials. Here is one example of this concern in reacting to how a young(er) woman elected to city council suddenly became "Elected Official of the Year" when there had been others who had already been serving in office:

*... I see them [national women's organizations] as like a sorority, and you still have to get chosen through them. And so a lot of my friends and I were talking about ...forming our own, [so that] we pick from amongst ourselves. [This is due to our] frustration ...that we should be able to choose when we're ready. And we should be able to advocate for that support and get it. ...but then when you want to get involved, you've got to like dump in a lot of money, too, and then nothing's a guarantee. ...I'm a single mother with two kids. I've always been a single mother with two kids. ...And so when I have to dump in a lot of money to an organization, I want to know [what the value-added is]. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, South, serving six to ten years)*

## **Role Models**

Young women elected officials also lack available role models. As one young woman elected official put it:

*But I can't say right now that there's somebody, one particular person who I would say, "Yes, this is the track that I want to go." And so if I'm being honest, I don't really have that yet. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Midwest, serving five years or less)*

## Running and Serving While Young and Female

Young elected women encounter some challenges that are specific to their age as well as their gender. It seems to be harder to address personal issues related to health in a public arena. While there are a lot of public examples of political men discussing prostate cancer, virility and related medications (Viagra), and heart problems, political women have few examples of women leaders discussing health issues in a public forum, perhaps with the exception of First Lady Betty Ford's opening the door to discussions of breast cancer. Consider this example:

*no one ever, ever, ever talks about [health issues related to] ...being a woman ...the highest of which is pregnancy... But on the flip side...there's [other reproductive] things that [can happen]. [I've] been ...feeling really sick...[and] I had to figure that out [while serving]. ...I'm keeping this a secret because I wouldn't want ...anyone...to feel like I'm weak or anything. So I think figuring out how to not be embarrassed about health issues, even including having children [while in office and the public eye]. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving five years or less)*

Some are young mothers, and others are single. Both family situations come with challenges. The young mothers find running and serving a challenge:

*...the family issue. It's hard. You know, it is really hard. It affects my family, and I know talking to other women that have kids that are elected or thinking about it and have kids. And there's no good answer to that, especially when we don't pay local elected or state elected officials enough money to have a family on. And then you're trying to figure out how to have two jobs, be a good mom, you know, how much do you put your children in the public space, and how much do you not? And you get judged critically. I was telling a friend of mine, I think the "mommy wars" are far worse than any political battle I've ever faced. And being a public mom just makes it that much worse. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)*

The young single women find dating to be a challenge, and also find the demands of their service to be harder when they serve without a "wife" or a partner:

*so the guys that I'm supposed to be dating are in college, but I found out very quickly that I can't date anybody in college ...The last guy like wouldn't take off his hat when I was going into a political function. And I was like, "You're 12. Why am I dating you?" If he's out there, let me know. And in the meantime, my mom is my wife. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Midwest, serving five years or less)*

*I'm not dating anyone right now and dating and being an elected official is difficult...I think it is difficult to find a partner, especially in my position, that is like not necessarily like intimidated or weirded out by what I do. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving five years or less)*

*you put yourself in the public eye, and you give up so much. I gave up a lot. I gave up my dating life. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, South, serving six to ten years)*

The concerns about dating also include how one meets people, how one responds to people you meet in the course of your work at social and political events, and how one is viewed publicly in potential dating and non-dating situations:

*you might have a lot of people that may want to come on to you, but be careful because you don't want to be perceived as someone who is free and open....you have to be careful...Next thing you know, you're in the paper. ...dating [is hard] because now I'm a politician. But when you are, your guard is more up, your antenna is up. You're more aware of who you're allowing yourself with. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, South, serving five years or less)*

Many describe politics and service as a “two-person career.” The young women elected officials who are single feel this keenly:

*when I look at successful male politicians, whether that's the President, or senators or whatever, that there's always a wife. ...sometimes I joke with friends that I need a wife. And you know, there is in some ways that luxury that some of the men have. ...But I don't have that sort of support network. ...everything that I do, I do completely on my own. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Northeast, serving five years or less)*

Overall, these young women elected officials shared a consensus that being elected while young as a “first career” has its own challenges. But the major finding is that these younger women demonstrated a high level of interest in office holding and have made considerable sacrifices for their public service.

## Table 14

### Insights from the Young Women Elected Officials Focus Groups

#### On Women and Ambition

- They demonstrate an interest in running for office and public service from childhood
- They are predominantly self-starters
- They are very interested in running for higher office
- They have made professional, personal and family sacrifices in their public service to date

#### Forward Perspective on Electing Women

- Young elected women encounter age-based, gender-based, and age-gender-based challenges
- Young elected women lack meaningful role models and mentors on “having it all” in public service
- The path to higher office is distant and “nebulous”
- The path to the state house is
  1. Problematic due to concerns about party-based sexism in the state party or in the legislature
  2. Difficult for those with children given the very low pay

#### Relationship to their Political Parties

- Most are outsiders
- Political parties are involved in some school board elections even if running as nonpartisan

#### Relation to the Women’s Movement

- They feel distant from women’s organizations and the women’s community
  1. National women’s political organizations are thought to be too focused on higher office
  2. Organizations focused on girls’ and young women’s empowerment are nonpartisan and nonpolitical
- Local women elected officials when helpful act more as “validators” than mentors

#### Family Support

- Most do not come from established political families
- Their birth families (e.g., parents and family members) were notable in supporting their candidacies and campaigns

#### Diversity in Approaches to Combining Family and Career

- These women have diverse plans for combining children and a career in office
- Some have started office holding before marriage and family
- Others plan to wait until their children are older before considering higher offices, including at the state level

#### Fundraising

- They feel the help for fundraising for campaigns for higher offices is not available for young candidates, especially young women candidates
- They identify parties as being dominated by male donors

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to question 1 through 12 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research young elected official focus group protocol.

## Congressional Staff Members

Part of the Achieving Parity Study involved two focus groups scheduled in December 2012 in Washington, DC. More detail on these focus groups is provided in the Technical Appendix. These focus groups provide complementary insights to the results of the long and brief interviews, but quotes from these data have not been included in prior discussions because none of the congressional staff had run for office. Congressional staff members have been called the “other farm team” for Congress (Herrnson 1994).<sup>6</sup>

These focus groups were included in the Achieving Parity Study because the transitions of congressional staff to elected office have been an understudied recruitment route for political office generally and also specifically for women. According to the Congressional Research Service, the fourth most common immediate occupation prior to being elected to Congress is that of congressional aide, following careers in law, banking or business, and education (Peterson 2012). In fact, if any prior staff or internship experience is counted, serving as a congressional aide or intern at least among congressional candidates may rival the top occupation, legal occupations, which constituted from 20 to 25 percent of the prior occupations of newly elected members.<sup>7</sup>

It is noteworthy that one in five of the interview sample (recruited separately and without consideration of any prior congressional staff experience) volunteered that they had had some prior experience working as a staff member or as an intern either for the U.S. Congress or their state legislature (when describing the origins of their interest in politics and public service). One volunteered that her campaign for a city council position had been mentored and “blessed” by her former boss, a member of Congress and a party leader. This suggests that, for women candidates, serving as congressional staff may be a major factor in motivating them to run for office. Whether one had had a prior congressional internship or staff/aide position was not directly asked of the interview participants, and thus this figure is likely a low estimate of any actual prior service. In addition, some others in the interview sample had worked for a federal, state, or local agency. Prior staff or internship public service experience stands out as one of the most common experiences across the Achieving Parity Study participants who have run for offices ranging from local to state levels.

It was for these reasons that congressional staff members were recruited for focus group research. This focus group was conducted with a somewhat different format than that of the other focus groups:

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<sup>6</sup> Herrnson estimated that the proportion of former congressional staffers (he did not count interns or other volunteers who can work as long as 4-12 months) among members of Congress in the mid-1990s as 15 percent, but that only 4 percent of the candidate pool were former congressional staff members.

<sup>7</sup> Beyond such famous former interns or staff members as Democrats Steny Hoyer and Nancy Pelosi and Republicans Paul Ryan, Dick Cheney and Mitch McConnell, a number of current members of Congress have been mentored by party leaders. This includes current Republican Representative Pete Roskam (IL-6) who was mentored by his predecessor and former boss Rep. Henry Hyde.

1. Because we worked to stay outside of congressional ethics jurisdictions which typically require a review of interview protocols asking staff members about how members of Congress do their jobs, the focus group protocol did not directly inquire into whether members of Congress mentor or sponsor women in the same ways and equally as often as men. It is noteworthy, however, that this topic was volunteered as an issue, with a subsequent discussion initiated by the participants. As such, this issue became a core topic of conversation among the participants after they introduced it.
2. Following brainstorming about the characteristics of leaders and role models as well as the characteristics of an ideal candidate for Congress, we utilized a technique called nominal voting that allowed the participants to identify topics of greater priority, concern, or interest. Nominal voting done after the discussion was used to help determine priorities of the focus group discussion. The value of nominal voting is that it permits participants to reflect and consider their views based on the focus group discussion. The following discussion also includes the priorities reaffirmed by the participants at the conclusion of the focus group.

Significantly, according to the congressional staff focus groups, women who are staff members are less likely to be:

- Invited into the “inner-circle” of important meetings where one gains public leadership skills;
- Mentored to run for elective office at other levels of service (state and local) or to serve in an appointive office; or
- Groomed to run for a congressional seat or other office by a current member of Congress.

As one participant put it:

*when I thought about the people that I had worked for and the people that I knew, I could think of quite a few examples of male staffers that I thought were groomed to run for the seat or a seat and I couldn't think of a single female staffer. (older, over forty, congressional staff, Northeast)*

The congressional staff focus groups provide additional insights about several aspects of why women do or do not run for office (see Table 15).

Of the participants in the two focus groups, all but one is interested in running for office. Two had or currently hold major appointed offices, one as an assistant secretary in a federal agency, and another in a statewide cabinet level post. What is interesting and significant is that they all came to the focus groups with the goal of learning more about how congressional staff might successfully run for office.

This goal suggests that for those who work for the U.S. House or the U.S. Senate, open conversations about how staff members might make the transition to running for elective office are relatively rare. According to the one staff member who has decided that she did not wish to run for elective office:

*I've never heard any staffer say I want to run for office someday. (younger, under forty, congressional staff, Northeast)*

This suggests that service in Congress is not a welcoming climate for encouraging staff members to run for office.

