Diversity Dashboard: Gender and Race in Local Government Leadership
April 27, 2017

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MPA 721: Public Policy Analysis

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Acknowledgements

First and foremost, we would like to thank Dr. Karl Nollenberger for providing a great opportunity to the Masters in Public Administration students to compile data for this diversity dashboard project. Further, we would like to thank Gail Sumi**,** Member Engagement and Communications Director at the League of Wisconsin Municipalities for partnering with us to collect data of local government leaders in Wisconsin. We would also like to thank Kirsten Wyatt, Executive Director of Engaging Local Government Leaders for developing the idea for this data collection project and for connecting us to students from the Masters of Public Administration program at the University of North Carolina - Chapel Hill who worked on a diversity dashboard project.

Introduction

The subject of minority and cultural diversity has always been an important topic of discussion in the United States of America. Since the 1960s, there have been political movements in favor of racial integration seeking equality educational opportunities and employment for all. By the end of 1960s the affirmative action plan was passed providing equal employment for all. With the growing diversity of labor force and competitiveness in current scenario, management of cultural diversity is an organizational answer.

Management of diversity implies a holistic approach in order to create an organizational environment that allows all employees to reach their full potential in pursuing company goals. The basic idea behind the management of cultural diversity is to plan and implement organizational systems and practices to manage people so that potential advantages of diversity are maximized and disadvantages are minimized.

Diversity of labor force is defined in several dimensions including but not limited to gender, age, education, religion, abilities, ethnic groups, origin, breed and language. Thus, diversity is a broad term, which not only includes gender and race but also ethnic groups and includes studies on different perspectives - societal level, organizational level, and group or individual level.

Considering the importance of diversity management in organizations, in this project, we will work on collecting data on gender and race in local governments in the state of Wisconsin. The procedure involved an indirect way of collecting data from local government leaders. This included data collection through an online survey sent out by our liaison Gail Sumi who is the Member Engagement and Communication Director at the League of Wisconsin Municipalities.

The data was collected for 15 days and then compiled by our group. The data for gender diversity and racial diversity was collected for Wisconsin cities and villages. The results showed high white male diversity in the state.

The results did help us get a first impression of diversity in the local government in Wisconsin, but due to the short period outlined for the project we were not able to collect enough data and will discuss some of the limitations of the project. Overall, this project does generate a way forward for future students to generate more substantial data.

Background

Engaging Local Government Leaders (ELGL), a nationwide local government professional association, is working on an initiative, Diversity Dashboard, to standardize a method in which local government diversity is tracked. The goal is to establish an accurate nationwide database that would measure the diversity in local government leadership, across the nation. Currently, leadership in local government is not being tracked and there is no true way to test if there is race and gender diversity within local government.

This causes serious issues, because local governments do not always depict the communities they serve. As a result, adherence and communication is lost between both parties. Significant amounts of cooperation needed from local communities' decreases, as such circumstances arise. Thus, making local government powerless, as the left and right arm are not on one accord. This causes more concern, because those that are ultimately impacted by such disconnections are women and people of color as they are not being represented in a fair manner.

As a result, when local government leaders and communities are not on the same page, this allows for not only some disconnect, but also reduces the production and efficiency of service that the local government is trying to administer.

Problem Statement

Currently, state-level qualitative and quantitative data are not being collected for race and gender in local government leadership in the United States of America.

Definitions

A. **Local Government:** Local government is defined as an administrative body for a small geographic area, such as a city, town, county, or state. A local government typically has control over their specific geographical region, and cannot pass or enforce laws that will affect a wider area. Local governments can elect officials, enact taxes, and do many other things that a national government would do but on a smaller scale.

In the United States, local governments refer to the governmental jurisdictions below the level of the state. Most states have at least two tiers of local governments (i.e. counties and municipalities). In some states, counties are divided into townships. There are several different types of jurisdictions at the municipal level, including the city, town, borough and village. The types and nature of these municipal entities varies from state to state.

B. **Diversity**: Diversity means understanding that each individual is unique and recognizing our individual differences. Its concept includes acceptance and respect. These differences can be along the dimensions of race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, socio-economic status, age, physical abilities, religious beliefs, political beliefs, or other ideologies. It is the exploration of these differences in a safe, positive, and nurturing environment. It is about understanding each other and moving beyond simple tolerance to embracing and celebrating the rich dimensions of diversity contained within each individual.

