

**Women's Commissions and Friends:  
A Beginning Look**

A Preliminary Overview of Women's  
Commissions and Affiliated  
Support Organizations in  
Region III of the United States

**Susan K. Garrison, Esq.**

A Collaborative Project of The Center Foundation  
and  
Friends of the Delaware County Women's Commission

## Region III Commissions for Women and Friends

### Table of Contents

Introduction and History of the Project	1	
Research Design and Process		1
Survey Results	2	
Commission Profile Overview		
Location in Government Structure		3
Source of Authority		3
Organizational Structure		3
Staff		4
Services Provided		5
Missions		5
Funding		5
Friends Organizations		6
Political and Organization Challenges	6	
Analysis		
Historical Perspective		7
Conclusions		7
Recommendations		9
Future Research Agenda		9
Implications for NACW		10
Acknowledgments		10

### List of Tables

Table 1 Location in Government Structure
Table 2 Commission Activities
Table 3 Mission Descriptions
Table 4 Funding Sources of Currently Funded Official Commissions
Table 5 Friends/Independent Commission Funding Sources
Table 6 Budget Comparison Data

### Appendices

Appendix A	Questionnaire
Appendix B	Abolished and Inactive Commissions
Appendix C	Respondent Commissions
Appendix D	Environment, Challenge and Successes (Survey Responses)

### Notes

### About the Author

## Region III Commissions for Women and Friends

### Introduction and Origin of the Project

This study is an interim step in a larger project covering all women's commissions across the country. Friends of the Delaware County Women's Commission conceived the idea of a nationwide study of women's commissions in its annual planning for the year 1995. The concept started simply from a desire to share information with other Friends of Commissions.

Friends of the Delaware County Women's Commission (FOWC) is a Pennsylvania non-profit corporation qualified as a tax-exempt public charity under 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code. It was incorporated in 1990 for the principal purpose of assisting in the development of the Delaware County Women's Commission, then five years old. In its 5th year of operation the FOWC identified formulating stronger working relationships with the Delaware County Women's Commission and with other women's commissions and affiliated Friends organizations as a long term goal. It was conceived that finding out similarities and differences in the structure and operations of other women's commissions would help it and other commissions to learn from each other's successes and challenges, avoid wasted effort, and improve coalition-building.

### Research Design and Process

A brief inquiry in the summer of 1995 showed that the National Association of Commissions for Women (NACW), of whom the FOWC is an affiliate member, did not have any list of Friends organizations nor an up-to-date readily accessible database on all state, county and local commissions. The FOWC had gotten from its local commission a list of official and "unofficial" commissions for women in Pennsylvania not on the NACW list. It was decided to solicit information from the various commissions for women on the Pennsylvania list as well as the NACW membership list to begin the process of inventorying commissions to find other Friends organizations. In this way the results of the survey could be utilized to assist the FOWC in formulating its own internal structures to best serve the women of Delaware County in its role as an affiliate of the Delaware County Women's Commission, could also provide information to assist NACW in its role as a support for its member commissions and could assist other commissions in modeling their own affiliated Friends supporting organizations.

A meeting was held in Topeka, Kansas with members of the Topeka Mayor's Commission on the Status of Women and its Friends organization in August of 1995 to discuss some of the information which would be most useful to obtain from the project. Initially the plan was to send a brief overview questionnaire to commissions on the Pennsylvania and NACW lists to assess interest on the part of commissions in taking part in a more detailed survey. The NACW list was obtained in September 1995 and with funding assistance from The Center Foundation, a consultant helped design the database for the mailing list of commissions. The scope of the study was expanded with the assistance of Widener University senior intern Audrey Shupp in January 1996 which enabled additional research and follow-up. An initial mailing was sent in March of 1996 to the dues paid membership roster which was supplied by the National Association of Commissions for Women along with the Pennsylvania list supplied by the Delaware County Women's Commission. These lists served as the initial source of information about the commissions. A survey was mailed to each of the 288 commissions shown with current information available. Follow up telephone calls were made in March and April. These revealed a number of changed addresses as well as inactive commissions. A personal solicitation of attendees at the National Association of Commissions for

Women Convention in July in Miami resulted in additional surveys. A series of additional follow-up phone calls and faxes were made during the summer.

At the 1996 National Convention it was decided after an informal meeting of Region III commissions to concentrate first on gathering information from all the commissions in Region III in order to bring a preliminary report to a regional conference planned for October of 1996. At this time The Center Foundation took over primary oversight for the project. Accordingly additional summer follow-up calls were made and additional surveys were faxed to commissions in the District of Columbia and the states of Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, Pennsylvania, Virginia and West Virginia. A second complete survey mailing was also done in the beginning of October to all commissions in Region III that had not completed and returned a survey. Final survey responses were also taken over the phone. After the Region III conference third and fourth mailings were done in December 1996 and June 1997 to all non-responding commissions. Telephone follow-up and personal contacts with some commissions continued through early 1997 into the summer with the aid of student interns and temporary foundation staff.

This preliminary overview of a single region represents only a hint of the depth of the data which could be obtained by the completion of this project nationally, as planned. In the spring of 1997 after ascertaining that about 60% of commissions nationwide had responded, the director of The Center Foundation found two collaborators for the second stage of the project. The second stage will involve not only quantitative analysis of the survey results but an in-depth on-site interview protocol for qualitative study of a selected sample of commissions. Dr. Janet Rosenberg and Dr. Barbara Ryan of Widener University have joined with Ms. Garrison as co-principal investigators to seek additional funding for the second stage of the project.

Through this survey the project was focused on identifying internal structural and programmatic characteristics of commissions as well as understanding their political and organizational environment and how they operate with other organizations, in particular with any affiliated Friends-type organizations. Thus the questionnaire inquired as to the source of creation of the commission in state, county or local government, its organizational structure, mission, activities, staff, funding, political and organizational environment and successes and challenges. The survey asked similar questions as to type of entity, structure, staff, funding, activities, and what types of services would be most helpful to be provided by such an affiliated organization which it might have or might consider forming. Preliminary research has shown only a couple models of structure of affiliated Friends-type organizations among non-profit and community advisory groups, most of which have primarily fundraising purposes. Accordingly, particular attention was paid to funding questions. As some respondents included a specific dollar figure for budgets, this query was added in the second mailing and was asked in telephone interviews. Most of the survey questions were multiple choice or fill in the blanks. The survey was three pages long and was accompanied by a memorandum with an explanation of purpose and instructions. (See Appendix A.)

