



UNIVERSITY
of VIRGINIA

2023

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BREAKING THE BARRIER: EMPOWERING WOMEN TO LEAD IN WYOMING POLITICS

**PREPARED FOR THE WYOMING WOMENS
FOUNDATION**



Table of Contents

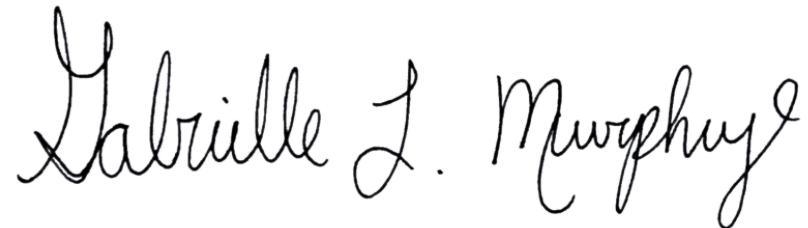
Mandatory Disclaimer.....	2
Honor Statement.....	3
Acknowledgments and Dedication.....	4
List of Acronyms.....	5
List of Figures and Tables.....	6
Executive Summary.....	7
Problem Overview and Definition.....	8
Client Overview.....	9
Background.....	10
State History.....	10
Causes.....	11
Legislative Structure and Effectiveness.....	12
Consequences of the Problem.....	14
Evidence of Potential Solutions to the Problem.....	15
Candidate Training Programs.....	15
Gender Balance Legislation.....	16
Legislative Pay.....	17
Alternatives and Criteria for Evaluation.....	19
Alternative 1: Status Quo.....	19
Alternative 2: Advocate for redesigning Leap into Leadership & partner with an outside candidate training program to develop online candidate training modules.....	19
Alternative 3: Advocate for Gender Balance Legislation, encouraging gender parity and transparency to fill vacant seats on state and local councils, committees, and task forces.....	20
Alternative 4: Advocate for Legislative Pay Reimbursement for Childcare.....	21
Criteria Definition.....	22
Criteria Evaluation.....	23
Alternative 1.....	23
Alternative 2.....	23
Alternative 3.....	25
Alternative 4.....	26
Outcomes Matrix.....	28
Recommendation.....	29
Implementation.....	29
Stakeholder Involvement.....	29
Stakeholder Perspectives.....	30
Next Steps.....	30
Potential Barriers to Implementation.....	31
Conclusion.....	32
References.....	33

Mandatory Disclaimer

The author conducted this study as part of the program of professional education at the Frank Batten School of Leadership and Public Policy, University of Virginia. This paper is submitted in partial fulfillment of the course requirements for the Master of Public Policy degree. The judgments and conclusions are solely those of the author, and are not necessarily endorsed by the Batten School, by the University of Virginia, or by any other agency.

Honor Statement

On my honor as a student, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid on this assignment.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gabrielle L. Murphy". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'G' and a distinct 'L'.

Acknowledgments and Dedication

I am endlessly grateful to those who have come alongside me throughout my academic career to challenge and support me. This report was made possible by so many, and I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge their contributions.

To my family- thank you for your love, supporting me throughout my academic career, and for encouraging me to pursue my dreams since I was a little girl. This degree is for all four of us, and I hope to make you proud with the skills I have learned by making a positive difference in this world. I love you.

To Professor David VanHeemst, thank you for inspiring me to pursue a graduate degree and believing in me since I was 18. Your servant leadership inspires me.

To Professor Pennock, thank you for your feedback and support throughout this process. Your guidance has been essential to the culmination of this report.

To my friends, thank you for loving and supporting me throughout the last two years. I will never be able to repay your kindness to me during this time.

Thank you to the Wyoming Women's Foundation for your guidance and time in addressing this problem. It is an honor to provide this report for you.



This report is dedicated to every woman who has ever felt inadequate, under-qualified, or outnumbered. You are worthy, powerful, cherished, and capable of greatness. It is my hope that this report inspires change and motivates working women and mothers to run for office for the sake of their friends, families, communities, and our country.

List of Acronyms

WYWF: Wyoming Women's Foundation

WCF: Wyoming Community Foundation

CTP: Candidate Training Program

GBL: Gender Balance Legislation

List of Figures and Tables

FIGURES

Figure 1: Percent of Women in State Legislature 1975-2019

Figure 2: Wyoming Community Foundation Organization Chart

Figure 3: Share of seats in state legislatures held by women vs. National average 1983-2019

Figure 4: Percent of Wyoming women who expressed an interest in running for office

Figure 5: Wyoming Legislature by Party

Figure 6: Wyoming Map

Figure 7: Next Steps Timeline

TABLES

Table 1: Outcomes Matrix

Executive Summary

The percentage of women in the Wyoming state legislature is significantly below the national average. As a result, women lack equal policy representation and face disparate economic outcomes across the state. The Wyoming Women's Foundation (WYWF) is interested in advancing economic opportunities for women and children in Wyoming. The WYWF is a fund under the Wyoming Community Foundation, a grant-giving non-profit in Wyoming. The WYWF makes grants and funds initiatives that focus on leveraging grantmaking that will make a lasting change.

This report identifies four alternatives to address how to increase the number of Wyoming women that run for political office:

1. MAINTAIN THE STATUS QUO
2. REDESIGN THE LEAP INTO LEADERSHIP CANDIDATE TRAINING PROGRAMMING AND PARTNER WITH A NATIONAL ORGANIZATION TO DEVELOP ONLINE TRAINING MODULES
3. ADVOCATE FOR GENDER BALANCE LEGISLATION
4. ADVOCATE FOR A LEGISLATIVE CHILDCARE REIMBURSEMENT

Each alternative is evaluated by four criteria in accordance with the mission of the WYWF: political feasibility, cost, gender diversification, and equitable geographic impact. I recommend the Wyoming Women's Foundation advocate for Alternative #2: Redesign the Leap into Leadership candidate training programming and partner with a national organization to develop online training modules. Moving the in-person component of the Leap into Leadership to a weekend and providing online training content will allow Wyoming women with families and full-time jobs across the state to access candidate training on their own time. The Equality State must provide expanded access for women with various experiences and schedules to explore running for office. I anticipate implementation challenges of coordination, administrative backlog, and status quo bias. With coordinated efforts and intentional communication, I believe the WYWF will be able to advocate for a more equitable Leap into Leadership conference successfully.

Problem Overview and Definition

Too few women run for elected office in Wyoming.

Women dominate Wyoming's healthcare, education, and service industries but are outnumbered by men in politically adjacent careers such as law, business, and journalism. Barriers such as lack of education, childcare, and limited time off prevent women in these sectors from pursuing elected office on the local, state, and federal levels. Motivating Wyoming women with diverse experiences to run for office will aid in legislation representing all Wyoming women, men, and children. As seen in Figure 1, in 2020, the percentage of women in the Wyoming state legislature was 15.6% (Center for American Women and Politics, 2020). This number has since increased to about 22% in 2023 (Rutgers, 2023). However, this percentage is nearly ten percent less than the national average.

