

Elected Women Officials in Pennsylvania Small Municipalities

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In 2018, 20 percent of elected small town municipal officials in Pennsylvania were women, according to a survey of municipalities with populations under 2,500 by the Center for Rural Pennsylvania. The Center developed the following profile of female elected municipal officials in Pennsylvania based on the 2018 survey results. The profile includes a comparison of the results with the those of a similar survey conducted in 2005.

The 2018 results indicated that:

- Women elected municipal officials were 61 years old, on average, and had been in office for 9 years. Their male counterparts were 62 years old, on average, and had been in office for 12 years.
- A higher percentage of female officials had a bachelor's degree or higher than male officials (38 percent and 26 percent, respectively.)
- Female officials were less likely to have attended a municipal training class in the previous 2 years (39 percent) than male officials (52 percent).
- A higher percentage of female officials (62 percent) was in the labor force than male officials (59 percent).
- There was no significant difference in income between female and male officials as 64 percent of female officials had incomes of \$50,000 or more and 62 percent of male officials had incomes of \$50,000 or more.
- A higher percentage of female officials volunteered in their communities (81 percent) than male officials (72 percent).
- In their last election, 51 percent of female officials and 45 percent of male officials had another candidate run against them.

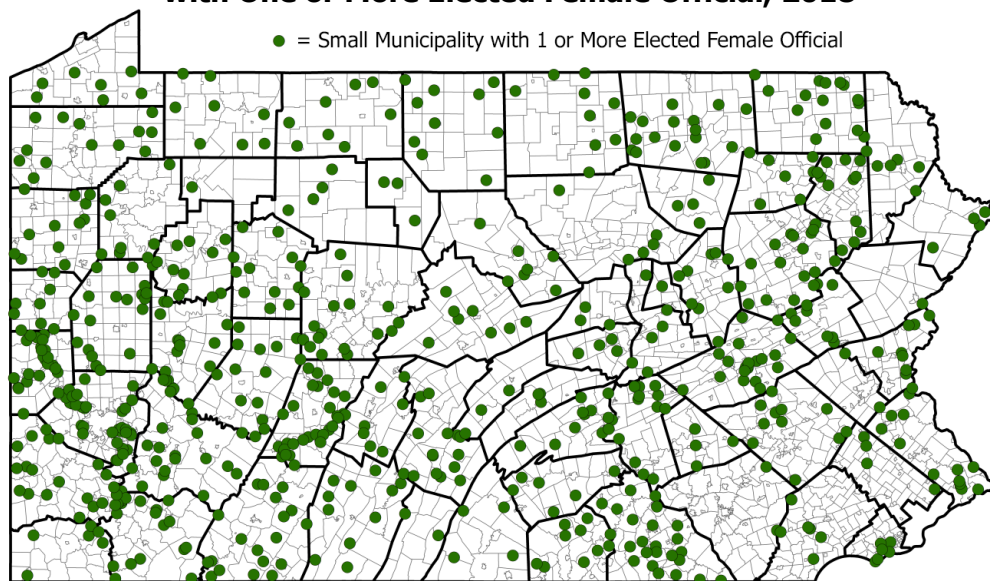
Findings

Small Municipalities with Elected Women Officials

Census data show that, in 2018, there were 1,504 boroughs and townships with populations under 2,500 residents in Pennsylvania. Among these municipalities, 45 percent had at least one elected female municipal official, and 55 percent had none in 2018, according to data from the Governor’s Center for Local Government Services.

Among the 680 small Pennsylvania municipalities with female officials, 18 percent had 50 percent or more female officials, and 78 percent had less than 50 percent female officials. There was insufficient data from 4 percent of municipalities to determine female representation.

Small Municipalities (<2,500 residents) with One or More Elected Female Official, 2018



Data source: Governor’s Center for Local Government Services

Methodology

The 2018 survey was modeled after the 2005 survey of local government officials. In both years, the sample was drawn from a list of elected officials maintained by the Governor’s Center for Local Government Services. From this list, the Center for Rural Pennsylvania excluded all officials in municipalities with 2,500 or more residents as well as officials in townships of the first class and all first-class through third-class cities.

In 2018, there were 7,131 officials on the revised list. A sample of 3,579 officials in boroughs and townships of the second class (hereafter townships) was taken to more accurately reflect the proportion of officials in each type of municipality in the state. In September 2018, the survey was mailed to 2,263 borough officials and 1,316 township officials. There were 1,196 usable surveys returned for a total response rate of about 33 percent. The confidence interval, or margin of error, was plus or minus 2.6. This means there is a 95 percent chance that if the survey were repeated, the results would not differ from the survey findings by more than 2.6 percentage points.