Nonetheless, the other four focus group participants do have a high level of interest in running for office:

*I'm very interested in running for office. I'm from the state of \_\_\_\_\_. I guess what peaked my interest in being in politics was the fact that I started locally. I got involved with local mayor's race. And then I went off to college and I got involved with the College Republicans. And then from there it stuck with me ever since. Interned for a senator as well as a U.S. Congressman at that time. And I interned for them both in the state as well as in D.C. So when I came up to D.C., fell in love with D.C. and have been here ever since. After I graduated from law school I came to DC. (younger, under forty, congressional staff, South)*

Two staff members who have strong interest in running for office stated that they have a lack of knowledge about how to make the transition from being a congressional staff member to becoming an elected official:

*I really don't know [what is best]. Do I go back to the state and start off as state senator and then work my way up? ...I've considered that a great deal, on whether or not, but this ...election cycle I've seen a lot of first timers entering the U.S. Congress, young, in their thirties, as a matter of fact. So I think to myself, well, why not? (younger, under forty, congressional staff, South)*

*I feel like I stumbled through my whole political career ... if I had started being more strategic in my thinking younger I'd be in a better position in terms of where I lived and different things like that. I just stumbled into politics. And again I never thought of running until I went to the executive branch. (older, over forty, congressional staff, Northeast)*

Another staff member had previously been appointed to a high-level state cabinet position, but was prevented from running for that position because she had publicly promised before her appointment that she would not run:

*being \_\_\_\_\_... was a great job and I advocate it for every woman \_\_\_\_\_. It's a terrific job. And if I had been able to run, [since I had promised publicly to not run] I probably would have run. It's funny what you feel like being in the shoes of a particular position even though you're around it all of the time, but once you get to be in it, you get to see a whole different angle to it. (older, over forty, congressional staff, Northeast)*

This staff member was later recruited to run for Governor, but decided not to run. Interestingly, despite having relatively young children (ages 7 and 12), her decision to say “no” was not because of family issues, but because there was too little time to launch a quality campaign,

something she felt really took about 18 months or so. She was recruited by the current Governor who had decided not to run for reelection;

*...unfortunately, he got out [late and]...he called me...and he says, "I'd like to talk to you." So I went over to the Governor's office and he says, "I really think you should run. You've done a great job as \_\_\_\_\_. You're an advocate on the environment. You're out there. You're doing a great job. ...I really think you should run." ..So I gave myself a two-week period because...our convention would have been in June [and] our primary would have been in August or September and then the election in November. So you talk about gearing up a campaign, raising the money, working delegates for the convention, having enough money for a primary because there would have been a primary because these other guys have been out there running. (older, over forty, congressional staff, Northeast)*

Congressional staff members typically leave their state or locality and work and live full-time in Washington, D.C., or one of the area suburbs in Virginia or Maryland. One of the issues raised by the participants is where to run for office – in the D.C. area or back home?

*I think much more about [running for] local [office]-- back in the state it would be legislature, governor. I think it's more appealing of a way to get actual things accomplished and done...[however] if it's D.C. [my concern is]... I don't think the City Council is very good right now, but it's that. And if it's back in the state it's the legislatures to the governorship. (older, over forty, congressional staff, South)*

*I grew up in [my state] and my parents are very active even still. ...my earliest exposure [were presidential caucuses ...and I recall meeting [President X]. So that was my first exposure. In high school I did student council and that [leadership] path [in college]. ...[after law school, I've been working for the Senate for 19 years and raising my children. ...so I'm sort of at the place where I'm thinking about what I want to do. My oldest is about to go to college. ... As far as where I'd run from that specifically is something I've been thinking about because I'm a D.C. resident [and] I've been active in the local schools. ...D.C. is an interesting place because of the racial dynamics going on in the city especially since I've lived here in the past 20-some years and [my state] has never elected a woman to national office. ...I left [my state] at 17 when I went to college. So even though I have deep roots strictly in the county I'm from which my parents are still there ...that would be a challenge. I think I'd be a bit of a carpet bagger not having been there for a while. So that's sort of where I am right now. (older, over forty, congressional staff, South)*

Another of the participants (who had previously served as an appointee to fill out a term in a statewide elective office) stressed that to run for office, staff members need to leave their jobs on Capitol Hill to go back home and develop a local base:

*it's the old political thing which is everything's local and you've got to get your base developed. I know when people are in my office and they say I really want to do politics I*

*say get back to [your state], go back, develop your base, make your connections, do your local work. It doesn't happen from here by and large* (older, over forty, congressional staff, northeast)

If staff members need to leave their jobs on Capitol Hill, part of the challenge is in evaluating how the decision might fit with their job trajectory on Capitol Hill, as well as prospects for their family life. As one participant noted, as staff members rise up to a level such as that of Chief of Staff for a Representative or a Senator where they might be at a point to leave, they might also be at the point of thinking about starting a family:

*It hits[in] the thirties. It's when you're looking at it that that's point are you going to have children, are you going to [do the] other-- it comes at the same time.* (older, over forty, congressional staff, Northeast)

The timing issue also relates to a question of what level of office one might consider running for? Should it be local, state or federal?

*...one dilemma that presents itself as you get very senior positions on Capitol Hill and now I have a pretty senior position in the administration – ...is would you go to a state legislature? In some ways, you're kind of like well, I'm going back-- I've kind of outgrown that. But on the other hand, it's not like you're necessarily ready to just jump into running for Congress. So if you wait too long in your Washington career you might find yourself in a funny spot where you really don't quite fit in in either direction.* (older, over forty, congressional staff, Northeast)

One thing to consider about the work that women do on Capitol Hill is that it is intensely engaging public service work that constitutes a highly attractive job in itself. For long-term and high-level staff members, one can quickly gain the sense that those positions allow individuals to contribute to national policy in a non-elected position. As one participant noted:

*When you're a Hill staffer, you can have a lot of power and I realize now from being in the executive branch you have astonishingly little accountability. I mean really it's kind of great. When you're in the executive branch you have a lot of responsibility and a lot of power but a lot of accountability, IG, GAO, Congress. It's a much more stressful existence. And I think for some people they love it and for some people they're like ugh, what have I gotten myself into? I think a lot of people love the job, but not everybody.* (older, over forty, congressional staff, Northeast)

The attractiveness of contributing to public service as a congressional aide contrasts sharply with the up-close and personal view of how staff members see the job when working alongside their boss. Consider the view of the staff member who did not want to run for public office:

*...for me personally, the reason why it doesn't interest me at all [is] seeing just how difficult it is to lead that lifestyle. ...your time with family is truncated [and] ...the show must go on, even if you're ill, you're sick, you're still on a crazy schedule where nothing, you know, nothing slows down. The public scrutiny, you're just never going to make everybody happy, there's always going to be somebody criticizing you. ...it's very popular*

*to criticize politicians. ... but to actually know the members and understand the challenges they face, and really see why they're there [because] ...probably 99 percent of them are not there for personal gain or advantage of some other sort of malicious intent. ...they really do believe in making a difference, and so I feel like you take so much criticism, it's grueling work, long hours, very unpredictable schedule, not much time with family or free time, and your private life is not private. So I don't see the up side, I just don't, personally.* (younger, forty or under, congressional staff, Northeast)

She was also the only staff member who indicated that she frequently traveled back to the state with her boss, who went back home weekly to attend political meetings and events. She also traveled on one occasion to Afghanistan on government business. She was thus the only staff member interviewed who volunteered that she had some opportunities to build local political networks through her congressional work.

In addition to the sometimes limited opportunities to develop local networks while a current staff member, the other major disadvantage of working on Capitol Hill is the added challenge of making the shift from behind-the-scenes leadership to public leadership. As one participant pointed out:

*one of the disadvantages of being a staffer that I didn't realize...is [that] you are ...in the back of the room, working for a member. You are not the focus of attention...for those that are here in Washington, you do achieve leadership of a certain kind but it's a behind the scenes leadership. And public leadership is very, very different. ... [For] a lot of us who go from Capitol Hill to appointed positions say in an administration it is a huge psychological journey to go from staffing someone to being a principal in your own right. And I feel like I didn't really experience it until I became... an appointed official [and now]... I get a flavor of what it's like to really be in the public light, to be the principal in the room. That for me was a huge psychological jump and made me think, okay, well, now I actually see what it would take to run. It's different than just being a very smart staffer on Capitol Hill. There's thousands of those and they know everything but to cultivate a public persona is a huge jump. ...those that are here in Washington probably have a harder time learning than those that are in the state.* (older, over forty, congressional staff, Northeast)

The focus group participants also discussed advantages that congressional staff members have as potential candidates. These included opportunities to develop an in-depth knowledge of national level policy issues, to gain a sense that one is capable of doing policy work, and to build national networks.

These focus group participants also feel that mentorship at all levels is lacking:

*I've tried to connect with folks just to get some sort of idea, mentoring and that part is also difficult, as well, to finding good mentors. I mean in my experience, as far as finding a mentor [or a way] for a younger [woman] to be paired with older seasoned women who have gone before...in my experience it's been very difficult in connecting and knowing how to connect.* (younger, forty or under, congressional staff, South)

This mentorship gap, similar to what was discussed earlier in the report, included both the dominance of the “ol’ boys” network as well as an apparent failure of women members of Congress to mentor and groom female staff for public leadership. Consider the following:

*And I think it's the-- whether it's the gym or the golf and it's still the same old thing. I think it's harder for cross sex mentoring relationships to be comfortable. To be comfortable to say I'm going to pick you to be my successor. (older, over forty, congressional staff, South)*

*the women are maybe less [into]. . . grooming the women [for office]; maybe [in particular] the older generation. Because I've worked for two female elected officials too and I can't say I feel like they were grooming the women on their staffs. (older, over forty, congressional staff, South)*

Congressional staff see their Representatives and Senators primarily as their bosses. While they do get an up-close and personal look at the legislative process, they also come away with a clear awareness of the “in-house” reputations of members. Interestingly, this was discussed specifically in terms of women members. One current member in particular was noted for having a different “in-house” reputation than she did publicly.

*I think there's an astonishing dichotomy between her public persona which is incredibly warm and funny, and the experiences of those who work for her. She has probably got among the worst reputations of all of the [current members] right now to work for. (older, over forty, congressional staff, Northeast)*

The flawed reputations of current members of Congress may reflect the challenging management role of new members coupled with learning the ropes and facing reelection. It is challenging enough to be an elected member of Congress, beyond the role of boss of a staff in multiple sites ranging in size from 20-30 people, or for Senators, upwards of 60 staff members.

That these women perceive a lack of mentoring suggests that there is an opportunity for organizations that conduct candidate training to recruit and support a large talent pool of skilled, credentialed, and ambitious political women for higher office. Mentoring congressional staff both on and off Capitol Hill would be seen as very helpful to these women focus group participants.

These focus groups also provide insights as to how to structure any training that might be developed specifically for congressional staff. Since many congressional staff have experience in campaigns as well as a lot of policy experience, any training would need to be tailored to a higher level of experience. At the same time training should provide the nuts and

bolts to develop skills in building local networks and a campaign or constituency base in the district. Training should also address how to provide public leadership while one is transitioning

from being a staff member to becoming a principal.

## **Table 15**

### **Insights from the Congressional Staff Focus Groups**

#### **How Congressional Staff Understand Political Leadership and Candidates for Office**

- Valued leaders are ones who provide intellectual leadership and demonstrate grace under pressure as well as a sense of humor. Valued role models include Hillary Clinton followed by Daniel Patrick Moynihan, Ray LaHood, Condoleeza Rice, and then Jeanne Shaheen, Amy Klobuchar, Joseph Lieberman and Ronald Reagan.
- While the ideal candidate is one who has the ability to raise money and has a local base and name recognition, it is personality characteristics (resilience, being thick-skinned, a risk-taker, ambition and the right personality mix including authenticity and genuineness) which dominate characteristics of an ideal congressional candidate

#### **What is Needed to Encourage Staff Members to Run and Double Women in Elective Office**

- Mentoring of congressional staff members as candidates and leaders
- Longterm development of women candidates for electoral success

#### **What Congressional Staff Bring to the “Candidate” Table**

- In-depth, expert knowledge of national level policy issues
- Having a sense that “you can do this work”
- Opportunities to build national policy and campaign networks

#### **Potential Campaign Disadvantages for Staffers**

- Making the shift from behind-the-scenes leadership to public leadership
- Developing local political, policy and constituent networks

#### **What Is Different for Female Staff Members on Capitol Hill – Women Are Less Likely To Be:**

- Invited into the “inner-circle” of meetings where one gains public leadership skills
- Mentored to run for elective office or provided opportunities to serve in an appointed office
- Groomed to run for a congressional seat or other office by a current member of Congress

#### **Parking Lot Issues Raised**

- Family pressures are a factor for staffers considering a campaign
- Reputation of Members of Congress as a “boss” by their colleagues/staff (gendered)
- Press and media are harder on women

Source: Authors' analysis of questions 1 through 17 on the Institute for Women's Policy Research congressional staff focus group protocol.