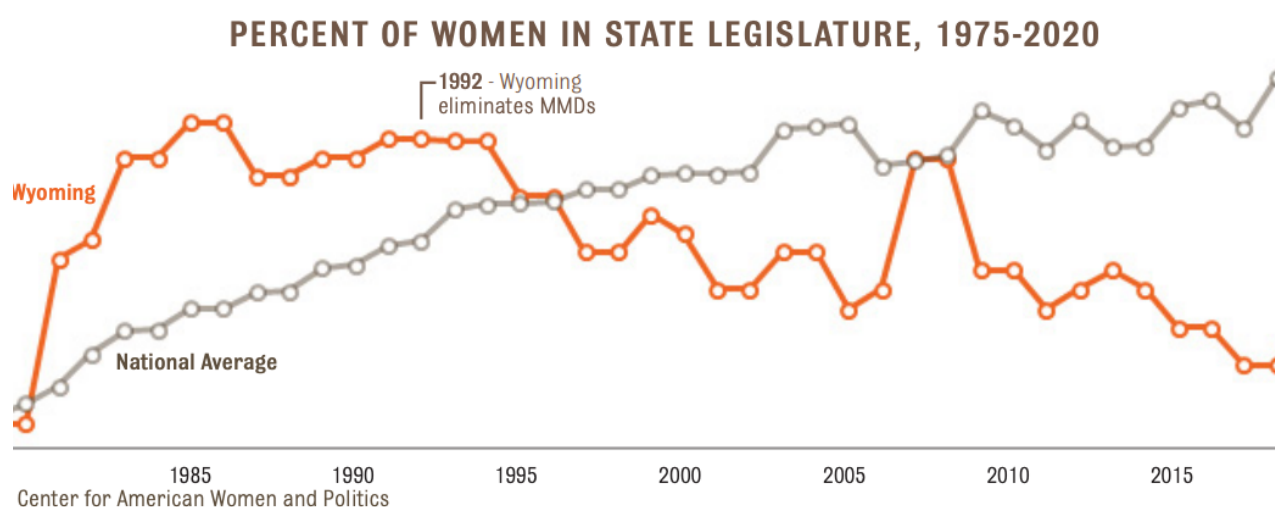


Figure 1

The Equality State has fallen behind in its historical support for women in political office. To improve the economic and social outcomes of women and girls in Wyoming, it is vital that organizations in the state work to increase access to political opportunities. Encouraging women to run for office benefits Wyoming families by increasing the diversity of representation within local and state elected office. Young girls in the state must see themselves represented in positions of power and know their perspectives are valued and celebrated. Empowering girls and women to uplift one another in their social and professional circles is critical for achieving positive economic and social outcomes.

Client Overview

The Wyoming Women's Foundation

The mission of the WYWF is to invest in the economic self-sufficiency of women and opportunities for women and girls in Wyoming. WYWF has published reports on Women as Economic Drivers, the History of Wyoming Women, Wyoming Women in Elected Roles, and the Wage Gap in Wyoming. As shown in Figure 2, the WYWF is part of the Wyoming Community Foundation, a grant-giving organization for local initiatives within the state. WYWF is concerned with increasing gender parity in the Wyoming state legislature and regional offices. The WYWF has invested financially in nonpartisan initiatives that focus on growing economic outcomes for women and girls in the state. The WYWF works closely with organizations such as the Wyoming Women's Legislative Caucus and the Cowgirl Run Fun to provide grants, publish reports, and plan events that unite Wyoming women. WYWF believes that increasing female representation in local, state, and elected offices will provide better outcomes for women and girls in the state. The WYWF must continue to advocate for and fund additional opportunities that increase the number of female candidates that run for office on the local and state level.



Figure 2

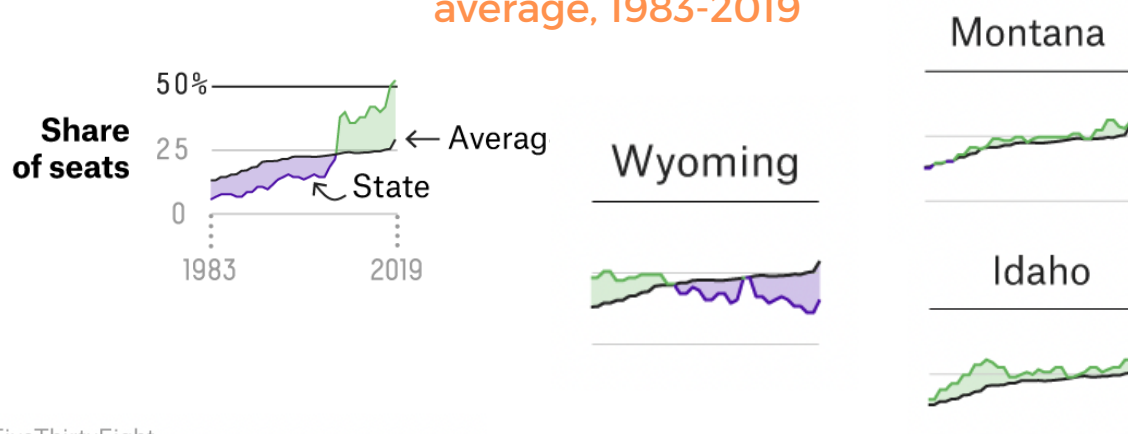
Background

State History

In 1869, Wyoming women secured the right to vote and serve on juries. Women went on to serve in roles such as Justice of the Peace, Bailiff, Superintendent, Representatives, Governor, and Director of the Bureau of the Mint before 1930 (Wyoming Women's Foundation, 2020). Since 1930 the number of women in the Wyoming state legislature has increased but not progressively. Wyoming has significantly fallen behind the national average in its share of seats in the state legislature held by women. However, as shown in Figure 3, comparable Republican western states have managed to keep up with the national average (Center for American Women and Politics, 2019).

Why has Wyoming struggled to increase the number of women in elected office at the same rate as the national average? Although women were granted equal representation under the law, they were not afforded many of the invisible privileges men were given. The increasing demands of labor and motherhood prevented Wyoming women from pursuing careers outside of the home, and those who could pursue politics or other interests often had to shoulder financial and emotional burdens. Today, Wyoming women are a unique demographic within the state. As an overwhelmingly white state, minority women in Wyoming face an even steeper journey to elected office. The Wyoming State legislature is overwhelmingly Republican. As a result, there are only a handful of Democratic politicians in the state. Women from various minority groups struggle to gain support and win elected office in the state. There are biases among the Wyoming population regarding racial and sexual identity. These populations of Wyoming women are especially vulnerable.