C. **Local Government Leadership**: Local governments generally include two tiers: counties and municipalities, or towns/cities. Municipalities can be structured in many ways, as defined

by the state constitutions, and are called, variously, townships, villages, boroughs, cities, or towns. Various kinds of districts also provide functions in local government outside county or municipal boundaries, such as school districts or fire protection districts.

Municipalities generally take responsibility for parks and recreation services, police and fire departments, housing services, emergency medical services, municipal courts, transportation services (including public transportation), and public works (streets, sewers, snow removal, signage, and so forth).

Whereas the federal government and state governments share power in countless ways, a local government must be granted power by the state. In general, mayors, city councils, and other governing bodies are directly elected by the people.

Therefore, Wisconsin's state government is committed to becoming a leader in management and leadership development. This will help managers and supervisors to contribute to stronger skill sets and be more effective in developing future talent for their organizations.

The administrative divisions of Wisconsin include counties, cities, villages, and towns. These are all units of general purpose local government. Whether a municipality is a city, village or town is not strictly dependent on the community's population or area, but on the form of government selected by the residents and approved by the Wisconsin state Legislature. Cities and villages can overlap county boundaries.

a. **County:** It is the primary political subdivision of Wisconsin. Every county has a county seat, often a populous or centrally located city or village, where the government offices for the county are located. Within each county are cities, villages, and towns. As of 2016, Wisconsin has 72 counties.

b.   City: In Wisconsin, a city is defined as an autonomous incorporated area within one or more counties. It provides almost all services to its residents and has the highest degree of home rule and taxing jurisdictions of all municipalities. Cities are generally more urbanized than towns.

c.   Village: In Wisconsin, a village is an autonomous incorporated area within one or more counties. It provides various services to its residents and has a degree of home rule and taxing jurisdiction over them. As of 2015, Wisconsin has 407 villages.

Villages are governed by a Village President and a Board of Trustees. Village officers include a president, clerk, treasurer, and assessor. Villages may also elect to hire a village manager to oversee day-to-day operations instead of an elected village president.

d.   Town: In Wisconsin, a town is an unincorporated within a county; Wisconsin towns are similar to civil townships in other states. All areas in the state that have not been incorporated as cities or villages are parts of towns. Towns provide a limited number of services to their residents.

Data Collection Process

An online survey was created and sent out to three different organizations in order to collect data on race and gender among the top two positions in local government leadership in Wisconsin cities, villages, towns, and counties. The survey was sent out to three different organizations in the state of Wisconsin: The League of Wisconsin Municipalities, the Wisconsin Towns Association, and the Wisconsin Counties Association. Contact information for individuals was not shared with us directly as to protect privacy. We sent the survey out through our contact for this project, Gail Sumi. Gail is the Member Engagement and Communication Director at the League of Wisconsin Municipalities. Through Gail's connection at the Wisconsin Towns Association and Wisconsin Counties Association, she was able to send the survey on through her

colleagues in order for us to use the online survey to collect data. The survey was sent on March 31, 2017 and was open for responses until April 14, 2017. The survey asked the following questions:

- Name of Municipality*
- Type of Organization*
    - City
    - County
    - Town
    - Village
- Population
- Name of County or Counties in which your organization is located? *
- First Name*
- Last Name*
- Title*
- Phone Number
- Email
- Gender*
    - Male
    - Female
    - Other _____
- Race*
    - White
    - Black or African American
    - American Indian or Alaska Native
    - Asian
    - Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
    - Other _____

