

Report to the Joint Minerals, Business,  
and Economic Development Interim  
Committee

Wyoming Council for Women's Issues

August 2020



## Introduction

Per [HB0002](#) from the 2020 legislative session, the Wyoming Council for Women was instructed to present a report for the Joint Minerals, Business and Economic Development. The text of the bill pertaining to WCW states:

**Section 16.** [Wyoming Business Council-Wyoming Council for Women's Issues]. Not later than October 1, 2020, the Wyoming council for women's issues created within the Wyoming business council under W.S. 9-12-501 and 9-12-502 shall report to the joint minerals, business and economic development interim committee on its statutory obligations regarding the status of women in Wyoming. The report shall include any efforts addressing economic development, data collection and partnerships with business technology organizations.

## Background of Wyoming Council for Women's Issues

The Wyoming Council for Women's Issues is a fourteen-member council with representation from each of the nine Judicial Districts, four at large members, and the chief executive officer of the Wyoming Business Council. The Governor appoints Council members through the Boards and Councils application process.

In 1965, Governor Clifford Hansen issued a proclamation creating the Governor's Commission on the State of Women, whereupon Wyoming became the 45th state to have such a commission. A year later, a study was conducted and presented to the governor. The report "Wyoming Women" recommended that the commission be a permanent and continuing entity and that appropriations be requested from the state.

In 1966, the Legislature passed a bill creating the Wyoming Commission for the Status of Women (9-12-501). The Legislature granted a general fund appropriation for the commission in 1973. In 1977, the Legislature changed the name to the Wyoming Commission for Women.

Throughout the years the commission was housed under various agencies, including the Department of Labor and Statistics and the Department of Employment. The title of the commission was again changed and became the Wyoming Council for Women's Issues (WCWI). WCWI was then moved to the Wyoming Business Council, effective in July of 2000.

According to the founding statute, the focus of WCWI is addressing the status of women in four core areas: political and legal rights, employment procedures, home and community, and educational opportunities. The Council receives its funding from the Legislature and relies on numerous volunteer hours to carry out its work. The WCWI has no dedicated staff. A member of the Wyoming Business Council staff is appointed as a liaison to the board and the WBC provides support through web site hosting and management, press releases, logistics for board meetings, and general counsel.

In 2019, the WCWI board decided to unofficially drop the “Issues” from its name. Stating that the board addressed “women’s issues” was found to have negative connotations. Women’s issues impact not only women but also men and children. “Women’s issues” are everyone’s issues. Discussion was held on whether to ask for a change in statute but due to the other pressing issues impacting the state at the time, it was decided to wait until a more appropriate time. Throughout this report you will see both WCWI and WCW based on if the piece of the report refers to work done before 2019 or since then.

## **Reports on Status of Women**

Over the past two decades, the WCWI has commissioned or participated in several different studies related to the status of women in Wyoming. While the results are often reflections of the time period (for example, in a survey in 2012 many participants perceived that substance abuse was a serious issue in the state while not describing it as a serious issue for them personally, possibly due to the fact that there were several media campaigns raising awareness on the issue of substance abuse), there are also themes that show up in each report.

### **[Wage Disparity Study, 2003](#)**

In the 2002 Legislative Session, WCWI was directed to head a steering committee for a wage disparity study to be conducted by the University of Wyoming. The Legislature required a report to be presented to the Joint Minerals, Business and Economic Development Interim Committee on or before May 1, 2003. The study focused on where wage disparities exist, the major causes of the wage disparities, the impact of wage disparities on Wyoming's economy, possible solutions to reduce or eliminate wage disparities, and the benefits of eliminating or reducing wage disparities.

“The impact on Wyoming of the disparity in wages was found to be large and to include: the larger than average need for women to hold multiple jobs, higher childcare costs, lost income for families, higher job turnover, increased human capital out-migration, etc. It is estimated that the costs to Wyoming’s economy exceed benefits by \$65 million annually.”