Share of seats in state legislatures held by women vs. national average, 1983-2019



FiveThirtyEight

SOURCE: CENTER FOR AMERICAN WOMEN AND POLITICS

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Figure 3

Causes

Financial instability, lack of confidence, little experience, and domestic expectations prevent women from pursuing elected office. One of the most prominent causes is the breadwinner constraint, defined as responsibility for the household's primary share of income (Bernhard & Shames, 2020). Breadwinning and being a woman were negatively correlated with willingness to run for elected office. Specifically, breadwinners were between thirteen and sixteen percentage points less likely to run for office than non-breadwinning women. Income disparities result in women bearing their families' financial burdens and unpaid domestic labor responsibilities. Mothers who were married or living with a partner and not bringing in additional income were most likely to run, whereas married, cohabitating, and single mothers who bring in income were least likely to pursue elected office. Within Wyoming, 26% of children live in single-parent households (Kids Count Data Center, 2021). That 26% of children live across Wyoming in about 28,000 single-parent homes (Wyoming Community Foundation, 2022). About 18,500 of these homes are headed by women, nearly double those led by men.

Ordinary women also face a lack of support within their personal and professional circles to encourage them to run for elected office. Evidence suggests that a women's likelihood of pursuing elected office is strongly influenced by their perceptions of their qualifications, experiences, and encouragement by others to run. Without the support of their personal and professional communities, Wyoming women will be less motivated to run for office. As seen in Figure 4, a Wyoming Women's Foundation report found that only 31% of Wyoming women have considered running for office, leaving two-thirds of the population unaware of political opportunities (2020). 60% of women said they would not rule out running for office, which indicates the issue is not women avoiding running for office, but rather women not being exposed to opportunities to run.

While only 31% of Wyoming women have thought of running for an elected office,



60% said they would not rule out running for office at some point in the future.³⁸



Figure 4

Crowder-Meyer suggests, “Ordinary women have a greater need of support from their families, friends, and coworkers to balance the demands of candidacy with their other responsibilities (2020)”. Women are responsible for the majority of childcare and household tasks, which would make it difficult for a Wyoming woman to embark on a political campaign.

Women report spending an average of 87 hours unpaid per week managing household activities, grocery shopping, caring for adult family members, helping non-household adults or the community, and providing primary or secondary childcare (Wyoming Women’s Foundation, 2020). In addition to a 40-hour-per-week job, it is difficult to imagine Wyoming women having time to run or serve in elected office with many competing priorities within their personal and professional networks.

The final major cause is income restraint. In Wyoming, women earn \$0.68 for every \$1 a man makes (Simon, 2021). This income disparity leaves little room to pursue political ambition without significant income from their spouse or partner. In addition, women spend, on average fewer years in the workforce because of domestic and childcare duties, which leave them with lower salaries on average. Women in 2021 will have a longer lifespan than men by about five years, requiring more work to plan for a longer retirement (Time, 2019). Women who care for children or elderly relatives have significantly fewer financial savings for retirement than men. Mothers under 50, on average, have saved between \$24,000 and \$36,000, whereas men of that same demographic have saved nearly double, between \$62,000 and \$87,000 (Wyoming Women’s Foundation, 2020). With significantly fewer savings, Wyoming women may hesitate to take a wage cut to serve in an elected position. For local and state elected offices that are either unpaid or have an unlivable wage, mothers and working women cannot afford to take time off or invest their financial resources into a campaign.

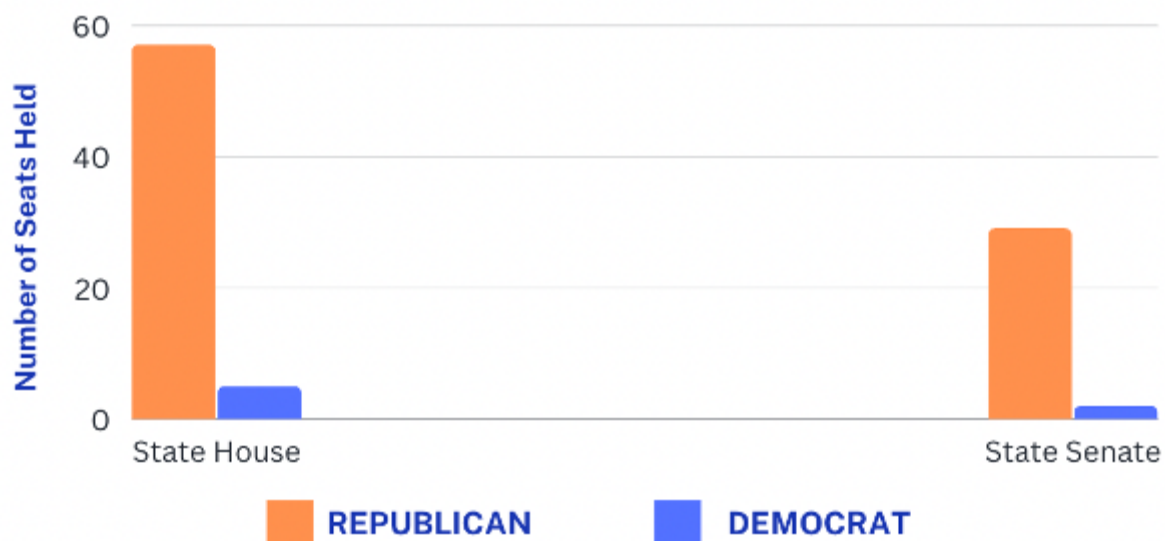
Legislative Structure and Effectiveness

At present, the structure of the Wyoming State Legislature is not conducive for working mothers. It is a part-time legislature that meets for no more than 60 days every two years. In an even-numbered year, the Wyoming Legislature meets for approximately 20 days. On odd-numbered years they typically meet for 40 days. This part-time structure requires that women who need to bring in a sizeable household income due to raising a child alone or because their partner cannot financially support the family on their own are left unable to run for elected office. They must take 3-8 weeks off to travel and work in Cheyenne. Although their income is supplemented, travel and opportunity costs are much greater than the payment. The base salary of an elected state senator is \$150/day, as set by the legislature (NCSL, 2022). This is a vouchered payment in addition to the \$109/day per diem.

They receive 57.5 cents per mile for travel reimbursement. This is not enough to supplement lost wages for working women. Women make up nearly 80% of healthcare, 61% of education, and 48% of the retail trade industry in Wyoming (Simon, 2021). These industries typically do not have flexible paid time off to pursue elected office. To encourage women to run for office, there will need to be opportunities for women to sustain their careers while running for and serving in an elected role.

The partisan nature of the Wyoming State Legislature may prevent women with diverse viewpoints and experiences from running for office. Democratic and Independent women may struggle to find support within their local communities. Potential candidates may feel pressure to adopt extremely conservative views to appeal to donors in the state. As seen in Figure 5, the State House and Senate composition is overwhelmingly Republican. In the State House, three out of 5 Democratic members are women. In the State Senate, two members are Democratic, and neither are women. Democratic and Independent women's perspectives are underrepresented in the state legislature, which may decrease the likelihood of Democratic women feeling supported or able to run for local or state office.