### Survey Results

A final total of 31 surveys were received from 34 active official commissions (21 county commissions, 4 state commissions, and 6 local commissions including the District of Columbia) for a response rate of 91 percent. Only three allegedly active commissions have failed to complete a survey. During the course of the research 9 commissions included on the Pennsylvania and NACW lists were revealed to be inactive or abolished since the initial mailings. One state commission (Pennsylvania) became inactive due to funding and staff cuts after sending in its questionnaire but has now been rebudgeted and should be restarted shortly. Surveys were also received from four independent commissions, not officially affiliated with any governmental body; although one of these, The Greater

Pittsburgh Commission on Women, is treated as a hybrid rather than unofficial for this purpose. See Appendices B and C for listing of inactive commissions and commissions which responded to the survey.

## COMMISSION PROFILE OVERVIEW

### Location in Government Structure

Among the state commissions in Region III all active commissions are concentrated in the executive branch of government and are associated with different departments including human resources, labor, and civil rights. Both state commissions which are currently inactive (Virginia and Pennsylvania) were under the office of the governor. Seventeen of the twenty-one county commissions responding report to their county council or commission or board of supervisors, two of which work with an executive branch department (respectively, Human Services and the Office for Women) for purposes of shared staff support. Four are connected to different executive branch departments, including Human Resources, Community Resources, Citizen Services, and Housing and Community Development. Local commission structures show more variance. One of the municipal commissions is under the office of the mayor, one is under both mayor and city council reporting to the mayor with appointments being made by the mayor and approved by council. Baltimore City's Commission for Women is an independent government agency with appointments made by the mayor. The Greater Pittsburgh Commission for Women is technically an independent, not an official commission, but is an NACW member and functions like a strong official commission by virtue of strong support through funding from and government relations with the city and county. The District of Columbia Commission is appointed by and serves under the mayor's office. Alexandria's Commission is under the office of Human Relations together with the Office for Women. (See Table 1.)

### Source of Authority

Although some commissions were originally created by executive order, most of the commissions reported that they were created by public statute or legislation. Some local and county commissions were created by resolution or ordinance. Four independent commissions responded which are unofficial organizations not connected with any governmental body. Each has differing characteristics. One was created by and reports to the office of the president of a state university. The other three are at different stages of development of official women's commissions. The Schuylkill County Women's Commission is an 11-year-old voluntary coalition of women's organizations in a county where there is no women's commission but which is contemplating attempting to obtain county affiliated status. The Women's Alliance of Lancaster County is the voluntary association successor to a now defunct Lancaster County Women's Commission which was dissolved in 1990. The Greater Pittsburgh Women's Commission serving five Pennsylvania counties is a 10-year old private non-profit corporation which was the officially sanctioned successor to the Pittsburgh Mayor's Task Force on Women.

### Organizational Structure

All commissions have unpaid appointed commissioners. In six of the county commissions responding (28%), appointments are made by the county executive sometimes with ratification by the county council or commission. In all other county commissions appointments are made by the county commission or council. Appointment of commissioners is by the governor in all state commissions. The commissions vary widely in having any input into the appointment process. A few make recommendations, formal or informal, which are taken into account in varying degrees by the council or executive. Some merely forward resumes for consideration.

The number of commissioners ranges from 11 to 24 among state commissions, and 9 to 30 among county commissions, and 5 to 21 among local commissions, including the District of Columbia. The average number of commissioners is 14. Fifteen is the most common number of commissioners among county commissions. Commissioners are appointed for terms of between 2 and 6 years with over 75% of all commissions having a term of 3 years.

Most commissions have a committee structure. In all cases commissioners are most likely to serve on the committees. In two-thirds of states responding additional committee members include volunteers, staff and legislators. Among county commissions 4 have only commissioners serving on committees. Seventy-six percent of the county commissions also include volunteers, the general public or staff on committees. Twenty-three percent of county commission committees also have representation from legislators or other official representatives. Among the city commissions one only has commissioners who serve on committees, the other two include volunteers and staff and the general public on their committees. Three commissions with Friends organizations also have Friends board members on committees.

### Staff

The number of commission staff varies widely if the Alexandria (Virginia) Commission and Montgomery County (Maryland) Commission are included as these commissions both have large staffs to provide direct services, while their administrative commission staff numbers three. These commissions are atypical, in providing direct services, so only administrative staff is included in the figures for staff comparisons. Among active state commissions the average number of staff is 3.75. (Pennsylvania, as an active commission had a staff of 5. Delaware and Maryland each have a staff of three.)

Among county commissions the picture is far different. Most commissions have minimal or no staff. In fact only 22% of commissions reported an executive director. Among our respondents only 3 out of 21 county commissions (14%) had more than one staff person; nine (43%) had no staff at all, and nine (43%) had either only one staff person or a part-time staff person. The vast majority of commissions, 18 of 21, (86%) operate with no staff or only minimal staff. The average number of staff is only .7 persons. Among municipalities personnel varies widely ranging from a 20 hour a week staff person in Fairfax City, 1 Staff Liaison in Falls Church, Virginia to 22 and 32 staff people in Alexandria and Baltimore City, respectively. The District of Columbia Commission has part time staff under the Department of Human Services. Among independent commissions only the Greater Pittsburgh Commission and Penn State Commission have paid staff.

With such diversity in staff numbers is not surprising that titles for staff are varied. All state staffed commissions have a director or executive director. But many county and local commission's only staff person consist of staff with such titles as coordinator, administrative assistant, secretary, human services coordinator, and staff liaison. Where commissions have more than one staff person, mostly state and local commissions, additional positions are listed under programming, outreach and public relations, community education and community relations, as well as secretary and administrative assistant.

