



Wisconsin Women's Council

State of Wisconsin

1997-99 Biennial Report

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Introduction

The Wisconsin Women's Council, an independent state agency created in 1983, consists of fifteen appointed members: the Governor's designee; six public members appointed by the Governor; two public members appointed by the President of the Senate; two public members appointed by the Speaker of the Assembly; two members of the Senate and two members of the Assembly. Members serve two-year terms, and are not compensated for their service. The Wisconsin Women's Council is preceded by the Governor's Commission on the Status of Women, which existed from 1964 to 1979.

These fifteen Council members represent women from throughout Wisconsin, and vary by background, age, occupation and interests. State Senator Margaret Farrow serves as Council Chair.

1998-99 Biennium

Every organization with a long history benefits from periodic revitalization. The Wisconsin Women's Council is no exception.

1998 marked the Council's fifteenth year of existence, and brought about changes in Council membership and staff. After a period of quiescence, new staff was hired and a full slate of Council members was appointed by the fall of 1998. This revitalized group proceeded to review and update basic Council operating procedures and developed a strategic plan designed to guide Council activities in the coming years.

Members determined that the Council would make new efforts to broaden its reach to all Wisconsin women, through a variety of means. They decided to meet at least four times per year and focus activities outside of Madison whenever feasible and possible, utilizing new technologies. The Council is fulfilling this goal in 1999 by holding meetings in La Crosse and Milwaukee. Further, a website has been developed to provide additional information about the Wisconsin Women's Council, providing electronic information accessible from anywhere in the world. As the 1998-99 biennium closes, the Council continues to explore new ways to reach additional Wisconsin women. Outreach efforts continue as we lay the groundwork for future statewide initiatives.

Message From the Chair

During the past year, the Wisconsin Women's Council has undergone many positive changes, beginning with revitalization of the membership. The result is a strong, cooperative mix of old and new. Returning members provide a solid base upon which to plan future direction. New members bring fresh ideas and enthusiasm.

The Council welcomed a new Executive Director in 1998. She is doing an excellent job representing the Council in its efforts to enhance the ability of all Wisconsin women to participate fully in all aspects of life.

To signify the Council's rebirth, the bylaws and mission statement were updated to reflect a desire to encourage women to utilize tools that will empower them to take charge of their own lives. For example, the Council co-sponsored a series of financial seminars aimed at educating women how to successfully manage their money.

The dawn of a new century is upon us. The Wisconsin Women's Council is making a strong effort to help women embrace opportunities and achieve their goals. With the highest percentage of working women in the country, I believe the Wisconsin Women's Council is correct in addressing women's issues at the workplace and in the home. Our diverse membership creates a setting for healthy discussion and programs. I am honored to serve a Chair of the Council and look forward to the coming year of Council activities.

Executive Director's Message

The approaching end of the twentieth century is an appropriate time to reflect on the progress women have made throughout the last 100 years, commemorate women who went before us to advance our rights, and lay the groundwork upon which we can build future successes. As the twentieth century draws to a close, women have increasing opportunities to excel in any field of endeavor they choose.

1999 marks a century of progress for women in the United States and Wisconsin. At the beginning of this century women were not allowed to vote. In 1999, we not only vote but serve in elective office at all levels of government. A woman has run for Vice President of the United States, and the first woman from a major party has declared her candidacy for the office of President of the United States.

Throughout the twentieth century, the number of women lagged far behind their male counterparts in many professions. At the century's end, women's numbers in formerly male-dominated professions continue to grow. We are shattering the glass ceiling that has prevented women from ascending to the highest levels of employment. Nationally, over 9 *million* women-owned businesses employ over 27.5 million people.

This century began with women in 'new and improved' corsets. It closes with female athletes competing on almost every field of play, against teams from countries throughout the world. Professional women's leagues exist and prosper as women's sports become increasingly popular worldwide.