WYOMING LEGISLATURE BY PARTY



Data Sources: Ballotpedia. (2023a). Wyoming House of Representatives. Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/Wyoming_House_of_Representatives
 Ballotpedia. (2023b). Wyoming State Senate. Ballotpedia. https://ballotpedia.org/Wyoming_State_Senate

Figure 5

When women are elected, research suggests they are legislatively more effective. On average, women are more effective federal legislators than men, with nearly 10% greater legislative effectiveness than their colleagues at baseline (Volden et al., 2013). This depends on their political affiliation; women in the minority party are about 33% more effective, whereas women in the majority are about 5% more effective. There are legislative programs that help women and families in Wyoming that could be increased if more women were in positions to advocate and legislate for them. For example, the Wyoming Pregnant Workers Fairness Act (HBO200) failed in the Wyoming state house in 2019 and was postponed indefinitely. This act aimed to specify accommodations for medical needs arising from pregnancy, childbirth, and related conditions for fair employment practices (HBO200, 2019). The act would prevent employers from denying women reasonable accommodations when pregnant, post-birth, or for medical complications. Within a majority-male and Republican state legislature, legislation that protects women may continue to be voted down.

Consequences of the Problem

Equity matters. Women bring a unique and gifted perspective to policymaking, and Wyoming is missing half of the talented people it could have in the legislature. A lack of diverse female representation will have real economic, physical, and mental consequences for women. These costs will be felt within families and by Wyoming women for years. Pressure to be selfless and provide for their children may continue to crush ordinary Wyoming women and restrain them from pursuing political opportunities. The breadwinner and income constraints mentioned above will continue to disproportionately harm women in the state.

Several gender-related issues, such as reproductive rights, equal pay, and domestic violence, require legislative attention. Women legislators are likely to understand and advocate for solutions to these issues. Healthcare and education are two of the biggest policy issues the legislature will face. Women in Wyoming dominate these two sectors, and as such their expertise would be helpful in making good policy.

Female legislators serve as role models for young women and girls. When women see other women in positions of power, they are more likely to aspire to leadership roles. Women's underrepresentation in state legislatures can lead to a lack of political engagement among women voters. When women feel their voices are not heard, they are less likely to participate in the political process. Overall, the representation of women in state legislatures is critical to ensure equal representation, diverse perspectives, and effective governance.

Evidence of Potential Solutions to the Problem

Literature that analyzes the interventions that increase the number of women in political office centers around themes of education, legislative protection, and economic support. Three of the most evidenced solutions are candidate training programs, Gender Balance Legislation, and legislative pay.

Candidate Training Programs

Candidate training programs equip future candidates with the technical and communicative skills necessary to run a successful political campaign. National organizations such as Emily's List & She Should Run seek to equip women with the education needed to run for public office. Emily's List endorses pro-choice Democratic women interested in running for office, whereas She Should Run is nonpartisan. She Should Run utilizes candidate training that consists of in-personal and virtual workshops to help women discover their purpose in running for office (She Should Run, 2022). They provide skills training on public speaking, social media, networking, and running for office with debt. In 2021, She Should Run helped 8,567 women consider running for office. Candidate training includes self-directed educational modules accessible to women across the United States. She Should Run estimated that in 2021, 104,000 women were made aware of their potential to hold elected office. Training and educational materials created by She Should Run help address women's lack of encouragement to run for office within their social circles (Lawless & Fox, 2022).

The New Girls' Clubs: Candidate Training Programs and the Women Changing the Face of United States Politics studied candidate training programs as a part of political action (Carson, 2022). Carson suggests that women's political training organizations are an increasingly important mechanism through which members of historically excluded communities can gain power. The study qualitatively examines the role of female candidate training organizations through one-on-one interviews with attendees and researchers attending workshops and training across the aisle. The responses suggest that training programs provide helpful information on campaign skills and social, emotional, and material support for their members. Demographics such as age, race, and socio-economic status were randomized within the various studies, and there are no significant gaps in representation.

The Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership runs a candidate training program annually in Virginia. It is bipartisan and helps participants build a strong campaign through strategy development and ethical training. In 2019, the program produced two graduates who were elected to the Senate in Virginia (Sorensen Institute, 2022). Wyoming can partner with organizations such as the Sorensen Institute that serve state populations rather than national ones. The Wyoming Women's Foundation could work to create a similar organization within Wyoming or curate Wyoming-specific content based on the Sorensen Institute's curriculum.

It is important to note that most literature regarding women considering running for office is centered around Democratic organizations. Themes such as the breadwinner constraint (Berhard & Shames, 2020) may transcend partisanship. However, Republican women may respond differently to various educational tactics, given their conflicting values. Carson (2022) includes data from both Democratic and Republican candidate training which may help inform future research into the effectiveness of training in mobilizing female candidates. The effective strategies mentioned above apply regardless of political affiliation. The literature lacks representatives from predominately conservative organizations, which are most prevalent in Wyoming. The literature surrounding candidate training programs is not plentiful. Although the Carson (2022) study is demographically robust, it has yet to be studied in larger groups across the United States.

Gender Balance Legislation

Gender Balance Legislation (GBL) is non-legally binding legislation that promotes women's political involvement with state and local boards, commissions, committees, and councils. GBL encourages women's political involvement and promotes equal gender representation. GBL rarely requires gender parity on local or state boards; however, it encourages equal representation by considering the gender proportions within the state and establishes that boards, commissions, committees, and councils should seek to replicate that proportion (Rutgers Eagleton Institute of Politics, 2022). For example, the Montana Gender and Racial Balance Code establishes that as a vacancy arrives on board, commissions, committees, and council, the appointing officer should select candidates that achieve gender equity (2-15-108, Gender and Racial Balance, MCA, 2021). In Iowa, gender balance has been required on state-level boards and commissions since 1987 (Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, 2022). In Wyoming, there is no formal commission that regulates the pay of elected officials.

The first scholarly work to analyze the impact of gender balance legislation was published in 2021 by McQueen. McQueen (2021) finds little evidence that GBL significantly impacts the representation of women in state-level political office. These findings are consistent across various outcome variables and models. This unsuccessful intervention is vital, making it clear that a creative solution must be found rather than a standard policy intervention. The gender balance law in Montana requires that openings be posted publicly before an appointment, which may help keep legislators accountable to their communities. An earlier study published by Filla & Larimer (2011) evaluated how adopting women's gender balance legislation affected the attitudes toward women serving in government. In Iowa, a state with gender balance legislation, there are higher positive evaluations of gender ability and qualifications than in Pennsylvania, which lacks gender balance legislation. Based on these findings, gender balance legislation may impact how women are viewed within Wyoming politics and encourage them to run for office through increased social support.