## Services Provided

The services reported to be provided by women's commissions whether among states, counties or municipalities appear to be similar. Almost all provide advice or advocacy to either the legislative or executive branch as well as public education and networking. One county commission, however, reported its only activity as being public education. Most did not provide direct services; of those that did all three indicated information and referral as a service provided. Three county commissions reported giving financial assistance through scholarships, loans, and grants. As noted previously, Montgomery County Women's Commission is unusual in providing considerable direct services through a staff of 7 in a counseling center that provides career and personal counseling groups and workshops and seminars, information referral, legal callback, psychometric testing, legal and financial counseling and a displaced homemaker services. The Alexandria Commission also provides comprehensive employment and mentoring services, runs a domestic violence shelter, and rape victim program through a staff of 13. Three quarters of all commissions reported providing four or more different types of services. See Table 2 for breakdown of commission activities.

## Missions

The missions of the responding women's commissions tended to be multi-faceted and not necessarily exactly consistent with the services they reported providing. The most commonly reported purpose was advocacy or advice to government. The next frequently mentioned was assessing the needs of women. Fifty percent of those responding included a general activist statement of mission such as "promoting solutions to the social, political and economic inequality of women." An almost equal number cited public education and information as part of their mission. Also noted were promoting recognition of women and their achievements, outreach and networking, and information and referral. See Table 3 for most commonly reported missions. Four commissions reflected a mission serving "women and their families" and two specified serving needs of "women and children". Specific narrower missions mentioned by one commission each included: monitoring sexual harassment and discrimination, and increasing the number of women on boards.

## Funding

Three of the commissions responded they are not currently funded, but one reported an expectation of renewed funding. Of those currently funded all received some monies from public allocation whether directly under the agency or council to which they report or an executive branch department. Seventy-six percent of those funded indicated 100% of their budget from public allocation. Some receive funds from a combination of federal, county and local government sources. Foundation and corporate grants and private contributions comprise a source of funding for 24% of commissions. Three of the four commissions that have existing Friends organizations report receiving grants from the Friends. Six commissions receive service or project revenue.

Pennsylvania showed the greatest diversity in sources of funds for county commissions. Mercer County reported 50% of its budget from public allocation, 25% from foundation and corporate grants and 25% from service or project revenue. Similarly the Delaware County Women's Commission receives financial support from corporate and foundation grants, grants from its affiliated Friends, revenue from service projects, discretionary funds from county council as well as operating budgets through the human services department of the county. The Berks County Commission receives only half of its funds from public allocation and half from corporate and foundation grants. Unofficial commissions and Friends organizations also report a diverse range of funding sources including

dues, individual contributions, service revenue, fundraising events, and corporate, foundation and government grants. See Tables 4 and 5 for comparison of funding sources for official and unofficial commissions.

Seventy-seven percent of the commissions reporting indicate they have an independent budget. Five counties, the District of Columbia and one state (Maryland) indicated no independent budget. Lack of an independent budget is distinct from lack of funding. Among local and county commissions which reported dollar figures budgets range from 0 to \$150,000. Most commonly reported budgets fell between \$1,000 and \$5,000. Some state budgets reported were equal to the highest city budget. See Table 6 for budget comparisons.

### Friends Organizations

Four of the commissions reporting have operational affiliated Friends organizations - the District of Columbia; Delaware County, Pennsylvania; Fairfax County, Virginia; and Baltimore City, Maryland. The Commissions for the State of Maryland and Chester County, Pennsylvania were in the process of setting up Friends organizations at the time of their response. The Pennsylvania Commission had initially reported an informally structured Friends organization. Calvert County, Maryland's Commission also indicated the existence of a Friends entity currently on hold. Most of the operating entities were created as non-profit corporations although Fairfax County reports an unincorporated association. Thirty-nine percent of commissions responding indicated that they were interested in or thinking about forming such organizations. Those who indicated a reason for not having such an affiliate indicated in a few cases unfamiliarity with the concept or responded that their funding needs did not require it either because of governmental support or support from other outside organizations.

Responses were made by commissions contemplating Friends organizations as well as those with existing Friends as to actual and recommended structure. Respondents indicated a variety of structural relationships between commission and Friends - from having Commission staff serving as staff for both entities with a board appointed by the Commission, through formal fiscal accountability and mandated percentage interlocking boards, to having Commission chair serving on Friends board, and other informal interrelations. Half of Friends boards have the Commission chair serve on the Friends board, require fiscal controls and are elected by members not the Commission.

When asked what would be the most useful services to be provided by a Friends organization, 58% reported that fundraising, particularly for special projects, would be the most helpful assistance. One-third suggested volunteers as the most helpful assistance, and twenty-five percent indicated advocacy, both general and legislative, and technical help and research as being the most useful support. Additional needs cited which could be met by a Friends organization were helping to provide more visibility for the Commission in the community, dissemination of information, and networking and outreach.

### Political and Organization Challenges and Successes

Appendix D includes the commissions' responses to two open-ended questions about their political and organization environment and their greatest challenges and successes. Four of the commissions responded that their greatest challenge was in achieving recognition or credibility or being taken seriously. One-third of those responding stressed the politically-related challenges posed by the political nature of the appointment process or partisan control over the commission and the concomitant lack of power and real authority to impact on policy or even secure necessary appointees. Related restrictions noted were inability to deal with controversial or unpopular issues. Fifty-

eight percent of the commissions indicated funding challenges, budget restrictions, the threat of cutbacks and like budgetary concerns as being the most serious concern. In some instances this resulted in prior attempts to actually abolish the commissions or at least force them to inactive status. Although in some cases such attempts were foiled by coordinated outside advocacy, such saving efforts have not always been successful. Even commissions which cited significant support from their governmental body and environment noted financial restraints as a concern. Three commissions did not indicate any challenges. Other challenges cited included dealing with internal leadership crises, lack of ability to obtain needed information, and achieving ethnic diversity for program participants.