Today, girls and women enjoy unprecedented opportunities to succeed in any field of work or play. But there are still important goals to accomplish. We must continue efforts to provide opportunity for all. We must empower women to succeed through education and life-long learning. We must promote flexibility both in the workplace and at home to accommodate the many and varied responsibilities women undertake every day, including caregiver, mentor, role model, mother, provider, wife, friend, teacher and coach. We must ensure that society recognizes the lasting and vital contributions that women make at home, at work and at play.

Above all, we must continue efforts to ensure that women live full lives by reaching their potential – for the benefit of women, men and society as a whole.

Wisconsin Women's Council Members

- Public Members Appointed by the Governor:

Margaret Farrow, Chair, Room 106 South, State Capitol, Madison, WI 53702; 608/266-9174. Farrow is a state legislator representing the 33rd Senate District.

Mary Jo Baas, Vice Chair, 6 Bea Circle, Madison, WI 53716; 608/224-0231. Baas is a homemaker.

Donna Simmert Heon, 4891 Blueberry Road, Fredonia, WI 53021; 414/692-9518. Heon is co-owner of the Premier Ecole Pre-School Day Care Center.

Celeste Hoze, 5264 N. 83rd Street, Milwaukee, WI 53218; 414/263-8519. Hoze is a Business Team Supervisor for the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources in Milwaukee.

Ruth Jensen, 208 Hewett Street, Neillsville, WI 54456; 715/743-6613. Jensen is the owner of Search II, an agricultural and water resources consulting firm.

Sarah Kidd, 5330 Arapahoe Lane, Madison, WI 53704; 608/241-8877. Kidd is a homemaker.

- Governor's Designee:

Ave Bie, 610 N. Whitney Way, Madison, WI 53702; 608/267-7898. Bie Chairs the Wisconsin Public Service Commission, which regulates utilities operating within the state.

- Public Members Appointed by the Assembly Speaker:

E. Vanessa Jones, 4429 North Frederick Avenue, Milwaukee, WI 53211; 608/962-3731. Jones is an attorney specializing in employment law.

Deb Jordahl, 5 Raskin Circle, Madison, WI 53719; 608/827-0947. Jordahl is a homemaker and part-time consultant.

- Legislators Appointed by the Assembly Speaker:

Representative Bonnie Ladwig, 113 West, State Capitol, Madison, WI 53702; 608/266-9171. Ladwig is a state legislator representing the 63rd Assembly District.

Representative Joan Wade Spillner, 10 West, State Capitol, Madison, WI 53702; 608/266-7746. Spillner is a state legislator representing the 42nd Assembly District.

- Public Members Appointed by the Senate President:

Laurie Dies, Room 108 South, State Capitol, Madison, WI 53702; 608/266-5490. Dies is the Executive Assistant to State Senator Brian Rude.

Audrey Kader, 715 7th Street, La Crosse, WI 54601; 608/784-3817. Kader is a small business owner and local official.

- Legislators Appointed by the Senate Majority Leader:

Senator Mary Lazich, Room 304, 100 N. Hamilton St., Madison, WI 53703; 608/266-5400. Lazich is a state legislator representing the 28th Senate District.

Senator Carol Roessler, Room 403, 100 N. Hamilton St., Madison, WI 53703; 608/266-5300. Roessler is a state legislator representing the 18th Senate District.

Committee Overview

<p>Executive Committee</p>	<p>Members: Farrow, Margaret Baas, Mary Jo Bie, Ave Jones, Vanessa Roessler, Carol Mnuke, Katie</p>
<p>Issues Committees:</p>	<p>Members:</p>
<p><u>Economics:</u> -Tax policy -Stay-at-home spouse/caregiver issues, including IRA's, health insurance -Financial planning</p>	<p>Committee of the Whole</p>
<p><u>Health:</u> -Long term care redesign/elder care -Mental health insurance parity -Health care -Low-income health care -Domestic abuse</p>	<p>Kader, Audrey Ladwig, Bonnie Roessler, Carol Jensen, Ruth Jordahl, Deb</p>
<p><u>Workplace Issues:</u> -Workplace communication -Women in nontraditional employment -Rural Women: technology use, child safety -Glass Ceiling -Increasing the Number of women on boards, in public office and serving as judges -Employer child care issues</p>	<p>Bie, Ave Jones, Vanessa Dies, Laurie Hoze, Celeste Jensen, Ruth Kader, Audrey Lazich, Mary</p>
<p><u>Work/Family Balance:</u> -Child care: quality, tax subsidies, low-income subsidies, access -Parenting: fatherhood and motherhood initiatives -Barriers faced by stay-at-home spouses: lack of networking, isolation</p>	<p>Baas, Mary Jo Heon, Donna Dies, Laurie Jones, Vanessa Kidd, Sarah</p>
<p><u>Education:</u> -K-12 issues; charter schools -Educational environment -School-to-work -Apprenticeship -Retraining</p>	<p>Committee of the Whole</p>