Legislative Pay and Reimbursement

Although candidate training programs have been found to increase the participant's interest in running for office, these programs do not address the often-unlivable public salary political office provides and the accumulated wealth needed to take time off work to run and serve (Carson, 2022). Wyoming ranks the lowest out of all 50 states in the gender wage gap. In 2022, Wyoming women made about 63 cents to every dollar a man makes (Lurye, 2022). In addition to unequal compensation, college-educated women in Wyoming tend to make less money than men holding a high-school diploma. This is because female-dominated industries in Wyoming, such as teaching and healthcare, tend to make less money than blue-collar jobs, such as ranching and mining (Wells, 2022). Women make up nearly 80% of healthcare, 61% of education, and 48% of the retail trade industry in Wyoming (Simon, 2021). Due to this, on average, women have less money saved when and if they consider running for office compared to men. Women who care for children or elderly relatives have significantly fewer financial savings for retirement than men. Mothers under 50, on average, have saved less than half that of men their age (Wyoming Women's Foundation, 2020). Wyoming State Legislators make about \$300 per month, with an additional \$150 per day that they are in session (Lurye, 2022). Such little pay makes it difficult for a low- or middle-income woman to justify leaving her job to serve in the state legislature.

A 2016 study by scholars at Duke and UNC examined legislative pay's impact on state legislatures' economic diversity. Aggregate-level data from 1979, 1993, 1995, and 2007 displayed the relationship between how well a state pays its legislators and the percentage of those lawmakers who came from working-class jobs (Carnes & Hansen, 2016).

The data showed that “in states that pay legislators higher salaries, working-class citizens make up smaller shares of the state legislature, not larger ones” (Carnes & Hansen, 2016). However, states that tend to pay higher salaries for their legislators tend also to have more professionalized legislators, larger populations, more urban areas, and elect more liberal members. The finding of this study may not be generalizable to Wyoming, given those tendencies. However, this data is relevant to the ordinary Wyoming women the Wyoming Women’s Foundation seeks to identify and encourage to run for office. Published in the *American Political Science Review*, this study was peer-reviewed and published by a reputable journal.

Increasing the legislative pay of state politicians is not the only way to subsidize their work. Following a data review, the *State of Pay 2021* provides key policy recommendations to help close the representation gap within state legislatures. One recommendation is to create independent compensation committees to reduce public distrust by requiring compensation committees to approve introducing legislative pay increases (New American Leaders, 2021). Nineteen states currently have independent compensation commissions to assess and set salaries for legislators. Wyoming's State Employee Compensation Commission focuses on state employees rather than elected officials.

The Vote Mama Foundation (VMF) seeks to expand and codify campaign funds for childcare across all 50 states by 2025. By petitioning state and local election commissions and introducing legislation that approves the use of campaign funding for childcare at the state and federal level, congressional candidates across the US have successfully used the funding to balance being a mother, wife, and candidate (Vote Mama Foundation, 2022). By partnering with the VMF, the Wyoming Women’s Foundation can enable candidates who are mothers to obtain additional campaign funding to be allocated towards childcare, thus reducing a barrier to entry for prospective candidates.

Alternatives and Criteria for Evaluation

In order to increase the number of women who run for office in Wyoming, I propose 4 alternatives: continue the status quo, advocate for a redesign of Leap into Leadership with online training modules, advocate for Gender Balance Legislation and advocate for a legislative childcare reimbursement.

Alternative #1: Status Quo

There is an option to not pursue any policy alternatives and continue within the current environment. At present, Wyoming has fallen behind the national average for the percent of women in the state legislature. Given the lack of legislative interventions, I will attempt to evaluate this alternative by the below criteria. I attempt to quantify the legislative impacts for women, children, and families within Wyoming if nothing more is done to encourage gender parity within the legislature and local elected offices.

Alternative #2: Advocate for redesigning Leap into Leadership & partner with an outside candidate training program to develop online candidate training modules.

Leap into Leadership is a program led by the Wyoming Women's Legislative Caucus that encourages and equips women with the tools necessary to run for office. Presently the two-day Leap into Leadership conference is held in February in Cheyenne, Wyoming with a program cost of \$95. Depending on the venue, childcare may be provided for the duration of the training by volunteers from the community. There is an opportunity to partner with the WWLC, WYWF, Equality State Policy Center, and the Cowgirl Run Fund to create, lead, and distribute online training program content across the state. Involving all these organizations may help reduce the administrative burden of standing up a new state-wide training program.

There is an opportunity to leverage the content previously used by the WWLC and adapt it to focus on local elected opportunities for women in counties across the state. I propose using and creating online learning modules such as She Should Run in addition to in person trainings. By providing an online and in-person experience, women will be able to participate in trainings however best fits their personal and professional commitments. Successful training programs focus on personal and professional development, providing tactical campaign training as well as purpose discovery workshops.

I anticipate upfront and incremental costs like those of the conference presently plus the expenses of creating online training modules. I anticipate the largest cost to be incurred by the development of an online platform, curriculum, learning modules, and staff support. These costs may be reduced by the Wyoming Women's Foundation in the form of a grant. Incremental costs would be incurred to upkeep the website, refresh materials, and bring in new speakers each year from National or out-of-state training organizations for the in-person training.

Alternative #3: Advocate for Gender Balance Legislation, encouraging gender parity and transparency to fill vacant seats on state and local councils, committees, and task forces.

Presently, Wyoming does not have any gender balance legislation requiring or encouraging gender equity on state or local board, commissions, committees, or councils. Adopting a piece of gender balance legislation may allow for more women to run for local office after being involved on various committees within their local community. Exposing women to local politics may help women to understand the importance of being involved politically and reduce travel and financial barriers associated with state office.

To pass a piece of legislation such as this, a sponsor is needed in the state legislature to champion this cause. Senator Lynn Hutchings representing Laramie County has sponsored common sense, bipartisan legislation in the 67th legislature and may be an appropriate candidate to sponsor this in the State Senate. Democratic Representative Karlee Provenza may be able to support this legislation in the State House.

This piece of legislation is an opportunity to pass a bipartisan bill that supports women across the state. It will be important to build a coalition of male elected officials that also support this legislation. Given the timing of this project, this legislation could be introduced in the 2025 General Session.

Alternative #4: Advocate for a Legislative Childcare Reimbursement

Wyoming ranks the lowest out of all 50 states in the gender wage gap. In 2022, Wyoming women make about 63 cents to every dollar a man makes (Lurye, 2022). Wyoming State Legislators make about \$300 per month, with an additional \$150 per day that they are in session (Lurye, 2022). Such little pay makes it difficult for low- and middle-income women to justify leaving their job to serve in the state legislature. Although the legislature is part-time, these wages do not account for time off from a full-time position, childcare, and housekeeping expenses associated with women leaving their homes.

One alternative would be introducing a childcare reimbursement program in the state legislature. Both male and female legislators would benefit from a childcare stipend, which reduces the financial burden of caring for child as a single-parent for the in-session legislative period. These funds would need to be used to directly supplement incurred expenses or lost wages from serving in the state legislature. This stipend could be proposed in the 2024 Budget Session of the Wyoming State Legislature, as it would require financial commitment. To pass, it would need a two-thirds vote during the Budgeting session to have the bill title read aloud and assigned to a committee. This would require significant legislative support from male and female legislators.

The WYWF may advocate for the adoption of this policy. The Wyoming Women's Legislative Caucus may support this initiative, and spearhead coalition building with the State Senate and House. Additionally, the state legislature may also choose to match funding from an outside fund that is intended to be used only for childcare, lost wages, and travel expenses occurred by first-year women in the legislature.