Fourteen of the commissions responding noted significant achievements in establishing policies to help women locally such as opening the first local abuse shelter, achieving gender balance on boards, and winning legislative battles. A multitude of issue areas were addressed successfully including domestic violence, hospitalization stays for new mothers, family leave, teen pregnancy, child care, child support enforcement, employment, pay inequity, court care, sexual harassment and women's health. In addition the commissions reported a number of highlights in the area of public education, providing information and resource guides, and various significant studies. A number regard having survived the challenges posed by budget and political restraints to be a success in itself.

### Historical Perspective

State Commissions on the Status of Women were originally conceived at the federal level in the 1960's. With the creation of the President's Commission on the Status of Women by Executive Order of President Kennedy in December, 1961 the Women's Bureau of the Department of Labor influenced states to create their own commissions. Pennsylvania was one of the first in 1963, Maryland followed in 1965 and many more were created until by 1966, 45 states had such commissions. These states formed the Interstate Association of Commissions on Women which later became the National Association of Commissions for Women. Membership in the NACW was extended later to county and local commissions.

Historically, commissions were initially created by executive order and later made statutory with varying structures of appointment structure and authority. In all cases there has been a clear political element involved. The first local commission for women was created in Beaver Dam, Wisconsin in 1966.<sup>1</sup> (That commission has fallen inactive during the period of this study due to the mayor's failure to reappoint commissioners.) By 1973 the Women's Bureau reported 31 local, i.e. county or municipal, commissions. By 1976 that number nationally had grown to 82.<sup>2</sup> In Region III by the early 1970's almost all the states had a state level commission. The West Virginia Commission was created by statute in 1977, and Delaware's statutory authority dates to 1981.

The first local commissions were mostly a response to the women's movement in the late 1960's and the 1970's. In Region III six local commissions were created in Maryland in the 1970's, as well as the District of Columbia Commission and three of Virginia's commissions. Two commissions each in Virginia and Maryland created in the 1980's as were three official and all four of the independent commissions in Pennsylvania which responded. Four commissions were been created since 1990. The oldest county commission responding is the Montgomery County Commission for Women in Maryland established in 1972. At the current time there are 242 local and county commissions officially listed as members of the NACW, 27 of which are in Region III. Delaware and West Virginia have no county or local commissions, while Virginia and Pennsylvania have active local commissions while their state commissions are inactive or in transition at present.

### Conclusions

As evidenced by the experience of the oldest local commission and that of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania, longevity is not a guarantee of continued performance. Given the political nature of the appointment and creation of commissions, this is not surprising. Turnover in political offices makes for more frequent change also in commission existence, staff and programming. However, the largest local commissions have been in existence for over twenty years and grew out of expressed needs for services for women not provided by other agencies.

Preliminary research indicates that structurally little has changed since the first wave of local commissions was created more than twenty years ago. At the time of the last study of local commissions in 1975 when there were 75 local commissions officially 60 of which were considered active, many operated with minimal staff.<sup>3</sup> Only 4 of the Region III commissions were in existence at the time of that last study but it is interesting that the numbers have not changed much. At that time 29.2% percent of commissions reported directly to the chief executive officer, 43% reported directly to county council and 16.7% reported to other officials under a specific department.<sup>4</sup> There was great latitude in terms of committee structure as is the case now. Staff and budgets were modest then as now. One measure of commission performance is the ability to gather and expend resources such as hiring administrative staff. By this measure, the status of women's commissions appears slightly worse today among Region III commissions than nationally twenty years ago. This may, however, reflect as much a national trend in funding cutbacks for women and minority issues as much as regional difference. In 1975 31.3% of local commissions reported having an executive director; only 18.3% had additional staff. Fifty-three percent reported no budget for the year 1975-1976; the median budget then was \$16,000.<sup>5</sup> It should be noted, however, that modest budgets are more the rule than the exception for all kinds of local advisory boards, not just those concerned with minority or women's issues, unless these boards are assigned an administrative responsibility like a human relations board for monitoring and reporting to local enforcement authorities.

Ever since commissions have been in existence, the number of active commissions has continued to shift as due to budget cutbacks and political changes, some commissions have gone active and some have rejuvenated. Some commissions have weathered these crises always with outside help. Many commissions, large and small, still perceive themselves at risk of being defunded, and while others appear very strong, almost all evince a consistent concern over future budget restraints. It would seem that sharing of information between the commissions would be helpful to divine methods of coping with these common challenges.

Even though many commissions expressed consternation over budget and political restrictions, the level of performance of substantive impact is far from minimal.<sup>6</sup> Almost half the commissions reported some success in achieving specific legislative changes or other policy implementations affecting women in addition to less controversial public education programs. It may be that despite the constraints imposed on advocacy by being affiliated with government that the benefits outweigh them particularly where such advocacy is combined with that of others in the community.

## Recommendations

In order to ameliorate some of the major challenges cited by commissions it is recommended that:

- Commissions investigate new ways of collaborating with the private for-profit and nonprofit sector and other women's organizations, particularly the independent unofficial women's commissions and women's centers at universities, both on a project basis, on advocacy for issues and for assistance in combating threats to their existence.
- Commissions communicate more frequently and openly with each other and with NACW to share problems, solutions and strategies, whether through regional and state and local meetings, informal networking, and especially through enhanced technological means now available online.
- Commissions learn from private non-profit models such as the independent commissions and diversify their funding sources for projects as well as for long-term financial security.
- Commissions do a legal and strategic analysis to determine what short-term and long-term roles and assistance a Friends affiliate-type organization could best serve and set up a task force for investigation and formation.
- Commissioners become more involved individually with the government officials connected to the commission and involve such officials more in programs so that they feel a greater sense of participation in commission purposes.
- Commissions and commissioners work toward more input into the appointment process.
- Commissions develop broad based multifaceted programmatic planning on different and varied substantive issues to minimize issue-oriented political interference and funding risks.