Because of the large response rate, it was possible to examine female and male officials separately. The table at right shows the total response rates.

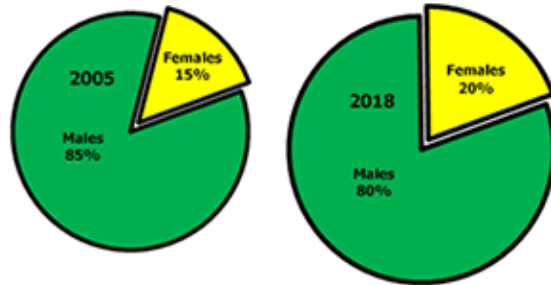
Survey Response Rates, 2005 and 2018

	2018	2005
# Elected Officials in Townships and Boroughs with Fewer than 2,500 Residents	7,131	7,323
# Surveys Mailed	3,579	3,500
# Completed Surveys Returned	1,196	1,208
Response Rate	33.4%	34.5%
Margin of Error (Confidence interval at 95%)	2.59	2.51

Percent of Female Officials

In 2005, 15 percent of small town officials were female, and, in 2018, 20 percent were female. In 2018, boroughs had a higher percentage of females (28 percent) than townships (10 percent).

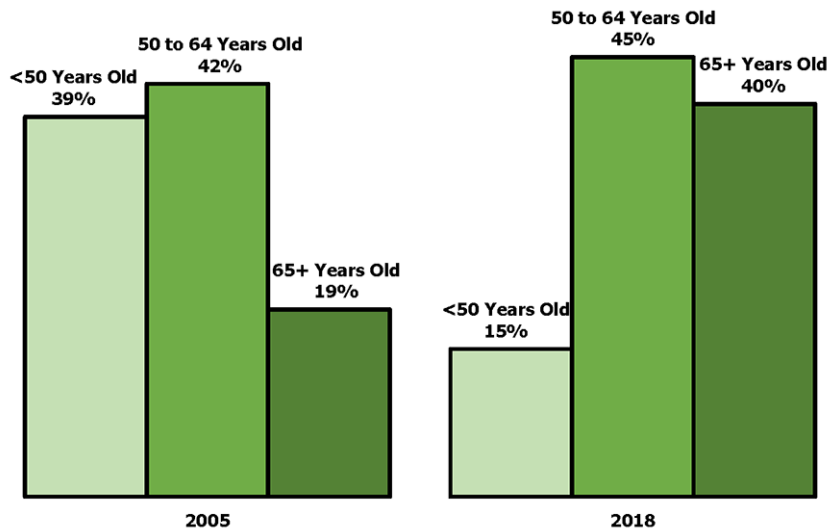
Percent of Small Town Officials by Gender, 2005 and 2018







Age of Female Officials

In 2018, the average age of a small town female official was 61.3. Males were slightly older, on average, at 62.0 years old. From 2005 to 2018, the average age of female officials increased by nearly 8 years, while the average age of male officials increased 4 years.

Age of Small Town Female Officials, 2005 and 2018



Household and Housing Characteristics, 2018

- 
Percent of Households with Children
 - 15% Female Officials
 - 14% Male Officials
- 
Percent of Officials Living Alone
 - 23% Female Officials
 - 12% Male Officials
- 
Percent of Homeowners
 - 96% Female Officials
 - 97% Male Officials
- 
Lived in the Same Municipality for 20+ Years
 - 73% Female Officials
 - 80% Male Officials

Households and Housing

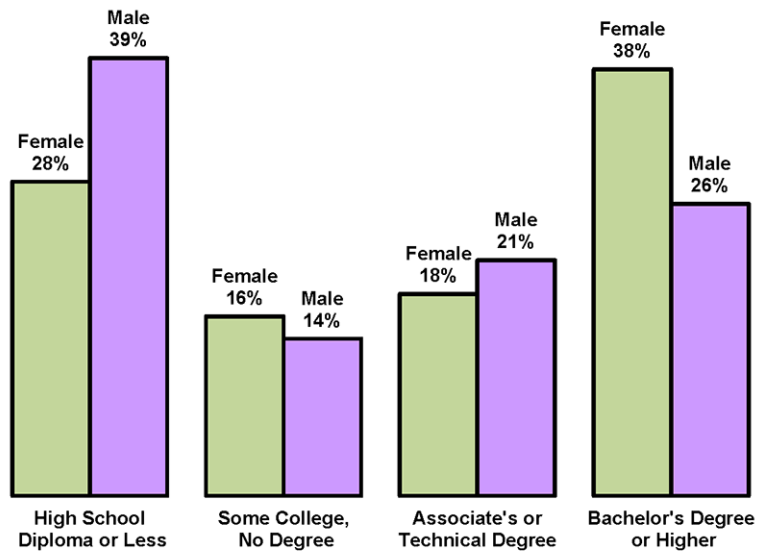
In 2018, the average number of people per household was nearly identical for both female and male officials (2.2 and 2.3 people per household, respectively). There was, however, a significant decrease in the average number of people per household in both female and male official households from 2005 to 2018. In 2005, the average number of people for both was 2.6 people per household.