"*" symbolizes a required question

Data Collection Results
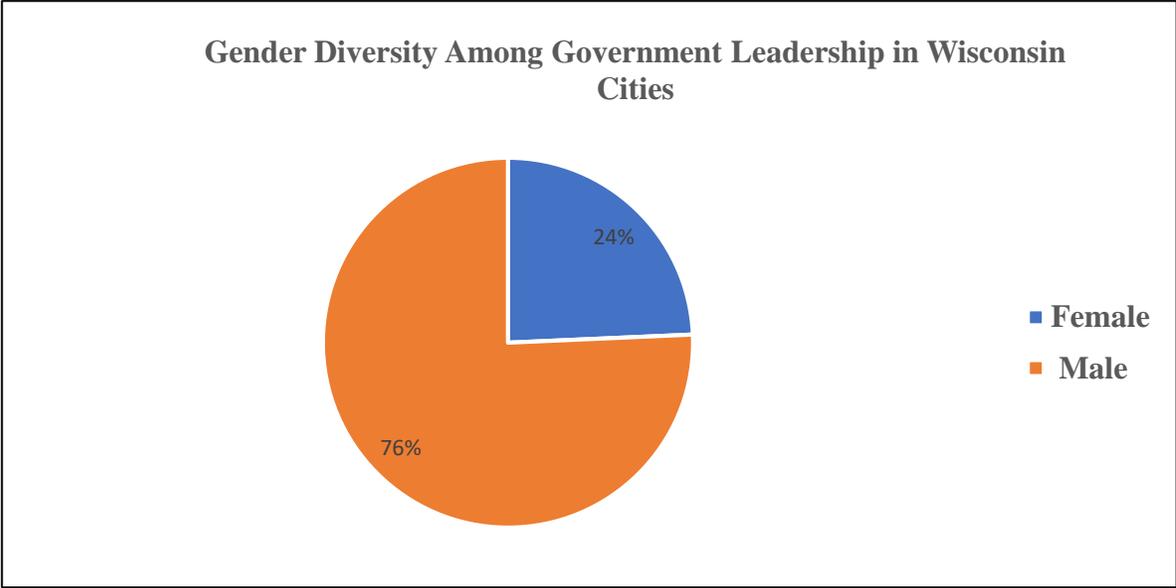
1. Wisconsin Cities:

Figure 1: Gender Diversity in Wisconsin Cities

We had 70 individuals complete the survey who identified themselves as government leadership in Wisconsin cities. Of these respondents, 76% were male and 24% were female (Fig. 1). The racial diversity data among the leadership in Wisconsin cities showed 96% identified as "White", 1% identified as "Asian", 1% identified as "American Indian/Alaska Native" and 2% identified as some other race or "Other" (Fig. 2).