## Future Research Agenda

This study is only a part of a larger national study. As such the recommendations made herein may change or be expanded when more complete information is available. It is not clear at this point how much, if at all, regional distinctions make a difference in outcomes as compared to the many similarities in purpose, structure and environment of women's commissions across the country. With the intricacies involved in individual structure and political and economic situations, more analysis is also needed and will be done in depth at the next stage of this research pending additional research funding.

In the final phase of this study after the overview research inventory of all commissions is complete, representative commissions will also be selected for comparative analysis to determine the implications for survival of commissions as a viable force to impact public policy for women. Additional elements which may be addressed in the detailed comparative studies include the following:

- 1) reviewing commissions that have been abolished or become inactive;

- 2) identifying different legal mechanisms creating, governing, and restricting commissions;
- 3) examining the relationships between state, county and local commissions;
- 4) examining the relationships between other local women's organizations and commissions;
- 5) further developing the database of information on commissions to include more information on appointment, structure, provisions of services and relationship to services otherwise provided in the community, demographics, nonprofit climate, government and private funding and budgets;
- 6) studying commissions with existing or forming Friends 501(c)(3) organizations and the possible models under various jurisdictions;
- 7) examining degree of impact commissions have on policymaking affecting women; and
- 8) analyzing the mechanisms for enhancing diversity within commissions and thus improving access to the political process.

#### Implications for NACW

The NACW may want to assist in gathering and disseminating information about women's commissions. It might help set up a more formal linkage system to provide information to member commissions. As of this writing it is clear that the NACW has already gone a long way towards this by its on-line internet system and web page. The NACW may also want to consider organizational structure changes so that representation and information at the national association level is available from a broader range of representative commissions, both regionally and representing counties, and municipalities, large, small, urban, suburban and rural. NACW may also want to update information on getting a commission established. The work done in this preliminary study and survey of Region III Commissions could not have been accomplished without the assistance of the NACW office and their assistance is gratefully acknowledged. It is hoped that this and the continuing research will be helpful to the NACW and that future collaboration will assist women's commissions around the country to increase women's access to policymaking process in government as well as positively impact on the status and opportunities of women in daily life.

#### Acknowledgments

The author wishes to thank all of the commissions who responded to the survey, commissioners and staff who gave frank and open responses to questions, the NACW for its support and assistance, Betsy Rohleder and the Topeka Mayor's Commission on the Status of Women, Widener University intern Audrey Shupp for her research assistance, Friends of the Delaware County Women's Commission volunteer staff Connie Helwig and Frances Freitick for assistance with the survey preparation and follow-up, Delaware County Women's Commission summer intern Lee Walker for survey follow-up, Robin O'Brien for painstaking database maintenance and manuscript transcription, Olivia Thorne of Computer Mentors, Inc. for database design, Drs. Barbara Ryan and Janet Rosenberg of Widener University for their assistance and review of the project, Heather Rodkey for survey

follow-up and assistance in the compilation of this interim report, and the board of The Center Foundation for its adoption, continuation, and funding of this project.

Table 1  
Location in Government Structure

State Commissions	County Commissions		Local Commissions
Executive Branch Department	Executive Branch Department	County Council/Commission Board of Supervisors	Executive Branch - Mayor/City Council
Delaware Commission for Women (Labor)	Harford County Commission for Women (Community Services)	Baltimore County Commission for Women	Baltimore City Commission for Women
Maryland Commission for Women (Human Resources)	Howard County Commission for Women (Citizen Services)	Berks County Commission for Women	City of Fairfax Commission for Women
West Virginia Women's Commission (Civil Rights)	Fairfax County Commission for Women (Health & Human Services)	Garrett County Commission for Women	Falls Church Commission for Women
Pennsylvania Commission for Women*	Chester County Women's Commission (Housing & Community Development)	Delaware County Commission for Women	District of Columbia Commission for Women
		Washington County Commission for Women	
		Wicomico County Commission for Women	
<b>University Affiliated</b>		St. Mary's County Commission for Women	<b>Executive Branch Department</b>
Penn State Commission for Women		Montgomery County Commission for Women and Families	Alexandria Council on the Status of Women (Human Relations)
		Lackawanna County Commission for Women	
		Luzerne County Commission for Women	
		Mercer County Commission for Women	
		Montgomery County Commission for Women	
		Loudoun County Commission on Women	<b>Hybrid \ Independent</b>
		Prince William County Commission for Women	The Greater Pittsburgh Commission for

			Women
		Calvert County Commission for Women	
		Anne Arundel County Commission for Women	
		Bucks County Commissioner's Advisory Council for Women	

\*Recently refunded, currently in transition

Table 2  
Commission Activities

	#	%
Executive or Legislative Advocacy or Advice	30	88
Research	14	41
Public Education	34	100
Networking/outreach	31	91
Financing assistance/grants	3	9
Direct Services	5	15
-Information and Referral	4	12

Table 3  
Mission Descriptions

	#	%
Advice/Advocacy	24	71
Needs Assessment	20	59
Public education	16	47
Promote equal opportunity	17	50
Promote recognition of women	8	24
Outreach	5	15
Information and Referral	6	18
Promote leadership of women	5	15

Table 4  
Funding Sources of Official Currently Funded Commissions

Source	#	%
Public allocation	27	100
Foundation/Corporate grants/private contributions	6	24
Grants from " Friends " affiliated organizations	3	11
Service/Project Revenue	7	26

Table 5  
Friends/Independent Commission Funding Sources

Source	#	%
Public grants	1	12.5
Foundation/Corporate grants	2	25
Individual contribution/dues	4	50
Service/Project Revenue	2	25
University allocation	1	12.5
Fundraising events	2	25



**National Women's Commission Survey**

**About your Commission:**

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

**Contact Person(s):** \_\_\_\_\_ **Title(s):** \_\_\_\_\_

**Telephone:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Fax:** \_\_\_\_\_ **E-mail:** \_\_\_\_\_

*Please circle or fill in responses as necessary*

1. Location in state / county / local government

a) Executive Branch – Governor's Office County Council/Commission Mayor's Office City Council

b) Executive Branch - Department (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

c) Legislative Branch

d) Independent Office (specify) \_\_\_\_\_

e) Other \_\_\_\_\_

2. Source of legitimation/authority

a) Public statute/legislation

b) Executive order

c) Resolution

d) Voluntary / independent

e) Other \_\_\_\_\_

3. Date of formation of Commission: \_\_\_\_\_

4. Briefly describe the purpose of the Commission \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you have an affiliated organization such as a "Friends of the Commission" ?