Educational Attainment and Municipal Training Classes

A higher percentage of female officials had a bachelor's degree or higher (38 percent) than male officials (26 percent). From 2005 to 2018, the percent of female officials with a bachelor's degree or higher increased 9 percentage points, and the percent of male officials with a bachelor's degree or higher increased 4 percentage points.

Female officials were less likely to have attended one or more municipal training classes in the previous 2 years than male officials (39 percent and 52 percent, respectively.)

Highest Level of Educational Attainment by Gender, 2018



Employment Status and Income

There was no significant difference between female and male officials when it came to labor force participation. In 2018, 62 percent of female officials and 59 percent of male officials were in the labor force. From 2005 to 2018, labor force participation for both female and male officials decreased. There was no significant difference in income between female and male officials; 64 percent of female officials and 62 percent of male officials had incomes of \$50,000 or more.

Labor Force Participation Rates By Gender, 2005 and 2018

Females in Labor Force, 2005, 71%	Females Not in Labor Force, 2005, 29%
Females in Labor Force, 2018, 62%	Females Not in Labor Force, 2018, 38%
Males in Labor Force, 2005, 66%	Males Not in Labor Force, 2005, 34%
Males in Labor Force, 2018, 59%	Males Not in Labor Force, 2018, 41%

Volunteerism

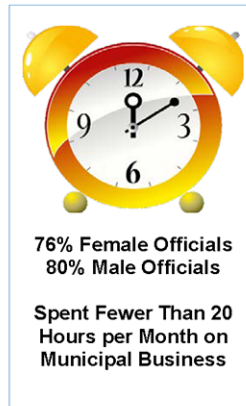
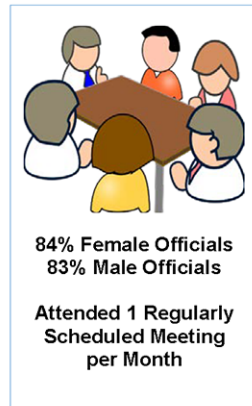
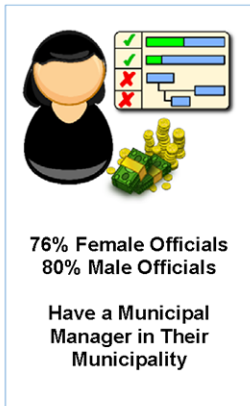
In addition to their municipal responsibilities, many small town officials volunteer in their communities. In 2018, there was a significant gender gap in volunteerism. Eighty-one percent of female officials said they volunteered compared to 72 percent of male officials. Among both genders, there was a slight decrease in volunteerism from 2005 to 2018.

Organizations, Activities Where Female and Male Elected Officials Volunteer, 2018

	Females	Males
Religious Organizations	51%	46%
Social/Civic Organizations	40%	30%
Volunteer Fire Companies	19%	30%
Youth Activities/Sports	12%	19%
Schools	18%	13%
Arts/Culture Activities	18%	10%
Other Organizations	31%	25%

Totals do not add up to 100% due to multiple responses.

Municipal Business, 2018



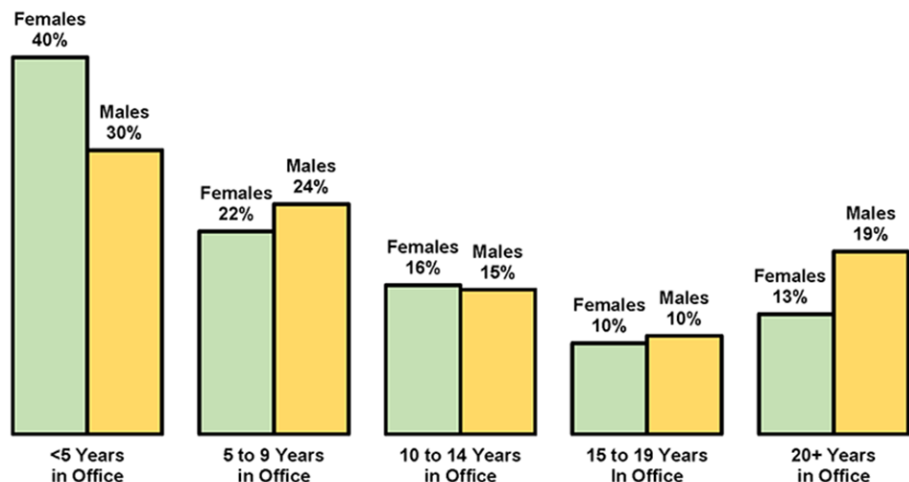
Municipal Business

The majority of both female and male officials served in boroughs and townships without municipal managers, both typically had one meeting a month, and most spent fewer than 20 hours a month on municipal business. In addition, there was no difference in the number of full- and part-time employees in their municipalities.