Racial Diversity Among Government Leadership in Wisconsin Cities

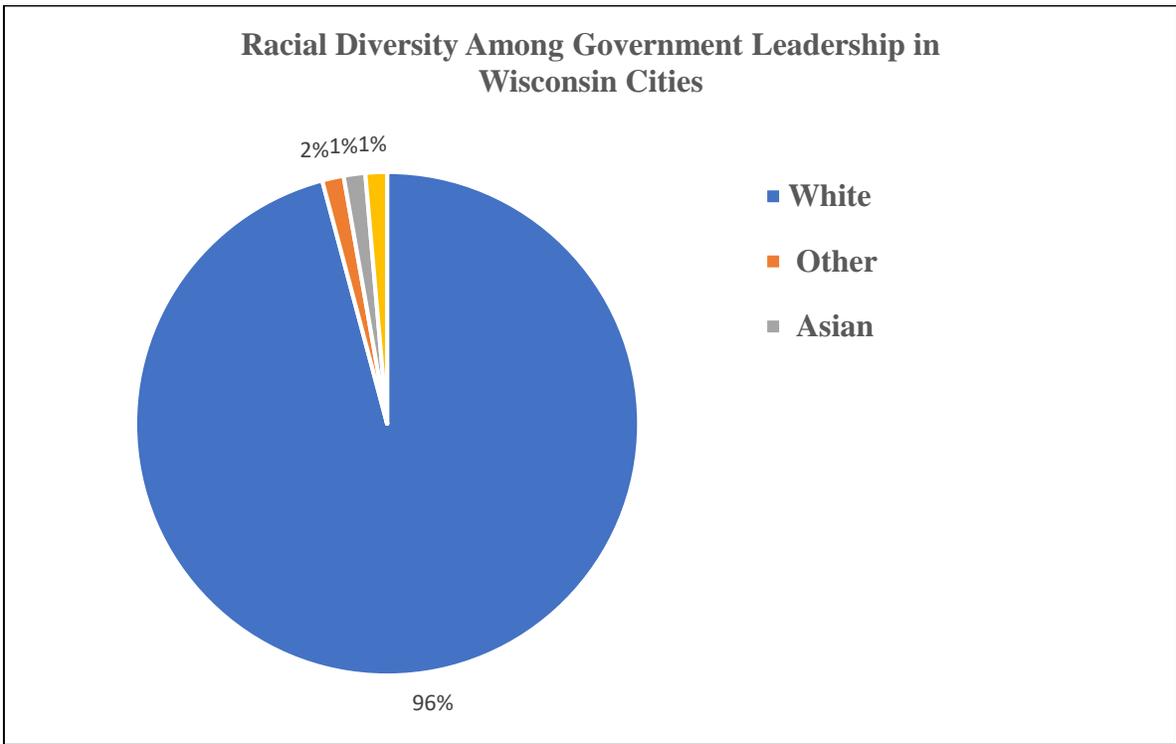2% 1% 1%

- White
- Other
- Asian

96%

Figure 2: Racial Diversity in Wisconsin Cities

2. Wisconsin Villages:

Government leadership in Wisconsin villages also participated in our survey. We had 75 individuals submit responses that identified they served villages. Of these responses, 99% of the people identified as "White" and only 1% of respondents identified as some other race, or "Other" (fig. 3).
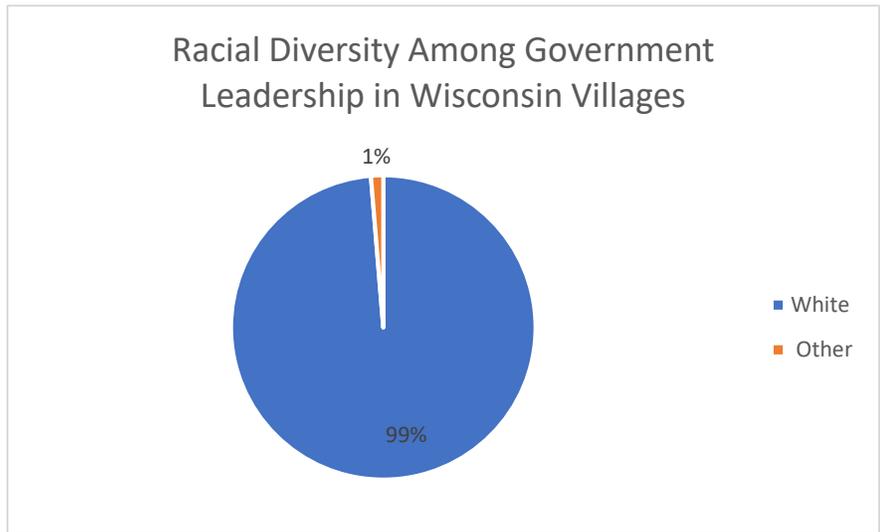
Racial Diversity Among Government Leadership in Wisconsin Villages

1%

- White
- Other

99%

Figure 3: Racial Diversity in Wisconsin Villages

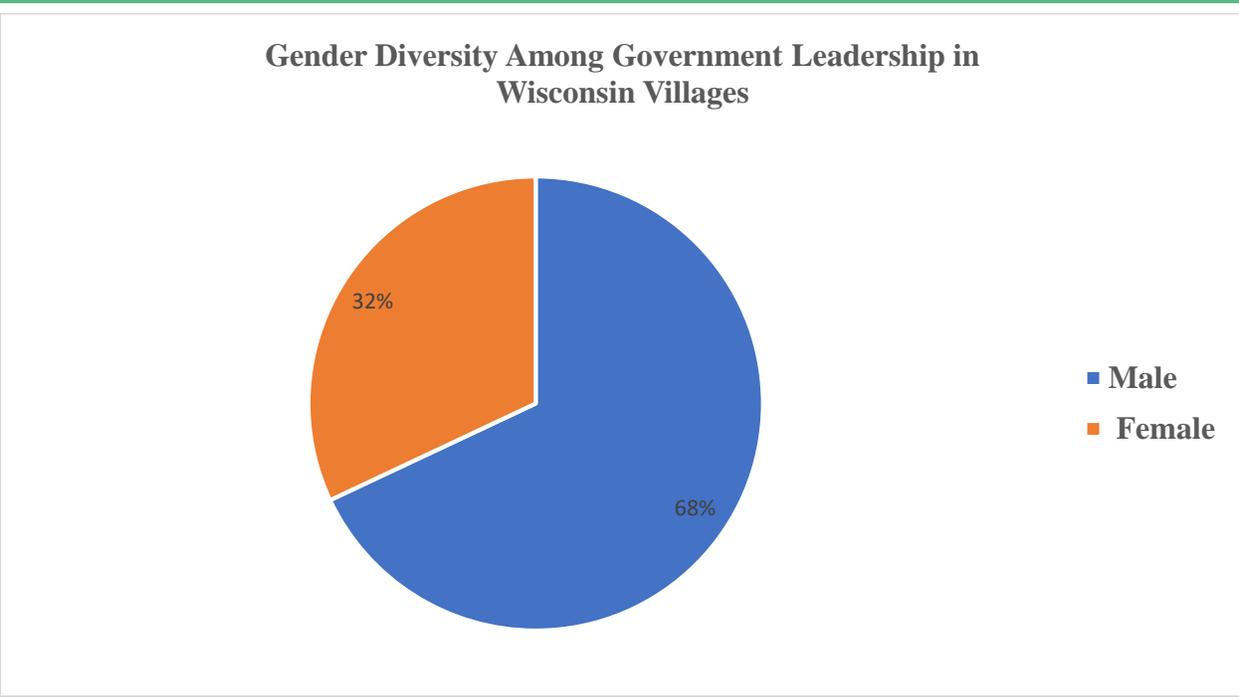**Gender Diversity Among Government Leadership in Wisconsin Villages**