Agency Information:

- Wisconsin Women's Council staff:

Executive Director:

Eileen DeGrand Mershart: 1992 – April, 1998

Katie Mnuk: July, 1998 - present

- Agency Budget: Fiscal Year 1998: \$88,900
 Fiscal Year 1999: \$88,900

- Required by Wisconsin Statutes s.230.215(4): Report on flexible-time work schedules, additional permanent part-time positions and other alternative work patterns: A flexible-time work schedule may be used by Executive staff when meetings or speeches occur in evenings or on weekends.

Agency Activities

The Council has conducted a number of activities since mid-1998.

In August, 1998, the Council reviewed its operating policies and procedures. Last examined in 1991, the Council's Policy Manual governs Council conduct and organizational structures.

The Council voted to make a number of changes to procedures:

Procedural and Policy Changes:

- Participation by Council members living outside of Madison was enhanced by adding a provision allowing members who participate in meetings through electronic means to also cast their votes via those electronic means;
- Council members were given specific input into Council-sponsored activities by making conference and co-sponsorship decisions the responsibility of the Executive Committee;
- Although the Council is still required to meet at least once per year, Council flexibility was increased by eliminating an overly-prescriptive annual meeting requirement;
- Language was added to the policy and procedures manual so that meetings conform to the provisions of the state's Open Meetings law;
- Meeting preparation and review time for members was increased by lengthening the lead time for distribution of meeting materials;
- Council hiring practices were modified to conform with state civil service laws and procedures; and
- Council self-determination was enhanced by replacing language requiring specific Council affiliations with general language specifying that Council members must vote to choose the groups with which the Council affiliates;

Strategic Plan:

In addition to procedural changes, in 1998 the Women's Council engaged in strategic planning designed to outline goals and define issues to shape the Council's activities in the coming years. This activity was undertaken to help gain perspective on the Council's past accomplishments, build a basis for teamwork and consensual decision-making amongst members, and to systematically plan Council activities for the future.

The resulting strategic plan is expansive and the issue areas identified by members are comprehensive. It identifies and communicates the Wisconsin Women's Council's mission, guiding principles, goals and priority issues for action over the coming years. The Council will work on aspects of each issue area simultaneously, although activities will be prioritized to address various issues over time, as resources allow.

In addition, new and emerging issues may require that some additional activities be undertaken by the Council; these activities will be determined by Council members and initiated on an ad hoc basis.

Mission Statement:

*The mission of the Wisconsin Women's Council is to enhance the ability of all Wisconsin women to participate fully in all aspects of life. **

** as defined by S. 16.01 of the Wisconsin statutes*

The Wisconsin Women's Council fulfills its mission through three key goals and objectives:

- Promoting public and private sector initiatives at all levels that empower women through education and opportunity;
- Providing a clearinghouse for information relating to women's issues and working cooperatively with related groups and organizations; and
- Promoting unique opportunities for partnerships and involvement to address issues impacting women.

Guiding principles

The Wisconsin Women's Council is a unique entity with an expansive charge. It is a statutory body intended to promote equity and address issues affecting women throughout the state of Wisconsin. Council members are public members or legislators, appointed to serve two-year terms. Because of the Council's unique charge and membership, no positions taken in any previous two-year period are interpreted as the position of the members of a subsequent Council.