Criteria Definition

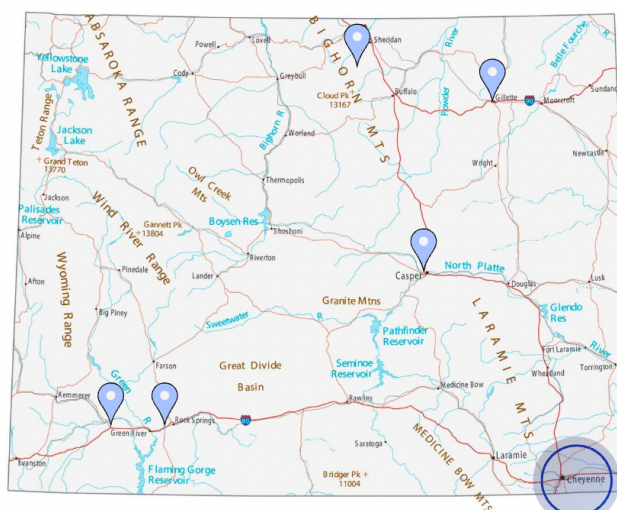
Political Feasibility: Given the polarized political climate in Wyoming, it is essential to consider the likelihood that a suggested alternative will be considered or implemented. Given the varying nature of alternatives, I measure political feasibility in two ways: the estimated odds that 2/3 of the Wyoming State Legislature would support the bill and the likelihood that the WWLC and WWF would support the initiative. I will also measure the social and reputational costs of advocating for policies and their financial costs.

Cost: I will measure the upfront & incremental costs associated with each policy alternative. Costs that exceed \$30,000 will be considered a high financial investment, and costs below \$30,000 will be considered a low financial investment.

Gender Diversification: To measure gender diversification, I will estimate the ability of the alternative to increase the number of women in the state legislature over the next ten years.

Equitable Geographic Impact: There is unequal political participation from women in different geographical areas of Wyoming. In response, I will measure each alternative by the difference it can create by having an equitable geographic impact. I will assess the estimated ability of the proposed legislative or educational alternative to represent, reach or protect women in multiple counties across the state. I will also consider barriers to travel when appropriate. Wyoming experiences heavy snowfall and winds during the winter, creating dangerous driving conditions. Current efforts are concentrated around Cheyenne in the southeast corner of the state. As seen in Figure 6, the most populous cities in Wyoming are located on average four hours away from Cheyenne. This creates a barrier for Wyoming women to engage with present efforts.

Wyoming Map : A most populous city in Wyoming



Source: GISGeography. (2013, March 1). Map of Wyoming—Cities and Roads. GIS Geography. <https://gisgeography.com/wyoming-map/>

Figure 6

Criteria Evaluation

Alternative #1: Status Quo

Political Feasibility: The current engagement with Wyoming women across the state to provide candidate training is seen as successful. Given this, continuing the status quo measures high in political feasibility. There is no overwhelming pressure from the legislature or independent groups to change the status quo. Continuing without candidate training programs or legislative protection for women will not result in political pushback from the majority of Republicans in the Wyoming State Legislature.

Cost: This alternative requires no additional financial cost.

Gender Diversification: Currently, the status quo is not increasing the number of women who run for office and are elected on pace with the national average. We know this because the percentage of women in the Wyoming state legislature in 2023 is 22.2 percent, about ten percent below the national average (Rutgers, 2023). Although we cannot say the status quo is the only factor prohibiting a more significant increase in the number of women in the state legislature, we know that the status quo is not improving the outcome we are concerned with now. As a result, this alternative is ranked low in gender diversification.

Equitable Geographic Impact: All efforts to educate Wyoming women are concentrated in the Southeastern portion of the State around Cheyenne and Laramie. There is no county-level gender balance legislation that is published, and no additional reimbursements have been passed through the state legislature. As such, this alternative measures low against increasing the geographic equity gap within the state.

Alternative #2: Advocate for redesigning Leap into Leadership & partner with an outside candidate training program to develop online candidate training modules.

Political Feasibility: The WWLC is chaired by three female legislators: Senator Ellis, Representative Newsome, and Representative Sherwood. Each legislator represents a different county in Wyoming and may share personal experiences with a lack of access to proper training themselves and for women in their districts. If the current program is viewed as successful, there may be little incentive to change.

There may also be a hesitancy to partner with a national organization such as She Should Run to develop online candidate training modules. This would be a significant investment and may be seen as frivolous spending. There may also be questions about the applicability of a national program to the unique experience of Wyoming women. Due to these constraints, this alternative is moderately politically feasible.

Cost: This alternative will require upfront and incremental financial investments. The registration fee to attend the conference is about \$75/per person and \$35/for the dinner and reception (Wyoming Women's Legislative Caucus, 2023). If there are 40 participants, that is \$4,400 in revenue. Additionally, Leap into Leadership has several sponsors for the event that bring in an estimated \$18,000 (Wyoming Women's Legislative Caucus, 2023). This revenue may be enough to cover a conference room rental in Cheyenne for one or two days, casual reception, and food and beverage services throughout the conference. However, with a new and expanded conference, costs will include venue rental, food and beverages, speakers and presenters, staff, travel expenses, hotel accommodations, A/V equipment and staff, advertising, rental chairs, tables and linens, and gift bags for participants. Venue rentals range between \$500 and \$1,250 per hour. Food and beverages range from \$45 to \$150 per person daily. Speakers and presenters can cost between \$500-\$5,000. Staff time allocated toward conference preparation and execution will cost between \$12-\$30/per hour per person. A/V equipment and staff will cost between \$750-\$2,000. A modest estimate for a 10-hour weekend conference will total around \$10,000 (The Conference Cost Estimator for Budgeting, 2020).

Although the Leap into Leadership program is financially affordable, increasing the programming cost would allow for investment in modern content and new conference programming. If Leap into Leadership increased its cost of attendance to \$200 per person, the total revenue would increase to \$8,000 for 40 attendees. To add an online component, there will be upfront module development, design, technology, and project management costs. Asynchronous online learning modules are more expensive to maintain and develop than synchronous ones. However, the flexibility of asynchronous content is appealing to working women and mothers with varying schedules. At an estimated 80 to 280 hours required to develop a 1-hour course, the expected cost to develop an online training modules is between USD 5,850 and USD 15,000, in addition to the cost of labor (Arabadzhiev, 2021). To decrease costs, partnering with She Should Run to utilize their existing online training content would eliminate content development, design, and project management costs until funding can be allocated to take on such an investment. This alternative is ranked moderately in cost due to substantial sponsorship funding that may help offset new development costs.

Gender Diversification: Research suggests that candidate training programs effectively motivate women to run for office. Responses collected by candidate training participants suggest that training programs provide information on campaign skills and social, emotional, and technical support for their members (Carson, 2022). As such, the Leap into Leadership program must continue to expand its offerings to Wyoming women. This alternative has the most significant opportunity to increase the number of women who run for state and local office. As such, this alternative ranks high when weighed against the gender diversification criterion.

