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## The Purpose of this Study



The Women's Fund of Greater Omaha's board of directors charged the Research Committee with implementing a ten year follow-up to the Women and Leadership Report conducted in 1996. The objectives of the 1996 study were:

- to determine the level of female participation in work force leadership positions in major corporations and organizations in the greater Omaha area.
- to determine the level of female participation in leadership positions in public and private decision-making entities in the greater Omaha area.
- to establish a community baseline of gender representation in work force leadership so that changes in representation could be measured and documented.
- to identify the social and psychological dimensions that contribute to the attainment of leadership roles.
- to describe various paths women have taken to successful leadership.

The 2006 Women and Leadership Research Report was designed to duplicate the methodology of the 1996 study. The shared objectives were to measure current female participation in work force leadership and compare what we found against the baselines established in the 1996 report. This study used a different methodology to explore the last two objectives of the 1996 study. Interviews were conducted with male and female leaders from corporate, health care, education and not-for-profit organizations in the community. The objective was to learn more about views of current leaders on women and leadership in Omaha, their understanding of the nature of leadership and the impact of gender on pathways to leadership.

The findings of this study will be used to establish the agenda for work being done by the Women's Fund to benefit women and girls, educate the community, and to act as a catalyst for change in the number of women in leadership positions.

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# Introduction

It has been ten years since the Women's Fund first published a ground breaking study that established a local baseline of corporate, political and community leadership. This report replicates much of the quantitative data from 1996 in an effort to measure change and adds a new dimension: 83 individual interviews to delve further into the personal aspects of leadership in Omaha. We believe this is the most comprehensive effort ever undertaken to examine leadership in our community.

## So What?

Leadership has many definitions and, in fact, later in this report the essential qualities of a leader are examined. But regardless of definition, what is rarely argued is the importance of leadership. Leaders get things done! Much of the progress documented in our community can be traced back to individuals who stepped up to tackle a problem or seize an opportunity.

So why look at leadership by gender? A pressing economic answer can be summarized in two words: **changing demographics**. Researchers with the Rand Corporation predict "the trend is for a shift toward a more balanced distribution by age, sex and race/ethnicity." Women will continue to be an important source of talent. According to the U.S. Department of Labor, women are projected to account for 51% of the increase in total labor force growth between 2004 and 2014.

National studies also indicate a clear shift in educational trends. During the past ten years women have been seeking to prepare themselves through education in even greater numbers. The New York Times (2006) reported women now make up 58% of the students in two and four-year colleges. Harvard's most recent entering class was 52% female. In fact, for every 50 girls:

- 53 boys are enrolled in elementary school
- 50 boys are enrolled in high school
- 48 boys graduate from high school
- 39 men enroll in college
- 37 men earn a bachelor's degree
- 31 men earn a master's degree



It seems this educational preparation has not transferred into real gains within leadership ranks for women. The General Accounting Office compiled data in 2002 examining the status of women in ten selected industries. The report concluded: "The majority of women managers were worse off, relative to men, in 2000 than they were in 1995."

Experts forecast a labor shortage and increased demand for human capital. Communities and businesses that provide opportunities to all segments of their population will be the most successful. Economist Joseph Cortright predicts "The U.S. is on the verge of a seismic shift in labor markets, and fault lines will emerge to threaten a city's economic future unless it succeeds in understanding and attracting the young, college-educated workers who propel today's knowledge-based economy." As noted above, increasingly those workers will be women. The Economist advises in a headline "The importance of sex - Forget China, India and the internet: economic growth is driven by women." The article goes on to suggest that governments should embrace the potential of women and use the "world's most under-utilized resource" because past GDP growth can be attributed to increases in female employment.

CEOs for Cities, a national non-partisan organization of mayors, corporate CEOs, and academic and civic leaders call educated women "the new mother lode" for cities. Carol Coletta, president and CEO of CEOs for Cities offers the following observation: "Today's 25 - to 34 - year-olds represent the first generation where women are measurably better educated than men. If I'm an urban leader serious about success, I'm going to spend a lot of energy making sure my city signals to women that they can find opportunity here. And I'm going to make sure my city delivers on that promise."

These few facts are part of the national picture. But what's happened locally?

***Women in Omaha have made limited progress in the leadership ranks, but barriers that were identified ten years ago still exist today.***

In many ways, we've learned what we already knew. Comparing this report to the one conducted in 1996, we observe many common threads that point to slow, if any, progress for women in Omaha.

## Leadership in Omaha - The Report Layout

This report examines the statistical picture first by reviewing results of a survey of individual women and their satisfaction in the workplace. The next section examines a survey of the corporate community. Both the individual and corporate surveys closely replicate the 1996 survey tool to allow for comparisons whenever possible. A scan of women participating in elective and appointive office is presented in the third section to complete the quantitative comparative analysis of women and leadership in Omaha between 1996 and 2006.

The last half of the report focuses on qualitative research - the 83 comprehensive interviews of male and female leaders in business, education, health care and the not-for-profit community. Hundreds of hours of data were condensed into six major themes. These themes are:

**Leaders share many qualities across gender, but there are still gender differences**

**Relationships make and break leaders**

**Becoming a leader does not happen by accident**

**A women's sense of self is critical to her leadership**

**Leaders recognize the challenges of balancing work and life**

**Leaders have concerns about the future**

The report concludes with a discussion of findings and recommendations. *Our hope is that this study becomes a launching pad for discussions and - most importantly - change for women within organizations and across the community*