## Implications of the Focus Groups for Family and Career

In several focus groups, participants struggled to find female role models who were “able to have it all,” and a number of the participants (some single, some single mothers, some married without children, and some who were lesbians) worried about how to fit their lifestyle within conventional political narratives which still emphasize the traditional American two-parent family as the norm. In particular, the younger elected officials felt isolated, felt a lack of peers among those their own age, found dating extremely difficult in the public eye (not only because of having to go to many public events but also because women tend to be labeled by their associations), and also suffered from the lack of the functional equivalent of a “wife.”

One message experienced women candidates and officeholders have for younger political women is to start their careers early (see Appendix D). Yet, because more women than men are single parents and because few women have stay-at-home spouses, more younger women candidates will run without someone in the role of “political wife” to demonstrate their family values and to shoulder much of the responsibility for family care.

As the research literature suggests, a spouse can be both a campaign asset in demonstrating one’s family values (often displayed at campaign events) and someone who can hold down the fort during long campaigning days and legislative sessions and public service responsibilities. This is an asset in many professional careers and in public office holding. Politics is often thought of as two-person job, with the wife as helpmate to the male officeholder. Early research on women officeholders found that they are less likely than male officeholders to be married, less likely to have children, typically have fewer children, and their children tend to be older while they are in office (Sapiro 1982; Carroll and Strimling 1983, Carroll, 1989, 1993). Even today, when so many married women have careers of their own, a number of political men can still claim the advantages of a spouse who is a full-time homemaker. Baer (2012) finds that a quarter to half of political party men (depending on their office seeking activity) describe their spouse as a full-time homemaker, while virtually no political women surveyed do.

While a spouse in a prestigious business or professional career might also be helpful to a candidate or officeholder (of either gender), it seems more often it is older couples with fewer family responsibilities who can take the most advantage of this arrangement. For one example of this type of symbiosis, what are known as “professional pairs” where both spouses are in the same field and share professional networks seem to magnify their influence. In politics, Senator Mitch McConnell and former Secretary of Labor Elaine Chao and former President Clinton and former Senator and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton are examples of this trend.

For women’s organizations to recruit and mentor young candidates and office holders they need to develop strategies that can create more political space for these young women. For example, public education to increase public awareness of diverse types of married and single women who serve and serve well as leaders and elected officials (including creating a greater zone of privacy for those who are dating and for the children of candidates and officeholders) would help to create more political space for women running for office at young ages – an essential foundational element to doubling the number of women in elective office. This would also be helpful to a married woman whose spouse may be indifferent to politics. There seems to be

more political space for elected men whose wives are not involved in their political careers than is true for elected women.

## **Recommendations to Double the Number of Women in Elective Office by 2022**

The Achieving Parity participants were informed that the goal of the Hunt Alternatives Fund and the Political Parity Leadership Team was to double the number of women in elective office by 2022 and were asked what they thought needed to be done to accomplish this. This was asked as a completely open-ended question.

In addition, the candidate interview sample and the women state legislator focus group participants were asked what advice they would give to a young woman in her twenties who wanted to run for higher office in the next ten to fifteen years on how to prepare herself as a credible candidate.

Overall, the Achieving Parity participants are mostly optimistic about achieving the goal of doubling the number of women in elective office, but they believe that dramatic changes are needed in order to do so. Only a few think the goal cannot be achieved because the scale of society-wide changes required is too great.

What is noteworthy is that the advice the study participants proffer to a hypothetical ambitious young woman in her twenties differs considerably from the “non-careers” followed by many of the women (particularly the older women) in this study. This advice clearly provides a strategic roadmap to developing a political career: plan for a political career early; develop roots and leadership in the community through activism on issues; prepare personally for the challenges; choose and develop a professional career prior to running for office that can be aligned with running (most experienced candidates do advise that young women have some life or work experience prior to running); lay the groundwork to be “on deck” for running by developing a constituency base in the party (through campaign volunteer work, for example); prepare to run by getting training from women’s organizations and advice from current officeholders; be strategic in the choice of office sought and the timing of the run (see Appendix D).

The advice to young women indicates that experienced women themselves envision a new way of “doing business” in politics and public service. This vision asserts that the past need not be prologue to the future and suggests new ways for women’s organizations to structure training to provide twenty-first century opportunities for women.

Before turning to an overview of the advice study participants provided on how to double the number of women in elective office, it is important to acknowledge that current women elected officials are doing the work of the angels. They face considerable hurdles (such as discrimination and sexism), make extensive sacrifices, and yet continue to serve because of their deep and passionate commitment to serving the public through political office holding. Women elected officials and experienced candidates are eager for help from the women’s community and in many cases are forming organizations of their own at state and local levels. While many existing

efforts to promote women running for office are founded on the idea that women need to be recruited, the major finding of this study, in which participants often self-recruited, is that many women are motivated to seek political office and are strategic in how they go about it.

A clear finding of the Achieving Parity Study is that more than the recruitment “ask” is needed if we are to double the number of women in elective office by 2022. One prominent finding of this study is that many women are recruited to politics and public service through issue mobilization and did not (and do not) view elective office as a traditional career (many still see other ways to engage in public service beyond office holding). This means that a key change that the women’s community should make is to encourage women who are inspired by public service to see elective office holding as a singularly important way to change public policy. While, indeed, women who seek to run for office can benefit from training and new ways of thinking about a career in politics on an individual level, the key recommendation of the Achieving Parity participants is that the women’s community needs to be more strategic and systematic in how it provides support, training, and other assistance to potential and current women candidates. Women’s movement organizations need to place a higher priority on getting women into elected office by focusing on the pipeline and providing tools and concrete support that advance women office holders to higher levels.

## **Table 16**

### **What Experienced Women Candidates Say Needs to be Done to Double the Number of Women in Elective Office By 2022**

- Launch an Organized Effort to Build the Pipeline and Organize Strategic Race Placement – 24 Mentions
- Existing Training Needs to be Expanded and Enhanced – 18 Mentions
- Women Candidates and Elected Officials Need Both More Mentorship and Sponsorship – 12 Mentions
- There Needs to be More Public Awareness to Support and Recruit Women Candidates and Officials – 10 Mentions
- Women Need More Help with Fundraising – 10 Mentions
- Women Candidates Need More Campaign Help – Provide a “Campaign-in-a-Box” – 9 Mentions
- More Women Should be Recruited and Asked to Run – 7 Mentions
- Policy and Institutional Changes and Reforms are Needed – 6 Mentions
- Create a Village Among Women’s Organizations – 5 Mentions
- Campaigning and Office-Holding Needs to be More Family-Friendly – 5

Source: Authors’ analysis of responses to question 49 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research long interview protocol; question 22 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research young elected official brief interview protocol and question 13 on the Institute for Women’s Policy Research state legislators focus group protocol.

The major recommendations for action steps to be taken by the women’s community to double the number of women in elective office by 2022 (see Table 16) follow. As a way to address the informal processes that dominate candidate recruitment in the political parties, the first recommendation addresses how to get “on deck” – the perception that one is a likely, credible and authentic candidate for the next level of office. This continues to be a gap identified by the women in the Achieving Parity study.

## **1. Rebuild the Pipeline**

The most widely shared recommendation among study participants is that the women’s community needs to work to build the political pipeline for women, including focusing on strategic race placement. This requires a new, long-term focus designed for change over the long haul.

### **Who’s On Deck?**

Being “on deck” includes two elements: ensuring that there are adequate numbers of women at different stages of the pipeline at all levels; and ensuring that women elected officials are included as potential “up and comers” for higher level races. Because of the concerns expressed by current state legislators about leaving their seat without a replacement, one aspect of the political pipeline is that the effort to recruit for higher offices should not “drain” the pipeline at lower levels.

Investing in a political pipeline should focus on long-term recruitment and long-term strategies rather than a cycle-based election recruitment process similar to that of the political parties. This investment should also include efforts to assist women aspiring to higher-level office whether they seek to rise from lower-level offices or seek to make a lateral entry from a prior career in the private sector to be viewed as credible front-runners.

### **Go Hunting Where the Ducks Are**

Recruitment is an essential part of rebuilding the pipeline. Part of the recruitment needs to be focused on women who are already demonstrating leadership. In other words, go hunting where the ducks are rather than simply provide training that uses a broad-scale recruitment process. For example, among the study participants, community organizing emerged as a singular background.

### **Help Women Elected Officials Remain in the Pipeline and Build National Networks**

The Achieving Parity Study found a variety of pipeline routes and different needs at different stages of career-building. In particular, young women elected officials need to be recruited, supported, mentored and sponsored to advance their political careers over an extended period of career development. This should be done on a national level. A number of women mentioned that no national organization exists to bring together women in different offices at different levels of government. The current types of official organizations for “electeds” tend to gather all those at the same level. This arrangement could be seen as encouraging “static” ambition rather

than “progressive” ambition. This organizational need is especially important because women candidates need to align running for higher office at the optimal point in a political career as well as to align such a run with one’s personal and family life.

In addition, study participants suggest that the women’s community should work to use appointments to help women, especially those who have lost a race. An appointed position can provide them with a political job that serves as a “way-station” between elections and also adds to their credentials.

### **Focus on Laying Markers Down on Seats Well In Advance of an Opening**

Another commonly offered suggestion is to develop a new, long term, strategic approach to recruitment. A number of women report that there is an informal process in which individuals begin to position themselves well in advance of an opening. Participating in this process means not just getting women to say they will run, but having them learn how to communicate that intention well in advance in order to gauge and gain potential support – often years in advance of an anticipated opening:

*[women need to be more public and] just more aggressive about wanting to run for office. ...You’ll see men who are like, “Yeah, I’m going to run. I should be doing this to carry [my district],” even if you have a woman who has much better qualifications. And that hurts us, because part of being successful is this: It’s the perception that you have that people see [when they are choosing candidates for offices]. So if we’re not exuding this aura of confidence and desire, it’s very easy for you to be pushed aside. (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

Participants also suggest that if women’s organizations could work on a national level to develop the information and the “intelligence” on likely or possible or anticipated openings, this would be very helpful to women who are not included in local discussions about these opportunities.

## **2. Expand and Enhance Women-Centered Training**

Training emerges as a highly valued resource in the Achieving Parity Study for current women elected officials and experienced candidates. It is also the second most mentioned area for recommendations to the women’s community – to provide even more effective training.

First, training needs to understand why women run for office. Because few women seek power for power’s sake (although some women do), more effective training would go beyond recruiting women focused on “ambition” to seeking to motivate women to run in order to better achieve their policy goals through being an elected official themselves.

Second, the women’s community needs to understand that there is growing competition in candidate training. Women are receiving training from a wide array of groups that do not address the unique needs or interests of women. The training provided by women’s organizations is a unique opportunity for candidates to network and to develop a broader sense of women’s policy

needs and agendas across the political spectrum.

Third, there is a gap in training for women who are recruited in the election year. These women are by and large not getting training from women's organizations. In fact, the training provided for many just-declared women candidates is provided by the political parties, an arena that is also the source of a lot of disappointments for women. In addition, the parties often times have existing relationships with campaign services businesses that may not provide the best value to women candidates running grassroots campaigns.

Fourth, training provides needed skills. This includes the nuts and bolts of campaign targeting and message development, how to do an interview, and how to fundraise. As currently provided, only in a few cases does it recruit or strengthen the long-term pipeline. But training can also build political networks and mentorship, and provide a broader awareness of public policies that affect women.

Fifth, a number of women suggest that a more effective type of leadership development is extremely useful. These are the trainings that last a year or more and focus on developing leadership skills beyond the nuts and bolts campaign skills.