Equitable Geographic Impact: This alternative has the highest potential to reach women across every county in Wyoming. At present, the Leap into Leadership program is inaccessible for women in Northwestern counties within the state. With a digital learning component such as asynchronous education modules available, this alternative could reach across Wyoming to meet working women and mothers where they are. Additionally, partnering with a large organization such as She Should Run will allow more women to connect with the program and each other, regardless of where they are in the state. Due to the immense opportunity for impact, this alternative ranks highly when weighed against the criterion.

Alternative #3: Advocate for Gender Balance Legislation, encouraging gender parity and transparency to fill vacant seats on state and local councils, committees, and task forces.

Political Feasibility: Iowa and Montana have passed similar gender balance legislation (Iowa Commission on the Status of Women, 2022). As Western states, advocates from these states may be able to partner with stakeholders in Wyoming to support similar legislation. It is unlikely that this legislation would be passed through both the state House and Senate due to the perceived partisan nature of Republicans. Although outside this project's scope, it will be necessary to watch where the courts are going regarding Affirmative Action and how that may impact the legality of this alternative. There are potential social costs in the form of reputational backlash for legislators who support this legislation. This alternative would rank low when weighted against this criterion.

Cost: This alternative has a low estimated financial investment. WYWF pays \$27 per hour. Assuming this would take 5 hours per week for one staff person, it would cost \$7,020 for one year to allocate time towards this recommendation. The staff person would spend time researching previous GBL and working with relevant stakeholders to advocate for and develop draft legislation. This is a low-cost alternative.

Gender Diversification: Research regarding gender balance legislation is immature, and the impacts of GBL are challenging to measure. There is little evidence that GBL significantly impacts the representation of women in state-level political offices (McQueen, 2021). Although this alternative is not well evidenced, in Iowa, there are higher levels of positive evaluations of gender ability and qualifications than in Pennsylvania, which lacks gender balance legislation (Filla & Larimer, 2011). Based on these findings, gender balance legislation may impact how women are viewed within Wyoming politics and may encourage them to run for office through increased social support. This alternative ranks moderately against this criterion.

Equitable Geographic Impact: This alternative would impact state and local-level committees, councils, and task forces, reaching an estimated 1-5 counties within the state. However, it is unclear how many counties would adopt this legislation if it was not legally binding. Due to this discrepancy, this alternative weighs moderately.

Alternative #4: Advocate for Legislative Childcare Reimbursement

Political Feasibility: In 2022, several failed attempts were made to raise legislative pay. A bill that increased the constituent service allowance for lawmakers that provided money to travel within their district was defeated in the Senate. In 2019, Governor Mark Gordon vetoed legislation raising per diem rates for legislators. However, in February 2023, the first per diem increase legislation since 2005 advanced through a House committee (GSA, 2023). Senate File 61 would increase the \$109/day per diem to the most recent rates established by the U.S. General Services Administration for location in Wyoming (SF0061, 2023). As of March 1st, 2023, the House Speaker and Senate President signed the bill, awaiting the governor's signature into law. With this recent push towards increasing legislative compensation, now is the time to act on a childcare reimbursement plan. The cost for the WYWF will be the potential social consequences of losing connections with state leaders who oppose this legislation. However, this kind of legislation is similar to the work that the WYWF does, and likely their supporters would advocate for this legislation. A potential challenge is accountability, and the program would require a relationship between private and public childcare facilities to report hours truthfully. This alternative is moderately feasible.

Cost: A high financial investment is associated with advocating for a legislative reimbursement program for childcare and travel in the state legislature. The estimated financial cost of the program is between \$70,00 and \$200,000 per year.

In 2020, the average monthly childcare cost in Wyoming for an infant was \$887/per month and \$750/per month for a four-year-old child (Procure, 2020). The 93 members of the Wyoming state legislature meet for 40 days on odd-numbered years and 20 days on even years. In an odd-numbered year, if 93 lawmakers were reimbursed fully for their childcare expenses, assuming they have two children each at \$820/month, the total reimbursement would be around \$202,520 for the 40-day legislative session. More realistically, if we still assumed a high end that 1/3 of the legislature does not have children or prefers private childcare options such as with family, that cost decreases to \$67,780. In an even-numbered year, these estimations would each be reduced by 50%. For even-numbered years, the cost would range between \$33,890 and \$101,260. A partial reimbursement program may be proposed, or a program that provides reimbursement on even-numbered years to decrease the total cost. The total cost for every child would increase by \$546.61 in an odd-numbered year and \$273.30 in an even-numbered year.

Gender Diversification: This alternative would focus on providing financial support for women already elected to the legislature. However, this program may incentivize women with financial barriers to access to consider a run for an open State House or Senate seat. Additionally, this program may allow the wives of current male legislators to spend time previously spent on childcare exploring a new career field. Even if this alternative is moderately effective, Wyoming must signal its appreciation for traditional family values through state support. While beyond the scope of this project, a way to measure potential effectiveness is to poll potential and current candidates on if a childcare reimbursement would increase their likelihood to run for state office. This alternative would moderately increase gender diversification.

Equitable Geographic Impact: This alternative could impact women from each of the 23 counties in the state but does not presently increase the number of women from each county in the state legislature. Although this alternative may be implemented by every county in the state, the overall impact on equitable geographic representation is moderate. This might be especially important for night-time childcare if fathers work night shifts. This alternative has a high potential to create an equitable geographic impact.

Outcomes Matrix

Criteria				
Alternatives	Political Feasibility	Cost	Gender Diversification	Equitable Geographic Impact
#1: Status Quo	High	N/A	Low	Low
#2: CTP+ National Organization Online training modules	Moderate	In person conference cost: \$10,000-\$15,000 + Online Training Module Creation: \$5,850-\$15,000 =\$30,000 - \$18,000 (sponsorships) = \$12,000	High	High
#3: GBL	Low	Staff Time (5 hour per week): \$7,020	Moderate	Moderate
#4: Legislative Childcare Reimbursement	Moderate	Odd Numbered Years: \$67,780-\$202,520 Even Numbered Years: \$33,890-\$101,260	Moderate	High

Table 1

Recommendation

Given the above assessment, I recommend that the Wyoming Women's Foundation advocate to the Wyoming Women's Legislative Caucus (WWLC) to redesign the Leap into Leadership conference and partner with a national organization to create online training modules. Based on the performance of this alternative on the criteria, the opportunity for impact is significant. This alternative is moderately politically feasible, with the Wyoming Women's Legislative Caucus already having an existing conference. Creating online content and improving educational programming would allow the WWLC to reach more women across the state and make training accessible for women of various geographic, professional, and personal backgrounds. The WYWF and WWLC have worked with organizations such as She Should Run, which has free online training modules that the WWLC may model their programming after or adopt for themselves. This alternative will require both upfront and incremental investments over time. Knowing this, the benefits of gender diversification and equitable geographic impact will outweigh the moderate to high financial investment. This alternative will require significant time capital from the WYWF and WWLC, as opposed to Alternatives 3 and 4.