Figure 4: Gender diversity in Wisconsin Villages

Gender diversity among government leadership in Wisconsin villages showed that 68% of individuals identified as "Male" and 32% of individuals identified as "Female". Overall, we had 145 individuals submit responses to our survey from leadership in Wisconsin cities and villages. This gave us a response rate of 17.9% (fig.4).

3. Wisconsin Counties:

The Wisconsin Counties Association was unable to send our survey to their contacts because they had exhausted their survey communication due to many surveys being sent out. They were unable to do another outreach communication of this type to their contacts during the survey collection time period. Due to these circumstances, we were not able to collect racial diversity data among leadership in Wisconsin counties. They were, however, able to provide us with data on gender diversity. Figure 5 shows that 76% of government leadership in Wisconsin counties identify as "Male", while 22% identify as "Female" and 2% identify as some other gender, or "Other".

Gender Diversity Among Government Leadership in Wisconsin Counties

2%

22%

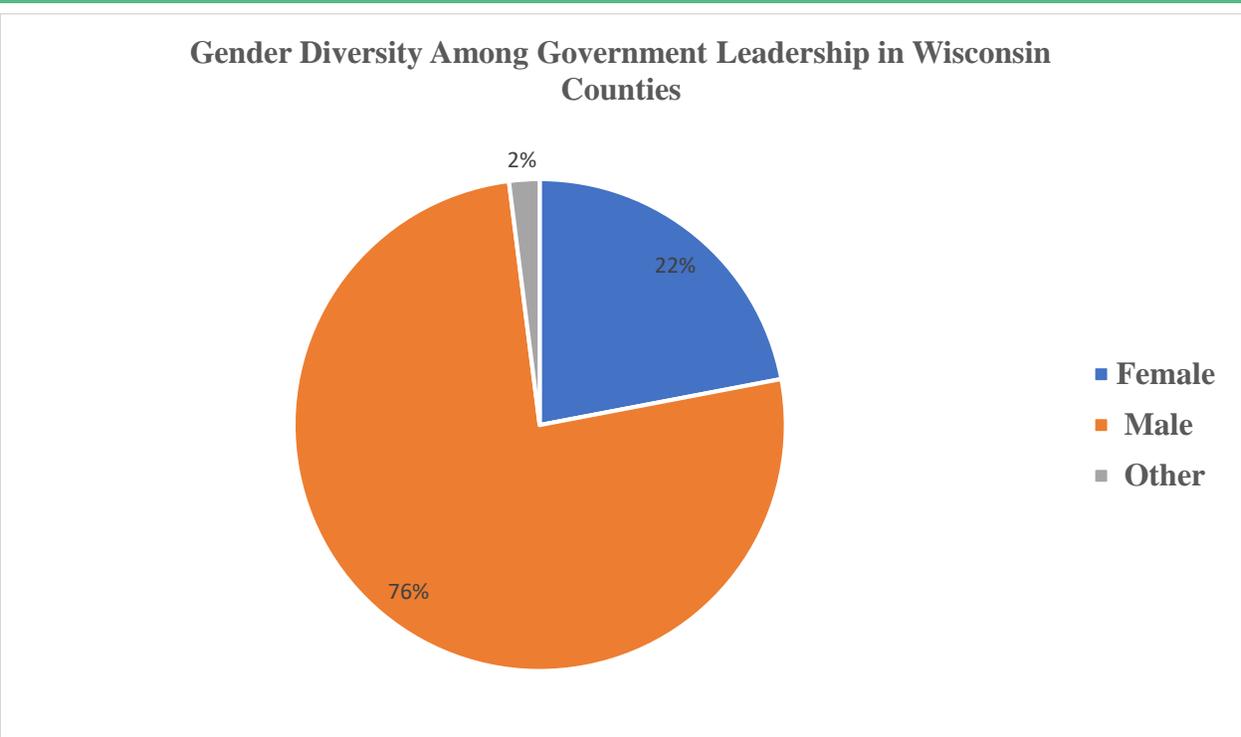76%

- Female
- Male
- Other

Figure 5: Gender Diversity in Wisconsin Counties

4. Wisconsin Towns:

There were no individuals from leadership in Wisconsin towns who completed our online survey. The survey was sent out multiple times and we did not get a response. Through conversations that we had through this data collection, we were told that the Wisconsin Towns Association could not think of any person off hand who was a person of color in leadership within the towns.