Six, there is a gap in providing training tailored to higher levels of office. A number of women mentioned that one gap they felt in running for higher offices is that they do not know Washington, D.C., and that they have no national-level political contacts:

*give us a campaign school in Washington, and invite us to go there. Subsidize it, so it doesn't cost us a fortune. ...there's a total feeling of isolation out here.* (older, over forty, state house candidate and local officeholder, Northeast)

Seventh, there is a need for new campaign training content. Part of this is communicating that politics is about relationships that need to be built. Declared candidates should not have to google to find their political party leaders or try to gain party support in the midst of their campaign, or be surprised about the conflicting nature of politics. New content about political skills and the nature of politics is needed:

*help women understand that politics is power, and get people interested in being involved in that, wanting to take part in that. I think our nature, women don't really like that type- - or are socialized to kind of shy away from those types of things.* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, Midwest, serving five years or less)

And eighth, it is important to have training that is tailored to the office, including training women to understand the wider array of executive offices that are available to them, as well as training them about how to plan for running for higher offices after serving in their current office. The request that training be tailored to the office comes from women who do not know what it is like to campaign for or serve at a different level of office. Surprisingly, women in the Achieving Parity Study seem unfamiliar with the range of other offices that they could run for beyond legislative positions and the top offices of Governor or Mayor. Interestingly, a greater proportion indicated an interest in running for Lt. Governor than were interested in Governor.

### 3. Grow Woman-to-Woman Mentorship and Sponsorship

While many women in the Achieving Parity Study did identify male mentors who had been extremely helpful, it is also clear that a significant part of the gap for women are the existing, informal male mentor relationships that primarily benefit men. Because elected officials who are also likely to be men are the largest single group of mentors, this means that women's opportunities for mentorship are limited, particularly given the role of the 'ol boys club in many areas.

Many women find little mentorship from other women elected officials and feel quite isolated:

*There's only ...one woman in our area that is really high up, and she won't bring anybody up with her. She just won't do it. And ...I get the same [party message]....you get this Old Guard and even my teacher who encouraged me to run, it was disappointing to really get to know him, because now he does a lot of that, "Well, why would you want to run? Why would you do that? Why would you-- it would mess up your family, it would mess up your future." And there's no encouragement. So it's hard. No mentorship for women either.*  
(younger, under forty, local officeholder, South, serving six to ten years)

*We go to these fancy women workshops and conferences, but how many mentors are we grabbing, how many people are we working with?* (younger, under forty, local officeholder, South, serving five years or less)

*I [had]... a huge mentor, my mother's friend was huge in getting me to run, and she had been in politics herself for several decades. And really gave me... the strength and just the support I needed to run. Because when I first ran it was so scary. And I ran for City Council before I became Mayor. And again, running for Mayor was really scary, and I needed that support. And that sort of level of comfort...like a blanket almost to be able to do it. And I don't think I could have made it without her.* (younger, under forty, local executive officeholder, South, serving five years or less)

Here is an example of both how one-on-one mentoring could work and the lack of experience that younger women have in being mentored. Both sides of the mentoring relationship must be learned:

*[A current woman U.S. Senator] asked to have a meeting with me. We sat down and she just said listen I've been watching you for the last two years, I've listened to you speak and I've seen you and she's like I really see you as a talented person, an up and comer. I want to be helpful to you. Let me know how I can be helpful. I want to lend my resources and my networks to you. ...for her to say what she said [was stunning] ...she gave me her personal cell phone number, her email and it's like listen I'm here. If you need me, here I am. So I haven't used her. I don't even know how to utilize that resource, frankly.*  
(younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)

The need for mentorship and sponsorship that is provided in an organized way was mentioned at all levels. It is needed not just for the first-time candidate. It is also needed for elected officials

already in office to gain credentials and produce accomplishments for higher offices. For this reason, mentoring should not be limited to peers, but should also involve those in higher offices mentoring those in lower offices. There may also be a special need for women elected officials to mentor their staff to encourage them to run for office. More education and structure are needed to help both the potential mentor and the potential mentee make the relationship a productive one. Even though both officials may be effective at their jobs, given their busy schedules, it is likely that a more structured and institutionally supported program could help launch productive mentor-mentee relationships resulting in encouraging more women to run for higher offices.

#### **4. Increase Public Awareness**

Expanding public awareness of women in leadership was mentioned by a number of study participants. The *Name It, Change It* campaign was mentioned for its excellent work with the media. But even more work is needed because, as the Achieving Parity Study reveals, there still remains considerable sexism and discrimination against elected women officials and women candidates that does not originate in the media. In fact, it comes from informal processes and the “buzz” among party leaders and other influential people – political intelligence that is shared with state, local and national political reporters, who then base their reporting on these conversations.

Thus there remains a considerable need for increased public awareness at multiple levels from citizens and voters to activists, party leaders, and elected officials. The goal is a cultural shift so that politics becomes much less based upon dated stereotypes and sexist behavior that is implicitly condoned today. It is important to realize that the women in this study who experience discrimination in their public office workplaces and in their political parties are in a difficult situation because they must continue to work with these same people. It is up to the women’s community rather than the elected official or candidate herself to develop and promote more appropriate social norms in the political arena.

Initiatives aimed at the general public can: 1) create more respect for women at all levels including women from diverse backgrounds; 2) illustrate how politics changes the lives of ordinary citizens and residents; and 3) show how political leaders serve the public. In particular, in addition to expanding the dominant leadership profile to include women of color and single women, this would include creating more public space for young women to enter politics at a leadership level while young, as well as providing greater opportunities for older women who enter politics as a second career.

Because of the perception and reality that politics is still a “man’s world,” study participants stress that politics and political leadership need to be made more attractive to girls so that they feel a part of it from a young age. It is noteworthy that two women in the Achieving Parity Study cited the visit of a woman Senator to their classroom as vital to their own aspiration to serve in public office. In addition, positive women role models need to become more visible for both women and girls. Ironically, this is a lack (an inability to name positive female role models) that some of the congressional staff members and young elected officials who participated in the study especially felt themselves.

Furthermore, politics needs to be seen as a viable career for young women. Certainly, structural aspects require change (e.g., the low salaries associated with many offices and the lesser level of support for outside employment found here for women elected officials as compared with male elected officials), but a perceptual shift is also necessary. The public awareness of this action step requires helping the public and young girls as well as public-serving young women to be more aware of elective office as a career choice alongside a profession. A major finding of this study is that women come to politics in more varied ways than do men, and nothing in this study suggests this is expected to change. Many women do not enter public service as a career, instead seeing it as the next step in their work around issues as activists. Nonetheless, there are career-like elements that involve learning skills specific to elective officeholding (executive and legislative skills) as well as electoral and campaign skills, and learning how to align one's personal life (family and professional occupation) with the ability to hold successive and higher offices.

Our study participants find politics and political careers to be quite different from their other career experiences, and many also cite discrimination and 'campaigning while female' as key problems. But it is also true that the public perception of political careers for women lags behind the reality and perceptions of women's changing roles in many other professions such as medicine and law. This, in turn, reflects dominant sexist, social norms that create reduced expectations for success at both the citizen and leadership levels. The Achieving Parity Study finds no evidence that women lack interest in (or "ambition" for) public service or elective office, but does find that the disdain for approaching politics as a career hinders women by delaying their initial campaign and by increasing the likelihood they will have to learn the ropes "on the job." But this is a learning curve that the study participants mastered, and they are enthusiastic about having more young women pursue their interests in public service. The costs of learning on the job, however, can often discourage or derail women in the pipeline. For this reason, greater public awareness of the career realities of elective office (prior to that first campaign), as well as acceptance of different routes to office among diverse women at different career points, lifestages, and from different backgrounds, would help expand the pipelines to women's elective officeholding. While women see politics first and foremost as public service, politics also needs to be seen as a rewarding profession that was formerly off limits to women, but that can be enormously gratifying as a life choice if public expectations encourage women to master the career-like elements early on:

*There are young men who are approximately my age, or a little older, or a little younger, who seem to get more [press]...they seem to get press a lot easier than some of the young women in politics. ...it seems like people expect young men to have politics as a career, a lifelong career, more so than they do women, who I don't know if that's just how the media sees it, or because women don't tend to pick politics as a career, no one expects them to. (younger, under forty, local executive officeholder, South, serving five years or less)*

## **5. Increase Understanding of the Complexities of Fundraising**

It is interesting that fundraising is only the fifth most mentioned recommendation for change. In part, this reflects the fact that fundraising is a challenge that may be out of the control of the women's community to wholly fix. Women candidates recognize that the women's community

cannot provide all of the funding and that women candidates, like other candidates, must fundraise from diverse sources.

Nevertheless, fundraising emerges as a much more complex problem than currently recognized. The Achieving Parity Study finds that women candidates face two distinct types of campaigns: the local, grassroots type of campaign that can be managed out of one's home without a professional fundraiser or finance director, and the campaign for higher offices that requires professionalized fundraising. Each type of campaign has different challenges, and some of those women who have mastered the first type of campaign and learned "how to ask" for support for lower level offices may still question whether making the leap to the rigors of professionalized fundraising and major donor networks is worth it to advance to higher offices.

One message for the women's community is that it needs to fund and support women candidates beyond the races perceived to be "viable." A number of participants mentioned that they feel that the women's funding community rarely provides truly "early" money, and that much more early money is needed to double the number of women in office.

Training can help with only one of the three aspects of effective fundraising for higher offices: learning how to ask. Women still need to develop personal relationships with major donors, and then develop a good donor, or call, list for raising funds for higher offices. Candidates can benefit from having relationships with sponsors, power brokers who can introduce them to moneyed connections and provide them with contacts. Women who are change candidates may find this more difficult, but developing national networks may be especially useful to them.

A major way that the women's community can help is to provide support for all women running for office regardless of perceived viability. Only this can address the pipeline gap and help women advance to more winnable races after a loss. This would also address the chicken-and-egg problem, which makes it difficult for new candidates to raise money because they haven't run successfully before, and it would also provide support to women who are change candidates.

## **6. Make Campaign Services Readily Available**

Achieving Parity Study participants believe that campaign support should be packaged in a way that is materially helpful. A "campaign-in-a-box" is typically thought of as a tool kit for developing messaging, targeting voters, perhaps providing access to discounted business services that are pre-tested and recommended and other forms of standard campaign support, but the Achieving Parity participants also suggested the need for support for other, distinctive needs that women candidates face in organizing their family life as they run for office on limited means:

*If there is a way to package support. And what I mean by 'support'-- and that can mean different things to different women. For me, I took a pay cut to become a state rep. And for a lot-- for certain women -- that is a barrier. For other women it could be the support that they need in the home to keep things going in their home while they are out on the campaign trail; and that support could come in a form of a nanny or a housekeeper, or someone to help their husband because he doesn't know how to braid hair and fry chicken. Or if there was a way to package support for what women need. Because we're*

*typically the ones that are taking care of the whole house, and when we're gone, things seem to fall apart. If there was a way to package that auxiliary or ancillary support that we need to run our households while we're out. I think that's the biggest barrier of women running for office.* (younger, under forty, local executive office, South, serving five years or less, prior state legislator)

While providing child care and household help would likely have to be highly individualized rather than one-size-fits-all, this suggestion should be explored further to see if costs such as these could routinely be considered routine campaign expenditures. The idea behind campaign-in-a-box is to stand behind women candidates and provide real support when they run. Many women in the study mentioned that they had received only rhetorical support from women's organizations, such as a mention in their newsletters. They suggest that an endorsement needs to be backed up by material help, providing labor for door-to-door campaigning and phone-banking and providing funds to women candidates, including those running at the local level.

## **7. Expand Recruitment Efforts**

Recruitment is something that the women's community is viewed as already doing well. Study participants suggest, however, that recruitment needs to be expanded to include arenas where women are already leaders and to go beyond that first office to include pipeline recruitment.