Years in Office

In 2018, female officials were in office for 8.8 years, on average, and male officials were in office 11.6 years, on average. From 2005 to 2018, the average number of years in office for females increased 2.2 years, while for male officials, there was only a 0.9 year increase. For both genders, there were significant relationships between the number of years in office and officials' age, and not being in the labor force. For both genders, there were no significant relationships between the number of years in office and the number of hours spent on municipal business each month, officials' educational attainment, and whether or not the officials volunteered.

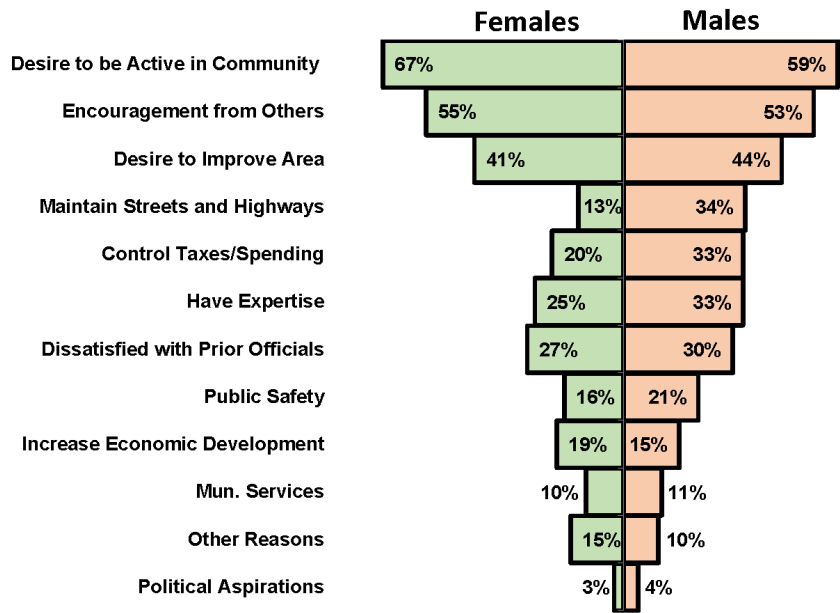
Years in Office for Female and Male Elected Officials, 2018



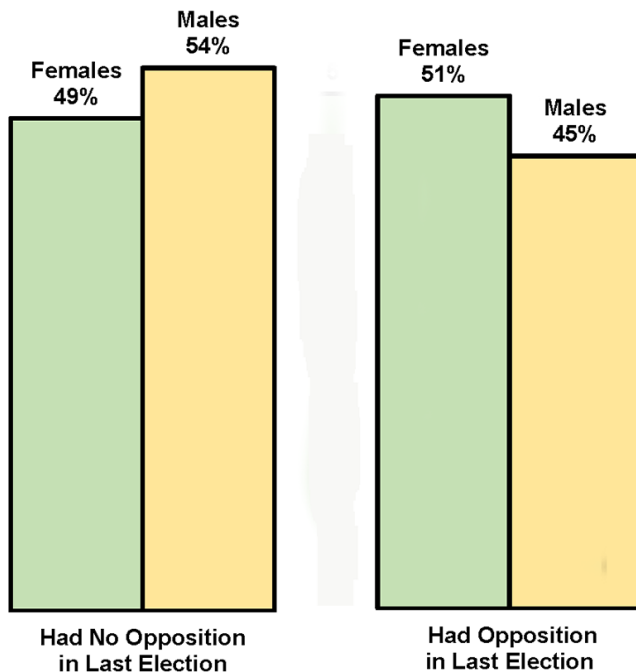
Reasons for Becoming a Municipal Official

For the most part, the motivation to run for local office did not vary by gender. The top three reasons for female and male officials were nearly identical: a desire to be active in the community, encouragement from others, and a desire to improve their local areas. The two reasons where there were significant differences between female and male officials were: controlling taxes and spending, and maintaining streets and highways. Female officials were less likely to check these two items than male officials.