Limitations

Time:

  We initially received the project in the beginning of February, which at most gave us twelve weeks to explore. Granted, we sent out online surveys, which historically carries less friction, however, time still played a factor. In this project, the goal was to establish a standardize method that tracks diversity in local government leadership. Our group partnered with Gail Sumi, Member Engagement and Communications Director for the League of Wisconsin Municipalities, Kristen Wyatt, Executive Director of Engaging Local Government Leaders, and students from the Master of Public Administration program, at University of North Carolina Chapel Hill. As a result, the schedules of these entities all varied.

  It would be nearly the middle of March before we established how we would go about the data collection process. This is because we had to align our method with what was already being done (UNC students). In addition, we received complimentary lists of leaders in towns, counties, and villages. However, because we could not assume a name was male or female, we needed a new method to track the names and gender of the local leaders.

  Once the details were set, we had planned to have the survey be sent out March 31 and closing at the latest on the 14 of April. The issue with this is that we needed the compliance of over one thousand individuals; therefore, two weeks would not be enough time to gather this information. In addition, we received word that county leaders would not be participating, because of burnouts from the prior surveys given.

Familiarity:

  As mentioned, we worked with Gail Sumi as a liaison between the local leaders and the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh's Master of Public Administration students. Therefore, there was no personal rapport that was recognized by the leaders receiving the survey. For those not

familiar with emailing leaders in any market, it is not an easy task, as they receive emails constantly, making it easier for your email to be lost in their archives.

We received an email from one of the local leaders depicting our approach as the wrong way about trying to solve an issue. The leader went on to share how asking for gender and race as a means to track diversity is not the way to solve the problem. This email taught us that perhaps our approach was too aggressive and or non-valuable. Perhaps had we given an online survey that was less forward about race and gender, this would have given us better feedback. To our credit, we sent out a disclaimer with the premise to the project and the effort that our venture was trying to solve. In this document, we mentioned our place of origin and who we have been working with thus far to gather the data. However, none of these efforts seemed to be impactful at the capacity we envisioned.

Validity:

Though it is not suspected falsifying information took place, we still have to assume there were some mistakes made during the data collection. Because the survey was given autonomously, we cannot verify that every entry was undoubtedly valid. In addition, considering the uncomfortable nature of the questions the survey asked, some people may have declined to take the survey. As mentioned, this may not have occurred; however, because there was no interviewer to verify each recording, we have to assume the potential for invalid data.

Identity:

As mentioned in the familiarity section, we inquired about personal questions such as name, race, and gender. Considering the negative perception the results may possess, the leaders wished to steer clear of this survey. We already had the names of the leaders, however, missing the gender and race, we were not to assume based on reading a name. As a result, this effort could have been seen with a different angle by the participants. Ultimately, what we wished to do

with the information following the collection process perhaps had major disconnection with leaders, resulting in them feeling this may affect their political reputation.

Future Considerations

There are multiple ways to mitigate the risks that revolve around this project, for future UWO MPA students. These options are the following:

- Wisconsin Hosts Annual Survey- this option would give autonomous, yet impactful adherence from leaders. In this survey the details of name, race, and gender too can be collected. This would too mitigate the burnout of being bombarded with surveys.
- Persons of Color/ Women Appointed should be Documented- The passive approach that could eliminate surveying this, is whenever a new appointee is a person of color or female, this be documented.
- UWO Students Work Backward from Presentation Date- Take the last day of the class as a target. From there, base all of the things that have to be completed between the start and finish date. It will be then understood that perhaps even twelve weeks is not sufficient time for the project.
- Students Establish Rapport Prior to Course- Prior to the course, projects could be administered. As a result, the students can meet with external parties more and this would allow more time for allocating man hours toward a piece of the project that is lagging behind.
- Lastly, it may be beneficial to get the perspective of local leaders and ask how they would go about asking this question in a mass quantity survey. This is important, because for our group, we seemed to be missing the link between what was needed, what already existed, and the culture of the people we wished to extract this information from.

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