An under-tapped potential target group includes congressional (and state legislative) staff members and interns. Other suggestions offered include:

- Community organizers,
- Activists in the women's community,
- Existing women leaders in women's organizations (PTA, Jr. League, LWV),
- Women business owners,
- Stay-at-home mothers and women motivated to community action through their role as mothers (e.g., Moms Rising),
- Women attorneys - especially those running for judges,
- School board members,
- Local officeholders,
- Young women officeholders,
- Appointed officials, and
- Those pursuing second careers as well as first careers.

## **8. Explore Institutional Reforms**

There are three areas in which policy and institutional changes are recommended by study participants:

- Campaign Finance Reforms
- Political Party Reforms

- Gender Quotas

A few individuals cited public financing as one way to address the enormous demand for fund raising in races of higher offices and the bias against women who run as change candidates. Political party reforms were also mentioned as needed because of the systemic biases against women that result from the current informal structure of the party recruitment processes in which an “old boys” network tends to recruit candidates who seem like younger versions of themselves. In some states a single party “boss” can select women who will “go along” with the existing power structure rather than including women who reflect or represent their constituents and the community. Gender quotas are also suggested as one way to deal with the fact that every office opening has many more credible candidates vying for that office than there are opportunities for viable races and that the limited opportunities will go more often to men. With gender quotas, women might receive greater consideration by predominantly male party leaders and power brokers.

## 9. Create a Village among Women’s Organizations

Achieving Parity Study participants would like to see more coordination among women’s organizations working with candidates as well as more women’s organizations placing a higher priority on getting women elected and supporting them in office. This would be helpful in the very competitive political world faced by women candidates and elected officials:

*Their tracks of power are pretty bad so once you get all these women into office we'd better keep providing some support because there's it can be-- there are no rules to this game. It's a wide open wild west.* (older, over forty, U.S. congressional candidate, northeast)

The idea is to institutionalize a network:

*I think the framework is there in [my state] to really be able to elect a lot more women, but it's not strong enough yet. Kind of put together with toothpicks and Elmer's glue right now. And what we really need is maybe some steel and, you know, rivets and bolts or something. It's just not a real strong network yet. The foundation is kind of there.* (older, over forty, local officeholder, Midwest, serving five years or less)

There are a large number of women’s organizations working at all levels on many different issues. If they were better coordinated, their combined effort could be more effective in achieving policy and political change. All of the women’s organizations have an interest in electing more women to office as it is well-known that women are more likely to support legislation that addresses women’s needs. Women’s organizations working on many different issues often have some experience participating in coordinated get-out-the-vote drives, so encouraging them to make it a higher priority to support women candidates and office holders should be doable. A “women’s village” would have effective ways of coordinating activities and reaching into all states at the local, state district, and congressional district levels to provide material resources as needed. It would be both locally connected and nationally networked and help connect women leaders at all levels across the country. Such an umbrella group could develop strategies that would be shared by all women’s organizations, as several participants mentioned would be desirable.

## 10. Develop More Family-Friendly Policies

A number of Achieving Parity participants believe that more family-friendly policies are needed. Women in the Achieving Parity study have different approaches to combining public service and their family lives, and a range of different approaches will most likely continue for the foreseeable future. Some women will start their political careers early, as a “first” career, while others will “start” after their children are grown as a “second” career. These approaches to political careers are different but both are credible careers. And women (and men) at all ages have family care responsibilities. Indeed some adults have child care and elder care responsibilities at the same time:

*I did not start until my children were grown. So, you know, I'm not a young fresh face starting out, and I think when I leave this office, I will probably retire. (older, over forty, state legislator or senator, Northeast, serving eleven to fifteen years)*

Family-friendly policies can ease the burden for those who run with young children, and also perhaps encourage other women to think that they can combine a first political career with their desired approach to childrearing:

*If we could find a way to acknowledge that children...and I think that we would see the men using it as well...I mean, my young colleagues who have wives who have jobs and small children often have their little kids in tow with them so I think there is a way that we could just make that productive.” But, if a twenty-five year old is coming to me and is saying to me, ‘I’m envisioning myself in politics,’ when it’s a guy saying it, he is envisioning himself at twenty-six and she’s envisioning it after she gets married and has kids, and it’s just going to be so much harder for her than [him]. Not only is it going to be harder for her to run but it is going to be harder for her to get leadership positions. And so, you know, if we could figure how to break through the [issues of]... confidence and life planning. You know, one of the wonderful things about my job, and this is really worth noting, so I tell young women this all the time, the schedule is difficult but it is much less difficult than working in an inflexible job. This is a great job for a mom with young kids. (younger, under forty, state legislator or senator, South, serving five years or less)*

*I get home at like nine, 10 o'clock at night. If I were to have children-- I mean, ensuring that there's some kind of support around a young, growing family [is critical to recruiting and retaining women]. For example, here in the board of supervisors we don't have childcare... (younger, under forty, local officeholder, West, serving five years or less)*

Some of the strongest evidence that family-friendly policies along with higher pay can make a difference is the degree to which women attorneys are running not for elective public office, but for judgeships. As discussed at the outset, given that only about one in three attorneys are women, the fact that a similar proportion of state judges are women means that women find these offices quite attractive:

*The only thing women in [my state] seem to want to run for is judge, and there's a million women running for judge here, and maybe it's because there's a nice salary and it's a*

*nine to five, and it's a six year term. But I particularly never had any interest in sitting on the bench and being a judge. ...there's this very drastic difference between the number of women I see running for judge and how few women run for anything else. (older, over forty, local executive officeholder and former state legislator, South, serving six to ten years)*

## **Addendum: An Additional Issue to Consider**

Respondents identified one issue that might require further consideration.

### **Abortion**

The Achieving Parity Study did not inquire about policy or campaign issues surrounding abortion, or pro-life or pro-choice issues. This topic was raised by a number of participants at the end of the interview, however, when it was asked if there was something that the individual would like to add. Thus, the abortion issue was an occasional volunteered issue at the end of the interview when some women said that they felt that this issue needed a broader conversation in the women's movement.

Women reported that they often felt that they had to address this issue regardless of the office they were running for. Those study participants who raised this issue felt ill equipped to handle questions either from the media or from groups who had asked them to fill out candidate profiles. They felt ill prepared even if they were pro-choice

It is notable that most women who are issue-mobilized are not motivated primarily or solely by women's issues. Some women said that:

- The abortion litmus test for endorsement by pro-choice groups creates problems in terms of their ability to run competitively in conservative districts, even if they are pro-choice.
- Women candidates who are interested in advancing women's issues, but who have different or non-pro-choice views on abortion, feel excluded.

Since the question was not asked of all Achieving Parity Study participants (which is also a nonrandom sample), no conclusions can be drawn as to how widespread these perspectives are. Still, given that several of these experienced candidates and officeholders mentioned being unprepared, the need to address how to talk about the issue could be usefully included in candidate training classes.

## CONCLUSION

### Placing the Findings in a Larger Context

Women officeholders, candidates, and aspiring candidates have a wealth of knowledge based on their experiences that they are eager to share. They have advice for young women candidates, for women's groups working to recruit and support women officeholders, for political parties, and for policymakers. As documented in the last section, their advice can be translated into dozens of action steps for those concerned with increasing the number of women in elected office.

The conclusions and recommendations summarized here were developed by the authors through analysis of the information provided by the experienced candidates, office holders, and aspiring candidates who participated in in-depth interviews or focus groups. A total of 60 women participated in the Achieving Parity Study, conducted by researchers at the Institute for Women's Policy Research, with funding from the Hunt Alternatives Fund. In addition, findings from existing literature were also used in developing conclusions and recommendations.

Overall, the findings and recommendations presented in this report have the power to change the conversation about why women run or don't run for higher office. The conversation we are having is dominated by several key ideas that this study suggests are misleading if not wrong: that women have less ambition for holding office, that women need to be asked and recruited to run, that when they do run their experiences are similar to those of men, that families are a barrier, that women candidates are just as successful as men candidates at all levels of the political pipeline, that state legislative office can serve as the major pipeline for higher offices for women, and that discrimination against women candidates is no longer a factor.

The women interviewed report experiences and motivations that challenge every one of these key ideas. The women in this study describe overcoming incredible barriers to run for office and to serve in public office. Most were self-recruited. They do not have an ambition deficit. They are highly motivated. They describe long work days year round coupled with low pay, which requires them to hold part-time jobs on the side to make ends meet. They endure these conditions because of their commitment to public service and their belief that they can create meaningful change in people's everyday lives through holding political office. Women public servants also encounter sexual harassment and inappropriate sexual behavior toward themselves from their male colleagues, donors, and other political leaders.

The study participants describe campaigning-while-female, which exposes them to endless questioning about their qualifications, their appearance, and their families. They report that they experience discrimination, receiving less support from their political parties, smaller donations, and fewer opportunities to advance. They report a great deal of biased treatment by the media as well as by political leaders and their peers. Recruitment both for the first race and races for higher office is dominated by informal practices that cede a lot of power to the "good old boys," or, in some cases, the single party boss, who tend to want to recruit people like themselves (only younger). Women describe difficulties in fund raising due, often, to their lack of connection to moneyed powerbrokers. While it may be that women raise as much as men on average and are as likely to win their races as men are once nominated (and already possessing incumbent status

themselves), this phenomenon may not reflect barriers that exist at earlier stages in the process and also may be due to the fact that the women work harder on their campaigns than the men do and must overcome larger barriers to advance to the same level.

What is the conversation we should be having? We should be acknowledging that women build political careers and make strategic decisions about which offices to run for and which ones to pass up, or when to do either of those things. We should be asking what changes society and political parties can make to assure less biased outcomes and more equal opportunity so that the political career, like other professional careers, can truly be opened to women, and so that our democracy can truly represent the people's interests. We should be analyzing how and where the political pipeline is broken for women and working to repair and strengthen it. We should be rebuilding the farm team so that office holders can move up without worrying about who will replace them. We should be exploring what types of support the women's community can provide, not only in recruiting but also in mentoring, sponsoring, and supporting women politicians' long-term career development. We should be asking how the political career can become more family friendly. We should be encouraging young women to start their political careers early so they have more opportunities to rise higher.

One far-reaching conclusion emerging from the study is that women officeholders often feel isolated and that they want more connections with women at different levels of office holding and with national leaders. This would help them enormously in developing their political careers. They recognize the importance of women's organizations being able to act in consort. They see that if women's organizations were better coordinated, they could be more effective in supporting women candidates and officeholders. An effective women's umbrella organization would have to be locally connected and nationally networked so that it could deploy resources and bring them to bear at key points at all levels. In short, to double the numbers of women in elective office by 2022, women's organizations would have to place a higher priority on getting women elected as a way to achieve their goals for social change that benefits women. This change in priorities would require them to develop coordinated strategies.

The lessons learned from the Achieving Parity research can be grouped under five major headings.

## **Higher Office Holding is Different**

The considerations that women candidates and elected officials have in mind when considering running for higher office are distinctive and separate from an interest in politics or running for that first office. Study participants with campaign experience weigh factors differently in considering higher offices and identify different barriers. Those who are already officeholders, or are experienced candidates, have already resolved or partially resolved personal and family issues, have answered the "why me, now" question, and have built some political support and campaign organization. To make a decision to run for higher office, they report that they need to consider whether they prefer the federal level over the state and local levels or executive over legislative functions. They recognize the costs of competition are a magnitude higher and they are concerned about a more polarized, partisan political climate. They identify the biggest barrier as fundraising as well as personal financial considerations. Party organization and recruitment

barrier issues are ranked second. Perceptions of viability and campaign requirements come in third, while personal and family factors are the fourth most important barrier—in fact, the least important barrier identified.