a) Yes b) In process of forming one

c) No, but we are interested in/ thinking about forming one

d) No, because \_\_\_\_\_

*If answer to question 5 is c) or d) please skip to question # 9 and answer only Commission questions:*

6. If answered a) or b) to question 5 above, please answer below about your Friends entity:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address \_\_\_\_\_

Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Fax: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact person: \_\_\_\_\_ Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Date formed/organized: \_\_\_\_\_

7. If commission has or is forming an affiliated Friends organization, what is its structure?

a) nonprofit corporation

c) informal group of individuals

b) unincorporated association

d) other \_\_\_\_\_

e) not sure

8. Briefly describe the mission or purpose of the Friends organization:

-----  
-----  
-----

9. How many members? Of Commission \_\_\_\_\_ Of Friends \_\_\_\_\_

10. Who appoints commissioners? \_\_\_\_\_ Who appoints / elects Friends board members?  
-----  
-----  
a) Commission c) Other \_\_\_\_\_  
b) Members d) Commission staff  
e) No board of directors

11. What is the term of service?  
On Commission \_\_\_\_\_ On Friends board \_\_\_\_\_

12. Who serves on Commission committees? \_\_\_\_\_ Who serves on Friends ' committees? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Circle all responses that apply)  
a) Appointed commissioners/board members a) Board members  
b) Legislators b) General public  
c) Representatives from State/County/ City c) Commissioners  
d) Members of general public d) Members  
e) Friends board members e) Staff  
f) Volunteers f) Commission staff  
g) Staff g) Volunteers  
h) Other \_\_\_\_\_ h) Other \_\_\_\_\_

13. How are committee appointments made?  
On Commission: \_\_\_\_\_ On Friends: \_\_\_\_\_

14. How many paid staff members?  
On Commission \_\_\_\_\_ On Friends \_\_\_\_\_  
Indicate title(s) \_\_\_\_\_

15. Does Commission have an independent budget? a) Yes b) No Amount \$ \_\_\_\_\_

16. How is Commission funded? \_\_\_\_\_ How is Friends organization funded? \_\_\_\_\_  
(Circle all that apply and indicate approximate % of budget if known)  
a) Not currently funded a) Not currently funded  
b) Public allocation \_\_\_\_\_% b) Public allocation \_\_\_\_\_%  
c) Corporate/foundation grants \_\_\_\_\_% c) Corporate/foundation grants \_\_\_\_\_%  
d) Contributions \_\_\_\_\_% d) Contributions \_\_\_\_\_%  
e) Grants from Friends entity \_\_\_\_\_% e) Dues \_\_\_\_\_%  
f) Revenue from services/projects \_\_\_\_\_% f) Revenue from services/projects \_\_\_\_\_%  
g) Other \_\_\_\_\_% g) Other \_\_\_\_\_%

17. Describe interrelation of the Commission and the Friends organization: (Circle all responses that apply.)  
a) Interlocking boards - indicate # or % of required common directors \_\_\_\_\_  
b) Friends are appointed by Commission  
c) Commission has seats on Friends- indicate # or % required \_\_\_\_\_  
d) Friends report to Commission or its staff (Question 17 continues on next page)  
e) Joint staff  
f) Fiscal controls or accountability required by bylaws or other governing instrument  
g) Chair of commission is ex officio member of Friends board  
h) Informal interrelations but none required by governing instrument or formal procedures  
I) Other (describe) \_\_\_\_\_

18. What types of services are provided by Commission? What types of service are provided by Friends?

- a) Executive advocacy/advice
- b) Legislative advocacy/advice
- c) Research
- d) Public education
- e) Networking/outreach
- f) Grants/financial assistance
- g) Direct services (specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_
- h) Other (specify) \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

- a) Executive advocacy/advice
- b) Legislative advocacy/advice
- c) Research
- d) Public education
- e) Networking/outreach
- f) Grants/financial assistance to Commission
- g) Grants/financial aid to others
- h) Direct services(specify)\_\_\_\_\_
- i)Volunteers/technical help to Commission
- j) Other (specify)\_\_\_\_\_

19. What types of services would be/are most helpful to be provided by Friends to the Commission?

\_\_\_\_\_

20. Please describe the current political and organizational environment within which the Commission operates and identify any specific advantages or supports and challenges or restrictions:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

21. Please describe the greatest challenge or frustration the Commission has overcome (or faced) and how it did so. Also please describe the Commission=s biggest highlight or greatest success:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

22. If you would be willing to participate in a further in-depth study, please indicate whom should be contacted for interviewing purposes:

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Title \_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Address: \_\_\_\_\_  
Best time(s) to call: \_\_\_\_\_ E-mail: \_\_\_\_\_

PLEASE SEND BACK YOUR RESPONSES AS SOON AS POSSIBLE. Feel free to attach additional sheets or send supplemental information. If you would like a copy of the final report, please indicate below to whom and to what address the report should be mailed. ***Thank you very much for your participation in this survey.***

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**REGION III**

**ABOLISHED OR INACTIVE COMMISSIONS**

**Pennsylvania**

Clarion County Commission for Women  
Lancaster County Women's Commission  
Mayor's Commission for Women (Philadelphia)  
Pennsylvania Commission for Women (In transition)

**Virginia**

Richmond Mayor's Committee on the Concerns of Women  
Virginia Council on the Status of Women