The following Guiding Principles identify the concepts that govern Council activities and interactions with each other and the citizens we represent and serve.

- The Wisconsin Women's Council works as a team in an environment of mutual respect and recognition.
- The Wisconsin Women's Council strives to develop consensus when determining appropriate actions, utilizing innovative and effective tools and methods to conduct business.
- The Wisconsin Women's Council makes decisions based on facts and data, and promotes positive change.

Priority Issues

Through strategic planning, several comprehensive issues have been identified by Council members for action over the coming years. The Council will review these issue areas and may designate committees for more concentrated review and work. Committees will develop and fulfill their action plans according to the priority placed on specific issues by Council members.

Priority issue areas were determined by the Council during strategic planning. In the coming years, the Council will focus its efforts on the issues and the subcategories included under these topics. Time and staff limitations may mean that not all areas listed can be equally pursued within each two-year period. Further, new and emerging issues may require that some additional activities be undertaken by the Council; these activities will be determined by Council members and initiated on an ad hoc basis.

Economics

This topic broadly focuses on issues with financial impact on women. Specific topics identified under this issue include:

- Tax policy
- Stay-at-home spouse barriers
- Financial planning

Health Issues

This topic broadly encompasses various health care issues including, but not limited to:

- Long term care
- Mental health insurance
- Low income health care
- Domestic abuse

Workplace Issues

Workplace issues are generally defined as those issues impacting women working outside the home. Identified issues under this category include:

- Workplace communication
- Non-traditional employment
- Rural women's issues
- Glass ceiling
- Service in leadership roles
- Employer child care issues

Work/Family Balance

Work/family balance refers to the unique challenges faced by parents of children today. These include:

- Child care
- Parenting
- Barriers faced by caregiving spouses

Education

This area encompasses a variety of education issues, including primary, secondary and post-secondary topics:

- K-12 education
- School-to-Work programs
- Women's access to apprenticeships
- Retraining to improve women's economic standing

Administrative Activities:

World Wide Web Site

A major agency efficiency has been achieved through development of the Council's home page, accessible through the World Wide Web. This site increases Council visibility; provides access to information about the Council through a 'self-serve' venue available at all hours of the day; posts useful information and current events, thereby reducing the need for direct contact with Council staff; and reduces printing, production and mailing costs by making Council publications available on the web.

The web page also helps fulfill a key Council goal of providing a clearinghouse on information for women by linking to various other world wide web sites and providing a number of resources of use to women throughout the state, including:

- **A brief history of the Council**, a list of Council members and information on how they can be reached.
- **The Council's 1998 Strategic Plan**. The strategic plan outlines general goals for the Council and staff, guidelines for conduct of the Council, and summarizes issues that members may wish to pursue in the coming years.
- **Tips on getting an appointment**. In an effort to increase the number of women and minorities who participate in the public policy process, this section contains tips and guidelines to follow when seeking state-level appointments. Much of the information is useful for those pursuing local appointments, as well.
- **Upcoming events**. The web page contains a list of upcoming events occurring throughout Wisconsin, including conferences, speeches, classes and other activities, based on information submitted by organizations throughout the state.
- **A link to the State Legislature's home page** so that users can easily look up the status of state legislation of interest.
- **A list of distinguished women in Wisconsin's history**. In 1998, the Wisconsin State Assembly passed Assembly Joint Resolution 94 to honor several Wisconsin women, many of whom accomplished significant "firsts" in history. The complete text of the resolution passed by the State Assembly is included on the site, with links providing additional background on the life of each woman. While it's impossible to highlight every distinguished Wisconsin woman in this space, the individuals listed on the site serve as shining examples of our ability to achieve success throughout our lives.

- **Items of interest.** This section contains links to dozens of other websites yielding a variety of information including women's health and employment issues, girl's issues, sports, and family and parenting issues.
- **Information on how to conduct a used clothing drive.** The Women's Council, with significant contributions from members of Wisconsin Women in Government, Inc., assembled a helpful list of tips, options and best practices to aid local civic, professional and community-based groups conducting used clothing drives. This effort captures and shares knowledge gained over the course of several statewide efforts by Wisconsin Women in Government, Inc., and can be used to organize efforts designed to benefit local women.