The money and media environments for running for the Senate or the House have changed in recent years. With the advent of unlimited campaign contributions to independent groups as the result of the Supreme Court’s Citizens United decision in 2010, money can pour into a state from outside its borders. Candidates who do not have national networks of their own to draw upon cannot compete effectively, especially for state-wide and federal offices. Of course, public financing of campaigns and/or campaign finance reform that could meet the scrutiny of the Supreme Court could be an antidote to the fundraising burdens. Media opportunities have also vastly expanded. With the advent of blogging and social media, there are many more media outlets and considerable expertise must be devoted to each type of outreach and communication. While some new outlets present new earned media opportunities or relatively inexpensive advertising opportunities, others remain expensive or have increased in cost considerably. Participants also report that they perceive that the media scrutiny is many times greater for federal or statewide races than it typically is when running at the district or local level.

## **Campaign Training is Highly Valued**

Campaign training is highly valued, but primarily for the political skills that are learned rather than to provide the impetus or inspiration for running. Training should be expanded and enhanced to be more woman-centered to address campaigning-while-female, to provide a better understanding of how to work within political parties, to learn how to build women’s pipelines and leadership skills, and to assist women in developing national (for local candidates aspiring to higher office) or local networks (for congressional staff in Washington, DC) and to develop more peer-to-peer networks among women at all levels, but especially nationally, since changes in the political environment have increased the importance of national connections.

Fundraising barriers are significant. Some aspects of fundraising, like the “ask” can be relatively easily taught and reluctance overcome with training. But study participants report that most current training does not help them build connections to the power brokers, large donors in the party whose sponsorship can help a candidate enormously. What they need are introductions as well as strategic assessments of how they can build access to those important donors by expanding their current networks or developing new ones. Some of this skill-building may have to be done by partisan training organizations. Fundraising is only as successful as the list is good, and building the list through networking is key. Increasingly, for higher-level office, these networks must be national in scope.

## **Advice to Young Women is Critical**

Offering advice to young women is important because it promotes a career orientation. Experienced women candidates, state legislators, and other officeholders provide detailed, long-term, strategic advice for ambitious young women in their twenties that in its substance is quite

different from the trajectory that they themselves followed – which suggests the potential for a groundswell of interest in and support for new ways of recruiting and training women.

The costs of running for federal or higher level office have been raised, and it may require having a longer career to attain those high offices and candidates who think strategically from their very first race. The opportunity structure is cited as the most important factor by experienced women candidates (including officeholders) in deciding to run for any office and aspiring women candidates should be taught to assess the opportunities various offices present in relation to their own skills and abilities and their long-term goals. Developing a ten-year plan can be helpful. Participants report it is also critical for women to lay claim to potential offices early, even before they become open, so that local party leaders learn to regard women as serious candidates who are approaching elections strategically.

## **Running-While-Female and the Gendered Pipeline are Barriers**

Recruitment barriers are a major deterrent for women considering running for higher office. Women in the study report that the party apparatus is usually dominated by men, who typically recruit and mentor young men, and not young women, for higher office. The participants report having difficulty being considered seriously as candidates and they report less support of all kinds from their party than they perceive men getting. Both recruitment and support are organized informally by male-dominated party structures. Research on business enterprises shows that promotions are more equitable by race and gender when the process is formalized with review panels and oversight (Hegewisch, Deitch, and Murphy 2011). Political parties could adopt such formal procedures. Quota systems to ensure that a certain proportion of nominees is female, as is done in other countries, was mentioned as a useful aid by several participants.

Beginning with difficulties in recruitment, the political pipeline does not work the same way for women as it does for men. Women perceive that they are less likely to be mentored and groomed for higher office. They perceive that they are not offered the same opportunities men have (such as labor unions or business firms that support men financially while they engage in public service) to earn decent money on the side to help them support their families on what is often dismally low pay in state legislator positions. Women in the study perceive that the political pipeline is gendered and may even be broken, with significant gaps and barriers for women.

While the state legislature is a vaunted pipeline for congressional office it may serve women less well in that regard. Term limits have changed the game for some, and the lack of adequate pay and professionalism at most state legislatures may make it harder for women officeholders to remain in office without the supports that they perceive men typically have. Since women who work typically earn less than men, it is likely that female office holders in part-time legislatures earn less in their other employment than their male colleagues. This means women may be less able than men to devote themselves to building a political career. As the U.S. economy and society becomes ever more complex, it may be time for states to reevaluate their part-time, low paid legislatures and allow legislators to have the time and resources needed to grapple with today's challenging policy issues. While races for the better-paid legislative offices are typically more competitive and more costly, winning such a race (which would enable a woman to have a

sustainable political career) may also aid her in being more competitive for a national race, because she would be on a more equal footing with her male counterparts.

Women acknowledge that a successful political career requires that they combine work and family. Some state legislators report raising their babies in the capitol building; others rely on a supportive spouse or other family member; a few pointed out that women's typically greater role in family caregiving may make "her" absence harder on the family than "his." They recognize that a society that has more paid family leave and more subsidized childcare would create a more family-friendly environment for women officeholders. The timing of having and raising children remains an issue. Slightly more than half of the mothers in the study with campaign or office holding experience waited until their children were teenagers or adults to run their first campaign; more than one-third ran when their children were newborns to age 13; about one-tenth ran before they had children. But their advice to young women is to run early, before they have children. Moreover, study participants did not rank personal or family factors as particularly important (it ranked seventh) in deciding between running for higher or lower offices. It was the least important barrier to running for higher office, ranking fourth of four barriers identified.

## **Support by Women's Organizations is Key**

Whether organized in the state legislatures (or among other officeholders) or by women's groups outside the political structure, opportunities for women to work together and to be sponsored and mentored are key to credentialing women and positioning them to run for higher office. Women's caucuses in elected bodies, which have been eliminated or have declined in some state legislatures, are much-needed tools. Experienced women officeholders are in critical demand to sponsor and mentor women with less experience.

Elected women officials and experienced women candidates look to the women's community for leadership. While the local farm team is said to be graying in some states, in others, these women are creating state-level organizations to encourage women to run for local and state offices. But large gaps remain in developing national ties, strengthening the pipeline, and supporting elected women who have progressive ambitions for higher office holding.

Several participants were disappointed at the lack of support from women's organizations for their races, especially at the local and state district level. Just as the U.S. economy and society have changed in the past thirty years, so has the nature and the structure of the women's movement. The movement has become more specialized, more professionalized, and more fragmented. The number of large national women's groups with hundreds of local chapters powered by grassroots volunteers has markedly declined. Most adult women are now working for pay. While there are many women's organizations, the movement lacks an affective national infrastructure that reaches into states and congressional districts and that would allow the movement to coordinate its efforts to maximum effect. While specialized women's groups focused on recruitment and training are important to candidates, the entire women's movement must increase its involvement in more aspects of electoral politics to achieve as ambitious a goal as doubling the number of women in higher office by 2022 (Hartmann and Burk 2012).

The political career is lagging behind the progress made in integrating other formerly male professions like law and medicine. Equal opportunity in politics has not followed naturally from women's progress towards equality in other arenas. Progress in politics is slow and unlikely to speed up without major changes in society's thinking about what is necessary and how to achieve it.

One of the Achieving Parity Study participants who demonstrated a power orientation to her public service pointed out that "as women we can't believe in, you know, the magical gate keeper. We have to just – you have to just go after it." This statement encapsulates an important finding in this study that the major barriers now result from informal practices that are nevertheless established traditions in a number of different arenas: recruitment, fundraising, media, mentorship and sponsorship, appointed opportunities between candidacies, and leadership opportunities as officeholders. There is no single gatekeeper who keeps women out and there is no single gatekeeper who can open the door to women.

Some observers today say that women who see discrimination are just misperceiving the political environment – that if we just ask more women to run, and more women would take a chance, the declared candidate gap would be erased. The findings presented here paint a much more complex picture. Not only do women face tremendous barriers to getting elected that may dissuade women from their first race, once women have run a race, they may not remain in the candidate pool, because they do not receive the guidance and support that would enable them to do so (such as appointed offices or other leadership opportunities that would enable them to run again or to pay off their campaign debt). A focus on achieving gender parity in the political pipeline should be the first order of business for the women's community.

In this study women were asked, confidentially, to identify any barriers they face and to name and describe them in detail. The barriers described in this report crosscut political generations and are found in most of the study participants' states and in both political parties. The women in the study are successful political women with significant accomplishments who do not publicly name the sexual harassment, the barriers, or the problems of campaigning-while-female. Why do they not do so? Because they must continue to work with these same colleagues and powerbrokers on issues they care about. They have shared their stories here in the hope that this study will give voice to their stories.

## **Appendix A: Methodological Approach**

The Achieving Parity methods were developed by the IWPR research team in consultation with Hunt Alternatives Fund staff and their consultants and designed to be aligned with and complementary to other ongoing research projects commissioned by the Fund. Lake Research Partners and Chesapeake Beach Consulting conducted a random sample survey of state legislators just prior to the data collection in the IWPR study.

### **Data Collection in the Achieving Parity Project**

In formal terms, the Achieving Parity Study used a qualitative, mixed-methods, replicated research design with nationally recruited interview and focus group participants using a variety of methods.

Five focus groups were conducted between July and December 2012, each including between three and five participants. Two of focus groups, conducted by conference telephone call in December 2012, were with young elected officials; one focus group conducted in Washington, DC in December 2012 consisted of congressional staff members interested in running for office; and two were conducted with state legislators at the National Conference of State Legislators Conference held in Chicago in July 2012. The focus groups were designed to provide opportunity for in-depth discussion of specific topics of interest.

A total of 60 participants were interviewed or participated in focus groups or both. Interview data were collected from 45 participants. A total of 36 were administered the long-form interview (interview protocols are available upon request) and 9 participants were administered a brief interview. Of those receiving the brief interview, 6 participated in focus groups and 3 additional women who planned to attend a focus group did the brief interview but did not in fact attend any focus group. Long-form interviews generally lasted between 1.0 and 2.5 hours, while the brief interviews last 30-90 minutes.

There is intentional overlap in the types of questions posed to the focus group participants and in the interviews to permit comparison across methodologies and groups. A crosswalk of the types of questions can be found in Appendix Table 1.

All interviews used a partially structured protocol to permit comparison with some statistical characteristics and also allowed respondents to introduce their own frameworks for answering questions

The interview participants were selected from lists of candidates in recent elections and from list of candidates provided by various political organizations. It was essentially a snowball type of sample selection, assisted by research into public data sources to ensure that the interviewees represented a broad range of desirable characteristics (political party, demographic background, type of office held, geographic distribution, and so on). The sample was compiled through public data on elected women as well as recommendations from women endorsed by political organizations. The women represented past and present candidates as well as past, present, and aspiring political officials. There were some challenges in recruiting participants due to the high profile and busy nature of the subject pool of currently elected officials and candidates in an

election year, and use of congressional staff during an extended post-election budget session.

In a few cases, the interviews had to be done in two parts due to the length of the interview and schedule conflicts for the elected official.

All interviews were conducted between July 2012 and January 2013.

For one of the three state legislator focus groups only one person participated, and that was also true for one of the congressional staff focus groups. While in technical terms, this was more of an interview than a traditional focus group (the modality of data collection), we used the same protocol as was used in the focus group. For this reason, we reported the data as focus group data rather than interview data. While this may have reduced the added benefit of the focus group methodology (see below), we believe that fidelity to the protocol required us to report the data as focus group data. We do not believe that this affected the quality or integrity of the data collected.

Each participant, in both focus groups and interviews, was researched regarding their prior office holding experience, campaign experience, and other pertinent information. These qualitative and quantitative data were collected using public records, candidate websites, and online election resources, and include primary election results, campaign finances, notable controversies, and political endorsements. These data were used to draw parallels or contrasts between participants.