**COMMISSIONS NOT RESPONDING**

**Maryland**

Cecil County Women's Council  
Prince George's County Commission on Women

**Virginia**

Arlington County Commission on the Status of Women

# Region III Commissions Responding

Surve	Regio	Commission	Stat
y	III	District of Columbia Commission for Women	DC
y	III	Delaware Commission for Women	DE
y	III	Maryland Commission for Women	MD
Y	III	Anne Arundel County Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Baltimore City Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Baltimore County Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Calvert County Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Garrett County Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Harford County Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Howard County Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Montgomery County Commission for Women and Families	MD
y	III	St. Mary's County Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Washington County Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Wicomico County Commission for Women	MD
y	III	Pennsylvania Commission for Women	PA
y	III	Berks County Commission for Women	PA
y	III	Bucks Cty Commissioner's Advisory Council for Women	PA
y	III	Delaware County Women's Commission	PA
y	III	Lackawanna County Commission for Women	PA
y	III	Luzerne County Commission for Women	PA
y	III	Mayor's Commission for Women	PA
y	III	Mercer County Commission for Women	PA
y	III	Montgomery County Commission for Women	PA
y	III	The Greater Pittsburgh Commission for Women*	PA
y	III	Chester County Women's Commission	PA
y	III	Women's Alliance of Lancaster County*	PA
y	III	Penn State Women's Commission*	PA
y	III	Schuylkill County Commission for Women*	PA
Y	III	Alexandria Council on the Status of Women	VA
y	III	City of Fairfax Commission for Women	VA
y	III	Fairfax County Commission for Women	VA
y	III	Falls Church City Commission for Women	VA
y	III	Loudoun County Commission for Women	VA
y	III	Prince William County Commission for Women	VA
y	III	West Virginia Women's Commission	WV

\*Independent Commissions

Political and Organization Environment/  
Challenges and Successes

Appendix D

Appointments are strictly political. At any given time, we can be made up of a majority of commissioners who truly have little interest in women's issues or who are more ambitious and willing to work toward our goals. Turnover is fairly high.

The highest challenge for the commission has been accomplishing any public project at a time when we are composed of commissioners with very little or no initiative. We have overcome this to some degree by limiting our projects and because we've had two or three commissioners willing to take on the entire project.

Supports: The current government and first lady are committed to women's issues. The commission has deep support in the women's community and from some segments of the legislature. Challenges: Government is contracting and commissions face ongoing review. Completion for public money is intense and commissions' funding is controversial particularly when direct services are at risk.

The greatest challenge is remaining viable and effective in changing public and political climates. Several years ago the commission was targeted to be defunded. The commission re-established itself through a major new initiative - the Legislative Agenda for Women. This past year have been engaged in a year long strategic planning process to redefine and focus work.

We are a recognized leader in local government with the full support of the current administration. The one challenge that remains constant is budget constraints that are shared equally by all agencies of local government.

Our biggest frustration remains fiscal solvency. We haven't overcome it yet but we're working on it. Our biggest recent success was successfully hosting the NACW convention. We've had many local successes regarding policy changes that directly affect women employed in city government.

We were funded and we operate under county commission. Funding was stopped but we are told funding will be restored July 1996. County commissioners are very supportive and helpful. They signed a grant for us and participate in our Hall of Fame.

Success - Women's Commissions has established a County Women's Hall of Fame. The Commission has organized steering committee of all agencies that work with domestic violence to support the commission in establishing a domestic violence shelter for the County.

The Commission is non-partisan and must be representative of all women in the County. Therefore, we cannot take strong collective stands on controversial subjects - i.e., choice, elective candidates, etc. However, we each act individually on such issues.

Adequate funding (never enough). The Commission started our spouse abuse, rape crisis center and our center for displaced homemakers. We are now having a strong affect on state legislation which pertains to women and their families. Last year, legislation was passed which mandated women and their newborns remain in the hospital for 2 days after birth. This was supported and lobbied by the Commission and was a "first" in the nation.

Commissioners are appointed by the county executive.

Challenge - Budget reduction equaled less spending and reduced support. Highlight - successful women's fair.

Current administration is politically liberal but fiscally conservative, and economy is difficult but not disastrous. Support exists for the CFW, but budgets are tight. CFW's a separate department of county government, which was see as a major strength, and has developed good network among the local women's organizations.

Biggest threat: to combine CFW with other departments or eliminate it altogether - overcome by letter writing campaign from local women's organizations. Biggest accomplishments 1) implementation of pay equity study - 1989; 2) establishment of family leave policies - 1986; 3) sex equity in education Hearings & Report - 1992; 4) easing divorce handbook publication - 1995; 5) publication of pamphlets on sexual harassment and pregnancy discrimination in 4 languages - 1995.

Practically none.

No political funds commission.

No female political figures in county, political environment is very white and very male.

The CFW was responsible for the Women's Fair which we pitched to other local women in groups.

Our support of a legislative agenda.- Biggest success.

The commission believes that it can be more effective as remaining political neutral. As the county council changes its membership during election years we found it advantageous to the continually of our work not to have an affiliation with one particular party.

Our greatest success has been our collaboration with the local health department in addressing teen pregnancy. Our greatest challenge during my term has in making our events inclusive of all ethnic groups within our county.

County government may not fund next year. A change in leadership, combined with tightening budgets create pressure to withdraw funding.

We have had a struggle against political intervention in our decision making, both external and integral. We completed a Resource Directory for low income women, a scholarship directory, and a study of gender in public school administration.

Our county government consists of 3 elected commissioners. They approve the budget for the commission. The commissioners are the appointing for the commission members. The members of the commission act on an advisory capacity to the commissioner on women's and children's issues.

The greatest challenges are acquiring credibility and equality on boards and authorities. Our success was that we accomplish both.

Work directly with the county commission and hands are tied because we are only an advisory board, so things happen slowly.

Biggest challenge - Trying to achieve gender balance in organizations.

Very successful studies on child support enforcement and teen pregnancy. Child support project received national recognition and dramatically impacted system at local and state levels. Teen pregnancy report has been used by other organizations in developing programs and securing funds.

Challenge: credibility and recognition of the commission. Greatest success: mammography project.

CFW executive board promotes communication with board of county commissioners, proposes annual goals and uses a policy of "no surprises". At present, we have support for our agenda.

In 1994 we had a crisis within our leadership but with patience, some strategic planning and a lot of energy, we came through that period. Biggest successes: initiatives in court care, domestic violence, women's health, impact of the legal system.