Reasons Why Officials First Ran for Office by Gender, 2018



Percent of Officials that had Opposition in Last Election by Gender, 2018



Opposition in Last Election

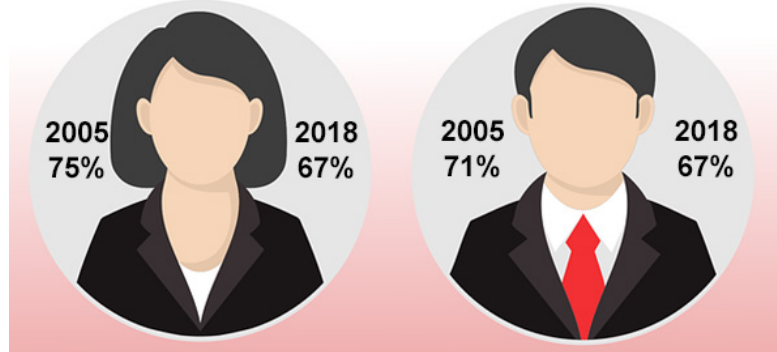
In 2018, 51 percent of female officials said they had opposition in their last election, and 49 percent said they ran unopposed. This was a change from 2005 when 53 percent had opposition and 47 percent ran unopposed. Among male officials, in 2018, 45 percent had opposition and 55 percent ran unopposed. In 2005, these numbers were nearly reversed, with 54 percent of male officials having opposition and 46 percent running unopposed.

In 2018, among both female and male officials that had opposition, there was no significant difference as to when they faced their opponent. Seventeen percent had an opponent in the primary election only; 25 percent had an opponent in the general election only; and 58 percent had opponents in both the primary and general elections.

Running for Reelection

In 2018, the percent of female and male officials not planning to run for reelection was identical at 33 percent. Among female officials not running, on average, they were 63.9 years old and served 11.5 years. Among male officials not running, on average, they were 65.8 years old and served 12.6 years. When asked why they were not running, 63 percent of female officials and 54 percent of male officials said they had served long enough and wanted to give others a chance.

Percent of Officials Planning to Run for Reelection by Gender, 2005 and 2018



Important Issues in their Municipality

In 2018, when asked to identify the top three issues in their municipality, female officials said streets and highways, taxes and spending, and financial viability. With some differences in percentages, these were the same top three issues for male officials. From 2005 to 2018, there was only one change in the top three issues for female officials: public safety. In 2005, 39 percent said it was their top concern. By 2018, this issue declined 9 percentage points. For male officials, there was no change in the top three issues from 2005 to 2018.

Important Municipal Issues by Gender, 2005 and 2018

	Females		Males	
	2005	2018	2005	2018
Streets and Highways	51%	61%	65%	76%
Taxes and Spending	45%	38%	60%	55%
Financial Viability	33%	35%	31%	33%
Code Enforcement	25%	32%	19%	28%
Economic Development	30%	31%	21%	20%
Public Safety	39%	30%	25%	30%
Water/Sewage Services	28%	22%	32%	23%
Land Use	23%	13%	25%	14%
Recreational Activities	16%	14%	8%	6%
Other	7%	11%	4%	6%

Discussion

Fewer Female Officials

One out of five elected small town municipal officials is female. The survey could not determine why there are fewer female municipal officials than male officials. However, the survey did show an increase in the number of female officials from 2005 to 2018. Over this period, there was a 5 percentage point increase in female officials.

Similar Reasons for Running for Office

Individuals rarely run for political office without having issues they want to address. The survey results indicated that there are many similarities between female and male officials on why they initially ran for office. The two factors that were different (maintaining streets and highways, and controlling taxes) did not make the top three lists for either female or male officials.

Similarities in Serving in Office

When it comes to the number of meetings per month, and the hours spent on municipal business, there were no significant differences between female and male officials. Nor was there any difference when it came to the number of municipal employees in their municipalities. All of this could suggest that the responsibilities of governing are shared equally by both female and male elected officials.

Better Educated, But Attend Less Training

According to the survey results, female officials were more likely to have a bachelor's degree or higher than male officials. However, female officials attended fewer municipal training classes than their male counterparts. For both genders, municipal training classes are important for keeping up-to-date on regulatory changes and other issues. It is also important because most Pennsylvania small towns do not have municipal managers, who facilitate the day-to-day management of municipalities.

Future Leadership Transition

On average, female officials were about 61 years old and male officials were about 62 years old. With an older cohort of officials, it is likely that many municipalities will experience a leadership transition in the coming years. For small municipalities, it will be important to prepare for this transition and to encourage residents to participate in municipal government.