## **Confidentiality**

All participants in the Achieving Parity were promised confidentiality. They were told that all identifying information would be removed, in addition to their names, so that their responses could not be identified by state or by office. Additionally, all of the focus group participants were asked to keep all discussions confidential (all participants agreed). All participants were promised a copy of the final results, and the sponsors and purposes of the study were identified. The interviews and focus groups were recorded, but only after permission was granted by each interviewee or participant. This was done to encourage frank and open responses.

## **Protocols**

The interview and focus group protocols are available upon request. In addition, Appendix C provides a comparison of the Achieving Parity Study to the LRP/CBC Study.

As is true in qualitative research, especially with “elite” or high level participants, the goal is to respect the perspectives that they bring to the process. This meant that in some cases, respondents would ask questions that had not been asked yet, or else introduced a new topic that added to the data collection process. In some cases, the order of questions changed due to the discussions that occurred and in a few cases, some questions were skipped. Because this happens with qualitative research, it should be recognized that the type of rigor that occurs in quantitative research will differ in this type of research. Thus, the multiple focus groups were developed with some variations, and each interview was different.

## **Complementarity of the IWPR Achieving Parity Study with the Lake Research Partners Survey**

The LRP/CBC Survey of women state legislators included only women state legislators. This was done because women state legislators are considered to be the major pipeline of effective candidates for higher offices, such as U.S. Congress or Governor.

The Lake survey found low levels of interest in higher office holding and identified money and campaign finance as major barriers to electing women to higher offices. The Lake survey also found that women state legislators still see inequities in the political support and the electoral opportunities available to women candidates. These issues were explored further in the in-depth interviews and focus groups conducted by IWPR in the Achieving Parity study.

The Achieving Parity interview schedule includes some of the same questions asked in the Lake survey. A comparison of responses from the two studies can be found in Appendix B.

The Achieving Parity Project participants included a focus on women state legislators in two ways: as focus group participants and as interviewees.

In addition, the Achieving Parity pool of study participants was expanded in several ways by the IWPR Research team. The participants include young elected officials, experienced candidates who have run for the higher offices of interest to the Hunt Alternatives Fund (US House of Representatives and statewide elective office), and those who ran for or hold state and local legislative offices as well as the local executive offices (such as mayor). In addition, congressional staff members interested in running for office were invited to participate in focus groups. Since a fair number of current members of congress were formerly staff members, this group was considered representative of women who are well placed to run for office.

Demographically, the Achieving Parity participants have similar levels of education and similar marital status to those in the LRP/CBC Study. The Achieving Parity participants are somewhat more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity (only 60% are white or Caucasian compared to 82% in the LRP/CBC Study), which makes sense given the effort to include young elected officials who are demographically more diverse.

The Achieving Parity Project (by intention) skews much younger than the LRP/CBC sample. For example, 40 percent of the Achieving Parity participants are under age 45, compared to only 13 percent of the LRP/CBC sample, and 46 percent of the Achieving Parity participants are aged 55 years and older, compared to 61 percent of the LRP/CBC sample.

Overall, more than one in four (28 percent) Achieving Parity participants were current or former members of state senates and legislatures.

Comparatively, the Achieving Parity participants have relatively similar levels of office holding experience in their current office, but somewhat less intention to seek reelection to the same office (only 70 percent compared to 81 percent in the LRP/CBC Survey).

In terms of specific questions asked in both studies, compared to the LRP/CBC Survey of

Women State Legislators, the Achieving Parity participants have (see Appendix B):

- Considerably more interest in holding elective office at all levels, including higher offices<sup>8</sup>;
- Similar perceptions of how their party encourages men over women for higher office;
- Similar perceptions of male electoral advantage in running for office;
- Similar or higher claims of having mentors or a kitchen cabinet;
- A markedly lower level of expected party support at state and local levels<sup>9</sup>; and
- Similar amounts of national party support.

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<sup>8</sup> This is probably in large part due to the much younger age distribution in the Achieving Parity study, but it also reflects the somewhat different question wording used in the Achieving Parity study which includes possible or serious interest in holding offices (done in order to gain a better picture of how women construct political careers). While younger, the Achieving Parity participants have similar levels of office holding tenure and experience.

<sup>9</sup> We attribute this to the fact that state legislators (the sole component of the LRP/CBC) are often viewed as party leaders by virtue of their office, at least in their local and state party structures, while our sample also included first-time candidates who had never held any political office.

## Appendix Table 1

<b>Crosswalk of Achieving Parity Protocol Content</b>					
<b>Protocol Item or Topic</b>	<b>Interviews</b>		<b>Focus Groups</b>		
	Long	Brief	NCSL	YEO	Staff
Current and Previous Elective, Appointive and Political Party Office-holding	X	X			
Interest in Running for Specific Federal, State and Local Offices	X	X			
Initial Interest in Politics	X	X	X	X	
What Brought You to Public Service?	X	X	X	X	X
Time a Week Spent on Public Service	X	X			
Do You Have Any Political Mentors?	X			X	
Do You Have a Kitchen Cabinet?	X				
How Do You Identify Yourself Politically – Young or Female or Something Else?				X	
Do You Represent a Group in Politics? If So, What Group(s)?	X	X			
Do You Have a Career in Politics or Public Service?	X	X	X	X	
What Do You Mean by “Career”?	X	X			
Were You Asked to Run or Did You Run On Your Own?	X		X	X	
How Did You Pick Your First Office?				X	
Are You Interested in a Run for Higher Office?	X		X		X
Run on Issues vs. Changing the Way Government Works?	X		X		
Running or Holding Office at a Young Age – Advantage or Disadvantage?		X		X	
Any Personal Life Trade-Offs to Running for Office at a Young Age?				X	
Who Are Your Peer Groups?				X	
What Does it Take to Raise Lots of Money?			X		
Have You Raised Money and Solicited Donors?	X				

<b>Crosswalk of Achieving Parity Protocol Content</b>					
<b>Protocol Item or Topic</b>	<b>Interviews</b>		<b>Focus Groups</b>		
	Long	Brief	NCSL	YEO	Staff
What Is Big Money in Your State?	X				
What Is the Most Money You Have Raised?	X				
What Is the Biggest Barrier to You in Raising Money?	X				
Do You Have the Fundraising Skills You Need?			X		
Are You a Party Insider or Outsider?	X		X	X	
Are Men and Women Treated Equally by Your Party?	X		X	X	
What is the Women's Community to You?			X		
Has the Women's Community Been Helpful?			X		
How Do We Double the Number of Women in Public Office?	X	X	X		X
What Advice Do You Have for a Young Woman of 20?	X		X		
Do You Have Any Political Role Models (Male or Female)?				X	X
What Makes These Role Models Admirable – What Are Their Attributes?					X
What Are the Characteristics of the Ideal Candidate?					X
What Are the Advantages and Disadvantages for Staff Members Who Work on Capitol Hill Who Want to Run for Office?					X
What is Needed to Help Female Staff Member to Run for Office?					X
Current Elective and Appointive Office Holding	X	X			
Did You Take Training Before or After to Prepare for Campaigning for Office? Who Provided This Training and Was It Helpful?	X	X			
Job for Pay Outside of Current Elective Office?	X	X			
What Can Political Parties Do To Make You Successful?	X	X			
What Can Women's Organizations Do To Make You Successful?	X	X			
At What Point Can Women's Organizations Be Most Helpful – Before, During or After a Campaign?	X				
Electoral Advantage for Men vs. Women Candidates?	X	X			

<b>Crosswalk of Achieving Parity Protocol Content</b>					
<b>Protocol Item or Topic</b>	<b>Interviews</b>		<b>Focus Groups</b>		
	Long	Brief	NCSL	YEO	Staff
Does Your Party Encourage Men or Women More to Run for Office?	X				
Do Women Have Different Campaign Experiences From Men?	X				
Has Anyone in Your Party or a Power Broker Suggested You Run for Office?	X				
Would You Get Party Support in a Run for Higher Office?	X				
Is There a Pipeline to Political Office in Your State?	X				
What are the Factors Important to You in Deciding to Run for Office?	X				
What Are the Major Differences Between Higher vs. State or Local Offices?	X				
Did You Experience Discrimination or Fewer Resources Before Politics?	X				
Did You Experience Discrimination or Fewer Resources in Your Life In Politics?	X				
What are Your Strategies to Be Taken Seriously in Politics?	X				
What Are Your Major Personal Assets and Challenges in Politics?	X				
If You Are Attacked in Media, How Many Would Publicly Defend You?	X				
What is the Biggest Barrier to You in Running for Higher Office?	X				
If You Had to Drop Out of Political Activity Tomorrow, What Would You Miss?	X				
Political Views	X	X			
Demographics	X	X	***	***	***
<p>X indicates that a item was asked of the participants            *** indicates information that was added in part of in full later based on public records</p>					
<p>Long Interviews were conducted with experienced women candidates            Short interviews were conducted with YEOs (Young Elected Officials)            NCSL = Women State Legislators            YEO = Young Elected Officials            Staff = Congressional Staff or Aides</p>					

## Appendix B

### Profile of the Achieving Parity Study Participants

#### Initial Selection Criteria N=60

Candidate Experience	N=36
National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)	N=6
Young Elected Officials (YEOs)	N=13
Congressional Staff	N=5

#### Total Interviews N=45

Long-form Interviews	N=36
<i>Interviews range from 1 to 2 ½ Hours</i>	
Short-form Interviews	N=9
<i>Interviews range from 30 Minutes to 1 ½ Hours</i>	
[Three of these interviewees did not show to participate in YEO focus groups despite RSVPs]	

#### Total Participants Using Focus Group Protocols N=24

National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL)	N=6
Young Elected Officials (YEOs)	N=13
[Six of these also did short interviews]	
Congressional Staff	N=5

### Geographic and Other Relevant State-Level Selection Factors

#### Census Regions

Northeast	30.0%
Midwest	16.7%
South	26.7%
West	26.7%
(N=60)	

#### Representation of Women in State Legislatures

(Center for the American Woman and Politics Ranking)

Highest Quintile	24.1%
2 <sup>nd</sup> Quintile	22.4%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Quintile	20.7%
4 <sup>th</sup> Quintile	10.3%
Lowest Quintile	22.4%
(N=58)	

## Professionalization of State Legislature by Pay and Length of Session

(National Conference of State Legislatures Ranking)

Red (4 states – 80% time and earning around \$69,000)	34.5%
Red Light (6 states)	17.2%
White (23 states – 70% time and earning around \$35,000)	34.5%
Blue Light (11 states)	8.6%
Blue (6 states – 54% time and earning around \$16,000)	5.2%
	(N=58)

## Candidate, Office Holding and Office-Seeking Experience

Percent With Any Candidate Experience	92.3% (N=60)
Percent Who Have Ever Held Office	65.0% (N=60)
Percent Who Are Current Officeholders	61.7% (N=60)
Percent Officeholders Intending to Seek Reelection	70.4% (N=37)

59.3% will definitely or probably seek reelection; 11.1% will maybe seek reelection  
The others demonstrated other office-seeking interests; e.g., defeated in primary, seeking another office, retiring, or had temporary reasons such as relocating in order to attend school]

## Length of Time Holding Current Office (for Current Officeholders) (N=33)

Five years or less	45.5%
Six to ten years	27.3%
Eleven to Fifteen years	8.3%
Sixteen to Twenty years	3.0%
Over 20 years	5.0%

## Major Candidate and Office Holding Experience

Offices	Candidate Experience	Office Holding Experience
State House	31.6%	28.3%
U.S. House	13.4%	--0--
County Council, Board or Commission	8.3%	10.0%
City Council	8.3%	11.7%
School Board	8.3%	10.0%
State Senate	8.4%	6.7%
Mayor	5.0%	5.0%
City Comptroller or Treasurer	3.4%	3.4%
County Recorder	1.7%	1.7%
Neighborhood Advisory Commission	1.7%	1.7%
Lt. Governor	1.7%	--0--
<b>Other</b>		
Often recruited, but never ran	3.3%	
Interested, but no experience	5.0%	
Not interested	1.7%	
	(N=60)	(N=60)

## Recruitment Routes

### Type of Candidate and Office Holding Recruitment Route

#### Direct Campaign for First Office Held

33.5%	DIRECT TO LOCAL	
	Mayor	3.8%
	Direct to County Council, Board or Commission	7.6%
	1 later lost State Senate election bid	
	Direct to City Council	12.5%
	2 later ran unsuccessfully for State House	
	Direct to School Board	9.6%
30.8%	DIRECT TO STATE	
	First Time State House Candidate	13.0%
	Direct to State House	12.1%
	1 succeeded husband who resigned	
	State House to State Senate	3.8%
	Legislative Staff Member then direct to State Senate	1.9%
9.3%	DIRECT TO FEDERAL	
	First time Candidates U.S. House	9.3%

#### Upward Movement

5.7%	LOCAL TO STATE	
	County Recorder then to State House	1.9%
	Township Supervisor then to State House	1.9%
	Board of Education, State House	1.9%
	later unsuccessful run for Lt. Gov.	

