



## Addressing the Need for Representation in Public Sector Boards and Commissions

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Boards and commissions at the state and local levels play an important representative role in communities. Publicly available demographic data for public appointees is important for two key reasons: first, to ensure that public boards and commissions represent the communities they serve, and second, to hold those appointing board and commission members accountable. However, it is not always possible to determine the representativeness of boards and commissions due to the lack of data on the demographics of appointees.

While there have been improvements regarding the inclusion of diverse identities in boards and commissions, the lack of public demographic information for state and local entities remains problematic. To address this issue, more demographic data should be collected and made publicly available to make this piece of the electoral puzzle more transparent. Decision-makers appointing board and commission members should also make efforts to appoint members representative of their communities.

### Why Demographic Data for Appointees is Important

Appointees of public boards and commissions should reflect the racial, ethnic, socioeconomic, gender, and other identities of the communities served. Diversity in public entities is **key for bringing attention to issues** that specifically or disproportionately impact historically underrepresented identities. Having appointees from these groups increases the likelihood that public entities address those issues.

Representation in boards and commissions is important, but it is not always clear in practice if the appointees to these entities are representative of the communities they serve. For instance, the **New York City Commission on Gender Equity** states that the commission members represent the community they serve, but it does not collect demographic data on commission members. While New York does not have a mandatory reporting statute for boards and commissions regarding the demographics of appointees, other states do. **Connecticut**, for example, requires that all state boards, committees, commissions, and councils with at least one member appointed by the Governor or General Assembly report the gender and racial compositions of membership. Despite this requirement, there are still gaps in data collection as the **mandatory survey** only had a 79% response rate from qualifying entities. Across the United States and despite efforts in some states or cities, there still needs to be more publicly available demographic information on board and commission appointees.

### Policy & Practice Recommendations for Data Collection

To ensure boards and commissions are representative, there is a need for new policies and practices regarding data collection, including mandates and publicly available databases and reports. Mandates for demographic data collection for state and local entities can ensure that there is data available; but as the mandate in [Connecticut demonstrates](#), these policies are not always effective at getting comprehensive data.

In addition to creating mandates, there must be [investment in expertise by state and local governments](#) to monitor data collection to ensure the mandates are effective in increasing the collection of accurate demographic data. Once the data is collected, it is key for those appointing board and commission members to publish the collected data in [annual reports](#). Such reports should include details about the current demographic composition of boards and commissions, along with historical trends. [Reports on demographic data](#) will provide state and local government decision-makers with opportunities to demonstrate the representativeness of appointees and any progress that has been made.

There is also a need for [publicly accessible databases](#) containing public appointee data. These databases would enable independent researchers, community members, and other individual groups to [analyze raw data](#) and assess the representativeness of boards and commissions. Such research can identify where there are [issues with data collection](#) by state and local governments. Additionally, independent [research can evaluate mandates and data collection practices](#) around the United States and offer suggestions for what data collection practices are most effective, as well as highlight where comprehensive data collection has led to better representation in state and local entities.

Accurate demographic data for board and commission appointees, increased availability of that data, and more independent research can hold boards and commissions accountable for promises of representative appointees. This will ensure that the boards and commissions at the state and local level represent their communities, positioning them to address the issues that uniquely [impact marginalized communities](#) more effectively. Ultimately, representation in local boards and commissions is essential to address community issues and deserves more attention by policymakers and researchers.