The current political environment is relatively supportive although there continue to be issues the Commission for Women needs to address within the institution. We received continued support from the President of the University and have experienced no budget cuts.

In the mid 80's, Penn State University was not a good climate for women. The Commission for Women did the Strategic Study on the Status of Women at Penn State which resulted in the improvement of climate.

Since the commission was formed by government executive order - always appointed by majority party.

Serve at the wishes of government. Ramifications pro/against commission issues and agenda can directly affect percent of funding.

The greatest challenge we face is membership. It is very difficult to operate a commission on a strictly volunteer basis. Our greatest achievement is our annual women's conference which attracts about 200 women each year. 1996 will be the 11th conference. The commission was actually a result of the conference.

Generally " safe " in terms of support and funding.

Biggest challenge - Being taken seriously by mostly male city council.

There was a call for dissolution of the commission by one of the members of the board of supervisors. We survived but we are short 4 members. There has been little interest it seems by citizens to come forward to serve. I think that we need to be more in the forefront. We need to learn what other commissions are engaged in.

Challenge - Not really being aware of the vastness of the work that others do.

Successes - Instrumental in getting a great child care study - end result a child care network. Organizing and assisting in the various activities of the network - 2X per year seminars.

Our commission and office for women find our biggest problem is public recognition. We are striving to establish a closer relationship with other women's groups. Each year at budget time we have obtained the remains provided. The chair of the county supervisor has remained supportive and has several other supervisors in spite of attempts by the county executive to obtain the office women.

Two large challenges: 1) remain funded 2) becomes better known in community. Highlight and successes: Suffrage Program, September 1995. Recognition for Resource Directory by county governments, organizing a gender in education forum - 1994.

The story of the last two years of our commission could fill a book. Basically, our legislature changed dramatically last year (1994-1995) and they voted (the House) to eliminate our agency. A huge public battle ensued with the commission becoming the issue last year. We were the focus of editorials and news articles, talk shows and debates for 2 months. The bill died, our budget was cut in half, then restored. We did a lot of reorganizing, rethinking and reenergizing. We spent money on PR and met the legislative head on this year (1996). We never were mentioned this year and some legislators apologized. Our top 4 legislative priorities passed including a major child care initiative (\$2.3 million) and we were able to push for a sexual harassment policy in our House of Delegates (historic) and do training of 1/3 of the delegates. It was our best year ever! We feel like the comeback kids.

We are an independent corporation (10 years as such) funding is always a challenge as well as good active volunteers for the Board.

Financial difficulties and reorganizing from a provider of services to an advocacy organization. This was our original mission but we got off track because of funding availability.

The County Commissioners have been supportive - they provide funding for a shared staff person with office space. Since it is a yearly budget item, future Commissioners might feel differently.

The CFW has its first major project underway - a domestic violence community audit which has been very successful in involving members of the community. So far, approximately 50 people have agreed to help.

The political environment has been generally supportive.

Budget - greatest challenge.

The CFW is unfunded but employs the dedication and support of the current administration to the extent funds permit.

Greatest challenge - Surviving its unfunded status. The establishment of the Friends and the survival of the CFW.

Very supportive county executive Ms. John Gary.

One of our greatest successes is the completion of the first and only study of the "glass ceiling" report in the county was done on police and fire department.

The advantage is that out of three county commissioners, one is a woman and she has a strong interest in the council. She plays the role of mentor and guide for the council and also advocates on behalf of the council with the other commissioners. Disadvantage - the other commissioners who are the majority party lack interest in the council, so council activities are not a priority. This is a change from past years when we had strong support from all 3 commissioners. The 2 majority party commissioners were elected by other positions leaving vacancies which needed to be filled through the election cycle. This left the council with dwindling membership, no reappointments and an unclear status. At this time we are rebuilding and restructuring the council's agenda and membership.

During the transition in leadership of county commissioners over an 18 month period our membership dwindled from 18 members to 5 members. The diligence and persistence of those 5 members kept the council alive to enter the restructuring phase it is now in.

This is rather rural conservative area, we are in need of part-time paid staff and are lobbying for one in 98's budget.

Members recognized the need for an abused person's shelter and worked to see the opening of the county's 1st (and only) shelter for abused women and men called "Safe Harbor".

The commission has good support from the city council & excellent support within the community.

The commission is periodically called upon to save programs of the office on women from budget cuts. Ongoing visibility of the commission is necessary to ensure that the needs of women & girls are met in the city.

## Notes

1. Stewart, Debra W. The Women's Movement in Community Politics in the US: The Role of Local Commissions on the Status of Women, (1980), Pergamon Press, Inc., at 8.
2. Stewart, at 7.
3. Stewart, at 10.
4. Stewart, at 18.
5. Stewart, at 22.
6. For discussion of women's policy agencies on a national level and use of comparative analysis in assessing their effectiveness, see Stetson, Dorothy McBride. Comparative State Feminism, (1995), Sage Publications.

## About the Author

Susan K. Garrison, Esq. is an attorney in private practice specializing in nonprofit organizations and director of The Center Foundation. She is the former President Friends of the Delaware County Women's Commission and served on the Delaware Women's Commission from 1989 - 1993. While on the commission she co-authored the commission's Adolescent Pregnancy Task Force Report (1992) and its Final Report on the Recommendations of the Child Support Enforcement Task Force (1989). She earned her B.A. in Sociology at Gettysburg College, and her J.D. and LL.M. in Taxation from Villanova University School of Law. Her research interests include women's history and legal rights, including especially reproductive rights, and Christian feminism and she has written and lectured in these areas. She most recently assisted in the preparation of the Pennsylvania Mentorship Model Program handbook produced by the Pennsylvania Commission for Women (1996).

The Center Foundation is a small private operating founding in Pennsylvania whose mission is to promote positive social change through public education and through encouraging constructive cooperative action among individuals and organizations. The Foundation engages in research projects and sponsors programs which model the values of equity, tolerance of difference, and collaboration in working for social justice and societal betterment.