Directory of Women's Organizations and Resources

Historically, the Wisconsin Women's Council produced a statewide directory listing women's organizations and resources, called the Directory of Wisconsin Women's Organizations and Resources. The last Directory was produced in 1994 and is now outdated.

The Council has received several requests for the publication, so a new version of the Directory is being compiled. Organizations have been consulted for new information and a database is being created. It is estimated that a 1999 edition of the Directory of Wisconsin Women's Organizations and Resources will be available in the coming months.

Programmatic Activities:

The Council has initiated programmatic activities related to its mission and the issues defined through strategic planning. These include:

-Long Term Care Roundtable Discussion

Conducted in La Crosse, Wisconsin in May, 1999, this meeting brought together Women's Council members, state agency staff responsible for administering long term care programs and representatives from the La Crosse community, including local government providers as well as private-sector providers and staff.

Council members toured two long term care facilities, one owned by the county and one privately held. Afterwards the Council reviewed provisions of the state's proposed Family Care Program with Department of Health and Family Services Secretary Joe Lekan, and discussed long term care insurance provisions with State Insurance Commissioner Connie O'Connell's staff. The Council finished its day by holding a dialogue on long term care issues with state agency representatives, members of the audience, county agency representatives, and direct care providers.

A multitude of issues were raised for Council consideration, including:

- Specific implementation and resource issues related to the proposed state Family Care program;
- Types of long term care insurance available in Wisconsin and the need to purchase such insurance;
- The desire that the proposed Family Care program succeed in expanding available services to cover those not currently served;
- The need for all citizens to develop plans to pay for the costs of long term care. It was noted that too many people believe that their needs will be covered by Medicare, when individuals are responsible for planning for their future health needs.
- The need to address high employee turnover within the health care industry, possibly by providing creative incentives for employees. This could include additional employee training, possibly linked to LPN or RN certification.
- The costs of advanced training programs for long term caregivers: many employees cannot afford to pay for the classes that will lead to their LPN or RN degrees.
- The need to encourage vocational schools to be responsive to the training needs of the local long term care employers and employees: many providers are forced to conduct their own training because these classes and programs are not universally available.

Council members are taking these issues into consideration when planning future projects and activities.

-Financial Education Seminars

The statistics are startling: over two thirds of the nation's four million elderly poor are women. Eighty percent of women experience financial jeopardy through widowhood or divorce. It's estimated that one-third to two-thirds of women currently aged 35-55 will be impoverished by age 70.

Women can capably manage financial matters, but many simply have not had the opportunity to gain the skills they need. To address this issue, the Wisconsin Women's Council and the Wisconsin Department of Financial Institutions, with assistance from local women's groups, collaborated to sponsor a series of free financial education seminars in Madison in the fall of 1999.

The seminars covered financial topics including: Understanding Credit; Personal Finance; and Investment Basics and Retirement Planning. Each session was held at a public school located centrally in Madison offering plenty of free parking and accessibility via the bus line.

Response to these sessions from women in the Madison area was overwhelmingly positive. In fact, so many people wanted to attend the sessions that a waiting list was formed. Council members will thoroughly review and evaluate these sessions to determine whether the content adequately addressed the needs of Wisconsin women, if additional issues should be added, and whether the sessions provided valuable information to the intended audience.

After carefully reviewing these issues, the Women's Council and Department of Financial Institutions will consider utilizing new technology to expand this effort to reach women throughout the state, possibly through videoconferencing or educational teleconferencing networks. Various women's groups from throughout the state will be contacted to provide outreach to their members regarding this effort in order to reach as many women as possible.

-Used Clothing Drive Guidelines

Wisconsin has led the nation in promoting self-sufficiency through work. This principle has resulted in implementation of the W-2 welfare reform program, which requires former recipients of Aid to Families with Dependent Children (AFDC) to work in order to receive benefits and support services.