#### Reverse (Downward) Movement

3.8%	STATE TO LOCAL	
	State House to Mayor	1.9%
	State House to City Treasurer	1.9%

#### Multiple Campaigns

7.6%	MULTIPLE CAMPAIGN ROUTE	
	Multiple unsuccessful campaigns, (7 races) elected	1.9%
	Multiple unsuccessful campaigns, never elected	5.7%
	U.S. House	3.8%
	Multiple offices	1.9%

#### Appointment Route

3.8%	APPOINTED TO OFFICE	
	1 City Comptroller subsequently ran	1.9%
	1 Attorney General did not run	1.9%

### Office Holding Interest

#### Percent Who Have Held, Ran For, or Have Interest in Office

U.S. House	68.2%
State House	68.2%
State Senate	68.2%
U.S. Senate	54.5%
City Council	52.3%

County Council	52.3%
Lt. Governor	45.5%
County Commission	38.6%
Mayor	36.4%
Governor	34.1%
School Board	29.5%
State Secretary of State	22.7%
County Executive	9.3%
State Treasurer	6.8%
County Sheriff	4.5%
State Secretary of Education/Public Instruction	4.5%
Federal Judge	2.3%
State Agricultural Commissioner	2.3%
State Auditor	2.3%
State Judge	2.3%
State Attorney General	-0-
Public Service Commission	-0-
U.S. Attorney	-0-

## Political Party and Political Self-Placement

### Political Party Membership

	Offices Ran For (N=60)	Interview Sample Only (N=36)
Democrat	61.7%	72.2%
Republican	20.0%	27.8%
Unknown/Nonpartisan	18.3%	N/A

### Percent Who Have Held a Political Party Office: 60.4% (N=48) Ranges from local precinct chair to local, state or federal committee member

#### Party Insider or Outside Self-Placement (N=35)

Party Insider	11.4%
Party Outsider	37.1%
A Little Bit of Both	34.3%
Previously Outside, Now Inside (vol.)	8.6%
Previously Inside, Now Outside (vol.)	5.7%
On Inside, But Still Feel Outside (vol.)	2.9%

#### Ideological Self-Placement

Very Liberal	31.1%
Somewhat Liberal	20.0%
Moderate	33.3%

Socially moderate or liberal; fiscally conservative	6.7%
Socially liberal, fiscal moderate	2.2%
Somewhat Conservative	6.7%
Very Conservative	-0-

### **Feminism Self-Placement**

Strong feminist	35.6%
Feminist	53.3%
Not a feminist	8.9%
Anti-feminist	-0-
Do not place myself on this scale	1.7%

## **Demographics**

### **Race and Ethnicity**

White or Caucasian	60.0%
African American or Black	21.8%
Hispanic or Latino	9.1%
Asian or Pacific Islander	3.6%
Biracial (volunteered)	2.4%
American (volunteered)	1.7%
	N=55

### **Age**

<b>Age of Respondents</b>	<b>Age When First Ran for First Office</b>	
18 to 35	14%	43.5%
36 to 45	26%	17.5%
46 to 55	18%	45.6%
56 to 65	22%	10.9%
66 and older	20%	0.0
	N=50	N=46

### **Education**

Some College or Associates Degree	14.3%
College Degree	33.9%
Graduate Work or Master's Degree	35.7%
Law Degree	14.3%
Doctorate Degree	1.8%
	(N=56)

### **Marriage and Family**

#### **Marital Status**

Married	60.0%
Unmarried with Partner	2.0%
Single	20.0%
Separated or Divorced	18.0%
	N=50

**Percent of Study Participants with Children: 64.0%**

**Number of Children for Those Participants with Children**

One Child	12.5%
Two Children	40.6%
Three Children	28.1%
Four Children	12.5%
Five Children	3.1%
Eight Children	3.1%
	N=27

**Timing of Children With Office-Seeking Activity for Those Participants With Children Election to First Office or First Campaign for Office (for those not elected)**

Ran Before Having Children	11.1%
Ran With Babies, Toddlers or Pre-School Children	22.2%
Ran with Elementary School or Pre-Teen Children	14.8%
Ran with Teenagers	18.6%
Ran with Adult Children, (20s and 30s)	33.3%

## Appendix C

### Comparison of Achieving Parity Study Non-Randomly Selected Participants to the Lake Research Partners (LRP) and Chesapeake Beach Consulting Random Survey of State Legislators on Selected Perceptual Questions of Gender Resources

Compared Questions	Achieving Parity Qualitative Study of Experienced Candidates	Lake Research Sample Survey of State Legislators
<b>Who Does Your Party Encourage to Run for Office?</b>		
Encourage Men More	44%	44%
Encourage Women More	--0--	3%
Equally Likely to Encourage Both Men and Women	33%	49%
Don't Know (volunteered)	5%	4%
Party Too Weak, Process Haphazard or Depends on Race (volunteered)	11.2%	--0--
<b>Who has Electoral Advantage?</b>		
Women Have Electoral Advantage	14%	18%
Men Have Electoral Advantage	53.5%	51%
Neither Has Advantage	18.6%	24%
Don't Know (volunteered)	4.7%	7%
Depends (volunteered)	9.3%	--0--
<b>Have Party Leaders Ever Suggested You Run for Higher Office?</b>		
Yes	48.6%	63%
No	51.4%	33%
Don't Know (volunteered)	--0--	4%
<b>Have Power Brokers Ever Suggested You Run for Higher Office?</b>		
Yes	29.4%	44%
No	70.6%	51%
Don't Know (volunteered)	--0--	5%

<b>Have You Had Political Mentors?</b>		
Yes	72.2%	70%
No	27.8%	27%
Don't Know (volunteered)	--0--	3%
<b>Have You Had a Kitchen Cabinet?</b>		
Yes	86.1%	71%
No	13.9%	28%
Don't Know (volunteered)	--0--	2%
<b>Would You Have Party Support in a Run for Higher Office?</b>		
Yes, local support	48.4%	59%
Yes, state support	34.5%	57%
Yes, national support	19.4%	22%
No party support at all	29.0%	4%
Depends (volunteered)	6.4%	26%
Don't Know (volunteered)	3.2%	9%

## Appendix D

### Advice to Young Women Planning a Run for Higher Office

<b>Personal Advice</b>	
	<b>Number of Mentions</b>
<b>Find your passion, know your own views heart on issues, be sure of yourself, keep integrity intact</b>	<b>14, 34.1% of cases</b>
Get some life experience before running	3, 7.3% of cases
Put down roots in community of your choosing (this matters)	3, 7.3% of cases
Tailor everything to that goal; Focus simultaneously on plan for office, cultivating friends donor networks, and expertise in a career	3, 7.3% of cases
Learn how to talk about and become knowledgeable on issues	2, 4.9% of cases
Know you are good enough, be persistent, don't dismay	2, 4.9% of cases
Must have family support, encourage running before family or after family	2, 4.9% of cases
Start now, expect failure, it is a long road	2, 4.9% of cases
Establish reputation as a hard worker	1, 2.4% of cases
Know what you bring to the table, have to offer as potential leader	1, 2.4% of cases
Time running with your other life plans	1, 2.4% of cases
Be prepared for a world with no privacy	1, 2.4% of cases
Learn how to shoot a gun	1, 2.4% of cases
Marry a millionaire or become one	1, 2.4% of cases
<b>Career Advice</b>	
<b>Get internship or job in state legislature or Congress</b>	<b>4, 9.8% of cases</b>
Build resume, get professional experience	3, 7.3% of cases
Choose career where you develop expertise and you know the subject well	2, 4.9% of cases
Choose career where you meet people	1, 2.4% of cases
Be as good as you can in your career, don't be on path to only run for office	1, 2.4% of cases
Go into office holding with a career, legislature is only part-time	1, 2.4% of cases

<b>Preparatory Steps</b>	
<b>Get involved in your party, in your local ward, cultivate party support</b>	<b>10, 24.4% of cases</b>
Get involved in campaigns	8, 19.5% of cases
Solve community problems, work on what matters in your community, take on a major project in your community	7, 17.1% of cases
Sit on committees and boards in your community	7, 17.1% of cases
Get involved in politics or advocacy campaigns	5, 12.2% of cases
Volunteer, get involved at the grassroots in community	4, 9.8% of cases
Get involved in civic organizations Chamber of Commerce, Rotary	4, 4.9% of cases
Write letters to editor, use social media to lead on issues	2, 4.9% of cases
Mobilize volunteers and get started	1, 2.4% of cases
Get involved in neighborhood organizations	1, 2.4% of cases
Go to township and school board meetings learn issues and constituencies	1, 2.4% of cases
Ensure connection with national networks, work to ensure that you get a good balance of national and local advisors	1, 2.4% of cases
<b>Laying the Groundwork</b>	
<b>Build community networks leverage relationships with community influentials</b>	<b>13, 31.7% of cases</b>
Learn how find raise money, gain help in building a "war chest"	6, 14.6% of cases
Build name recognition, own base of voters for an electoral voting constituency	4, 9.8% of cases
Know demographics for your district, develop plan; understand role of demographics and the impact of redistricting, supermajorities	2, 4.9% of cases
Help a women get elected	1, 2.4% of cases
<b>Preparing to Run/First Steps</b>	
<b>Prepare yourself, get training</b>	<b>7, 17.1% of cases</b>
Learn about state and local government and start local race, run state local first no lateral moves in politics anymore	5, 12.2% of cases
Build financial networks before running	4, 9.8% of cases

Learn about job different offices, decide what to run for	3, 7.3% of cases
Get advice from candidates officeholders	3, 7.3% of cases
Learn about different parts of the state	1, 2.4% of cases
Talk to women candidates	1, 2.4% of cases
Focus on strong issues, don't be narrowed by party agendas	1, 2.4% of cases

## Appendix E

### Protocols for Interviews and Focus Groups

### Achieving Parity Study

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NOTE: These protocols were used in a project conducted by the Institute for Women's Policy Research for the Hunt Alternatives Fund, for which Denise Baer served as consulting project director. The full text of the protocols, pages E1-32 of this report, are available as a separate document, *Appendix E, Building Women's Political Careers: Strengthening the Pipeline to Higher Office*, which can be downloaded at [www.iwpr.org](http://www.iwpr.org).

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