Implementation

Stakeholder involvement, perspectives, and potential barriers to implementation are essential to consider before moving forward with Alternative 2: Redesign the Leap into Leadership conference and partnering with a national organization to create online training modules. Once these are considered, the WYWF may implement the timeline outlined below.

Stakeholder Involvement

The Wyoming Women's Foundation and the Wyoming Women's Legislative Caucus are involved in moving this recommendation forward. The WYWF has expressed a willingness to advocate for improving Leap into Leadership and working with She Should Run to provide an online training component. I anticipate coordination pains, as the WYWF and WWLC have different priorities. It may be difficult for the WYWF to set aside time to advocate for these improvements. This recommendation may not be a priority for the WWLC and may not be discussed further or implemented without continued advocacy from the WYWF. The WWLC may be reluctant to implement these changes as their program continues to have attendees without additional investment. The WWLC will need to coordinate with their staff and legislators to have continued conversations to clarify the goal of Leap into Leadership and how the program can be improved to meet the needs of an average Wyoming woman.

Stakeholder Perspectives

The WYWF will likely be supportive and potentially resistant. The WYWF will not endanger its longstanding relationship with the WWLC and will likely follow its lead on this recommendation. However, the WYWF can work alongside the WWLC to provide funding for resources and advocate for change. They have expressed a willingness to support this recommendation with their financial resources. As a present sponsor of Leap into Leadership, the WYWF can fund the recommended improvements. If WWLC does not express interest in partnering with She Should Run, WYWF can help coordinate She Should Run training sessions within communities. Due to administrative and time constraints, I predict the WWLC will be less inclined to improve its programming.

Next Steps

To move this recommendation forward, the WYWF must coordinate communication with the WWLC. As shown in Figure 7, the WYWF and WWLC should continue conversations regarding Leap into Leadership throughout the summer to ensure there is ample time for conference planning. In April, I will present my research findings to the WYWF, WWLC, and the Cowgirl Run Fund to underscore the need to improve candidate training programming in the state. During this presentation, the WWLC will have the opportunity to engage with the research and ask questions about the effectiveness of the recommendation. Over the summer, the WYWF should have brainstorming sessions with the WWLC to implement the recommendations presented in April creatively. Once there is established communication, the WYWF can continue to advocate to the WWLC throughout the planning process in the Fall.

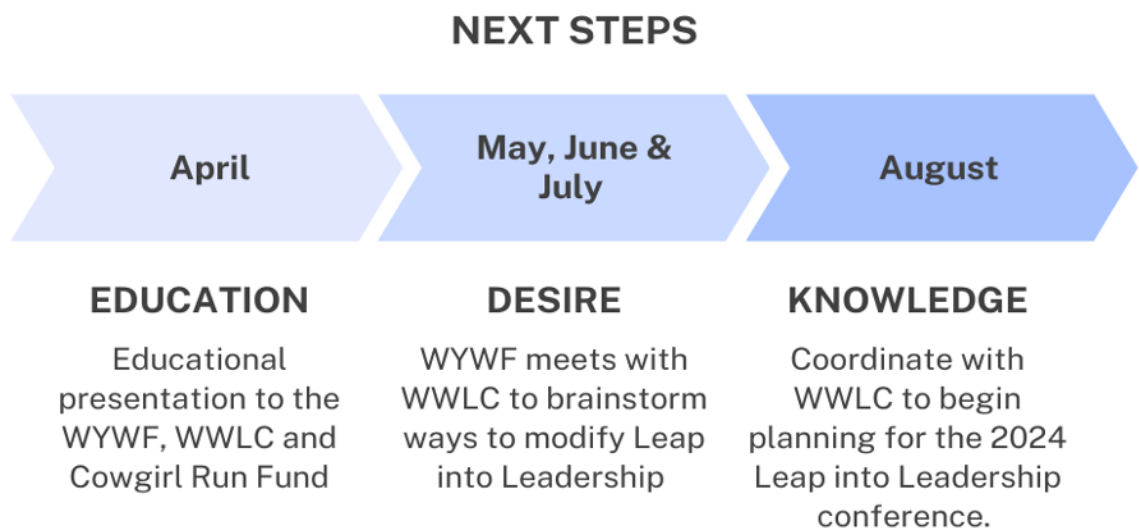


Figure 7

Potential Barriers to Implementation

Barrier 1: The WWLC does not modify its programming.

The most likely risk is that the WWLC does not have the capacity or willingness to improve Leap into Leadership and partner with an outside national organization such as She Should Run. Considering these risks, having the WYWF continue communication over the coming months regarding making the conference equitable for all Wyoming women is essential. The WWLC has expressed an interest in updating its programming, and one of the program's founding members has identified similar areas for improvement, as discussed above. I estimate that this is a likely but navigable risk.

Barrier 2: There is insufficient funding to partner with an outside organization.

If the WWLC expresses financial constraints, they may avoid implementing these recommendations. In response, the WYWF may provide increased financial investment into the programming for curriculum improvements. This is a moderate risk that could be resolved with WYWF investment.

Barrier 3: There is a change in leadership at the WYWF.

These alternatives have been developed based on communication with Rebekah and Marissa at the WYWF. If there were significant personnel turnover within the WYWF, this recommendation might be lost when files are transferred or may not be a strategic priority for the new team. It seems unlikely that both Marissa and Rebekah would leave the WYWF simultaneously, but there is a moderate risk. This is important and should be a priority when considering implementation. To address this, the WYWF should begin a conversation with the WWLC regarding updated candidate training early and engage many members to ensure the momentum is recovered.

Although the evidence for this alternative is not focused on Wyoming data, we say with certainty that this alternative will not create harm and will allow more Wyoming women to explore running for office. Moving in the direction of gender parity is a necessary step forward. Moving the in-person component of the Leap into Leadership to a weekend and providing online training content will allow Wyoming women with families and children across the state to access candidate training. The Equality State must provide expanded access for women with various experiences and schedules to explore running for office.

Conclusion

Too few women run for local and state office in Wyoming. A lack of gender parity contributes to a lack of legislative advocacy on behalf of Wyoming women. This is harmful to “normal” low- and middle-class women with families and careers underrepresented in the state legislature. In response, I recommend the WYWF advocate for redesigning the Leap into Leadership conference and contract with a national organization to develop online candidate training modules. This recommendation ranks well against the geographical equity and gender diversification criteria. This alternative is also moderate in cost and politically feasible after conversations with involved stakeholders. Although the peer-reviewed literature for this alternative is not focused on Wyoming, we can say with certainty that this alternative will not create harm and will allow more Wyoming women to explore running for office. Moving in the direction of gender parity is a necessary step forward. Moving the in-person component of the Leap into Leadership to a weekend and providing online training content will allow Wyoming women with families and children across the state to access candidate training. The Equality State must empower women with various experiences and schedules to consider running for office.

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