As a result, many women are working outside their homes after prolonged absence from the workplace, and may not have the appropriate attire. These women, facing a variety of economic pressures as they struggle to improve their lives, need

affordable clothing suitable for work. That need generated the idea of collating and disseminating a compendium of tips on how to conduct used clothing drives. The Council solicited input from members of Wisconsin Women in Government, Inc., which has conducted several of these events with great success.

The guidelines are aimed at local civic, professional and service groups that wish to conduct efforts locally to help women within their community. The information is currently included on the Council's website so that it can be accessed remotely, and the Council is exploring the possibility of printing the material for direct distribution to local groups.

-W-2 Mentoring Project

Through the course of discussion surrounding the state's W-2 program, Council members began discussing ways in which the Council might work to enhance participants' experience in the program. Currently, the Executive Director is exploring the possibility of developing a partnership to create a W-2 mentoring program that would match local professional women with women in W-2.

Such a partnership would be designed to capitalize on the experience and expertise of professional women within the community by creating a system through which volunteer mentors would provide support to W-2 participants, who may be less familiar with expectations in the workplace and the skills needed to balance work and family. Ultimately, the project could foster a sustained community partnership between women active in local professional organizations, W-2 participants and local agencies. The Council's intent is to design a blueprint so that such a program could be replicated in communities throughout Wisconsin, as need dictates.

Potential partners are reviewing program proposals. The Council will continue to explore the viability and feasibility of this project with local partners, with the understanding that program goals and scope may be adjusted based on recommendations of community partners.

Conferences, Special Events and Activities:

In addition to speeches given by Executive Director Katie Mruk to various groups ranging from the Business & Professional Women of Madison to the UW-Madison Child and Family Studies class, the Executive Director represents the Council in a variety of activities:

-Governor's Glass Ceiling Commission

Serves as a liaison to Glass Ceiling Commission; helped plan 1999 Governor's Diamond Awards luncheon and ceremony.

-Wisconsin Women's Business Initiatives Corporation

Serves on a Madison Advisory Committee responsible for local oversight of a lending and education program aimed at assisting women and low income individuals in succeeding at running their own small business.

-Meeting with Dr. Wanjiku Mukabi Kabira, Coordinator, Kenya Women's Political Caucus

Sponsored by the International Institute of Wisconsin, this meeting between Dr. Kabira and the Women's Council was designed to foster cross-cultural understanding of women's issues and how they differ between the United States and Kenya, and to combat isolationism.

-Transportation Alliance for New Solutions (TrANS) Advisory Committee

Served on a committee advising TrANS program, which provides training, counseling and employment placement for women and minorities in non-traditional road construction occupations.

-Americans Discuss Social Security

Participated in a national forum held in 11 cities across the county to stimulate discussion of various proposals to modify the federal Social Security system.

-Sister to Sister Summit

Served as a focus panel member at a statewide summit co-sponsored by the Johnson Foundation, the American Association of University Women and the Girl Scouts of Wisconsin, designed to give seventh and eighth grade girls an opportunity to discuss issues central to learning but not addressed in school curricula.

-Wisconsin Fatherhood Initiative Summit

Participated in a statewide summit to promote responsible fatherhood in Wisconsin by building local community activities and programs aimed at connecting fathers with their children in a positive manner.

-Take our Child to Work Day

In 1999, the Women's Council voted to support efforts aimed at educating all children about the workplace and the roles women play in it, both as employees and supervisors.

-Business-to-Business: Innovative Child Care Options & Other Family Friendly Trends

Attended a conference sponsored by the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and Wisconsin Manufacturers and Commerce designed to explore and perpetuate new and innovate child care policy and practices in Wisconsin.

-13th Annual Women in Poverty Conference

Attended a conference focusing on women's employment issues, child care, domestic violence, women and children's health, self-sufficiency, welfare reform and poverty.

-Chair, Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Pregnancy Services Board

As Executive Director of the Women's Council, Mruk continues to Chair the Adolescent Pregnancy Prevention and Pregnancy Services Board, which provides grants to local programs aimed at reducing the number of adolescent pregnancies in Wisconsin.