### **[Wyoming Women’s Issues Survey, 2004](#)**

The WCWI contracted with the University of Wyoming’s Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC) to conduct a telephone survey that would provide information on the priority issues for women living in Wyoming. This would be the first of three surveys conducted by WYSAC to look for trends in responses over time.

The survey focused on possible problem issues experienced by respondents themselves. The survey also included one question about respondents’ perception of serious problem issues for women in their community.

The top four issues that women felt were serious problems for *women in their communities* were: substance abuse (70.1%), employment (68.4%), domestic violence (65.4%), and health care (63.4%). The top four *personal problems* for women, according to the survey, were health care, family, employment & wages, and child care. Thus, two of the issues perceived as serious issues for women in the community are not reflected as the most prevalent personal problems—substance abuse and domestic violence (19.3 percent of the women said that substance abuse was a personal problem for them and 4.2 percent of the women said that they had personal problems with domestic violence). These indications, however, need to be viewed with the knowledge that substance abuse and domestic violence are typically under-reported.

### [Wage Disparity and Other Women's Issues in Wyoming, 2007](#)

This report, written by the then chair of WCWI, details the findings from the 2003 Wage Disparity survey and the 2004 Wyoming Women's Issues Survey. It also discusses efforts by the WCWI to that point to address issues highlighted in both studies.

### [Wyoming Women's Issues Survey, 2009](#)

In 2009, WYSAC again completed a survey of women in Wyoming, asking what issues they perceive to be problems for the women of Wyoming and what issues they have experienced themselves.

“Substance abuse is again reported most frequently, by 78.1% of all women, as a serious problem in the community, with a statistically significant increase of 4.4 percentage points as compared to the results from 2004. Notable increases from 2004 to 2009 include Child care (+7.1), Caring for elderly relatives (+5.9), and most significantly Housing (+11.4). Issues where there is a significant decrease in perceptions of the issues as being a serious problem for women in the community are Employment (-5.5) and Education (-7.3).

“The most common issue that respondents say they have personally experience problems with is Health care, reported as a problem by 37.5% of all women. There is no significant change from 2004 on this issue. Two other issues frequently reported as personally experienced problems are Child care and Employment and wages (reported by 23.6% and 22.8% of all women, respectively). It should be noted though, that there is a significant decrease in the number of women reporting to experience problems with Employment and wages – a 6.5 percentage points decrease. Other significant changes from 2004 to 2009 include problems experienced with Children's education (-6.1 points) and Transportation (-3.1points). In both cases there is a decrease in the number of women who report to experience problems with these issues.”

### [Wyoming Women's Issues Survey, 2012](#)

In June of 2012, the Wyoming Business Council and the Wyoming Council for Women's Issues contracted the Wyoming Survey & Analysis Center (WYSAC) at the University of Wyoming to conduct the third iteration of a telephone survey of women in Wyoming. Having completed three iterations of the survey we now are able to test for significant and meaningful trends in the issues

that affect women. In the 2012 survey a total of 832 telephone interviews were completed with women in Wyoming.

Substance abuse, child care, and domestic violence are the issues most commonly perceived as a serious problem for women in their community, with 74%, 69%, and 68% indicating that, respectively. Significant upward trends are apparent in the number of women reporting that an issue is a serious problem for women in their community for child care, family issues, caring for elderly relative, and housing.

### [Legal Rights of Women in Wyoming Handbook, 2008 and 2016 Update](#)

A handbook for women, which contains information about legal topics relevant to women, children, and families in Wyoming. The topics include Wills, Adoption, Education, Consumer Protection and Fair Credit, Domestic Relations, Government Benefits, Housing and Property Rights, Insurance, Name Changes, Public Accommodations, Reproductive Rights, and Violence Against Women and Children. Subsequent updates were made to the handbook with the most recent being in 2016. The project was dropped as the updates were costly due to the highly specialized background needed in order to sufficiently provide information and support. Other entities in the state such as the University of Wyoming Family and Child Legal Advocacy Center and Equal Justice of Wyoming are far better equipped to provide support and advice in legal matters.

### [Self Sufficiency Standard and Calculator, 2020](#)

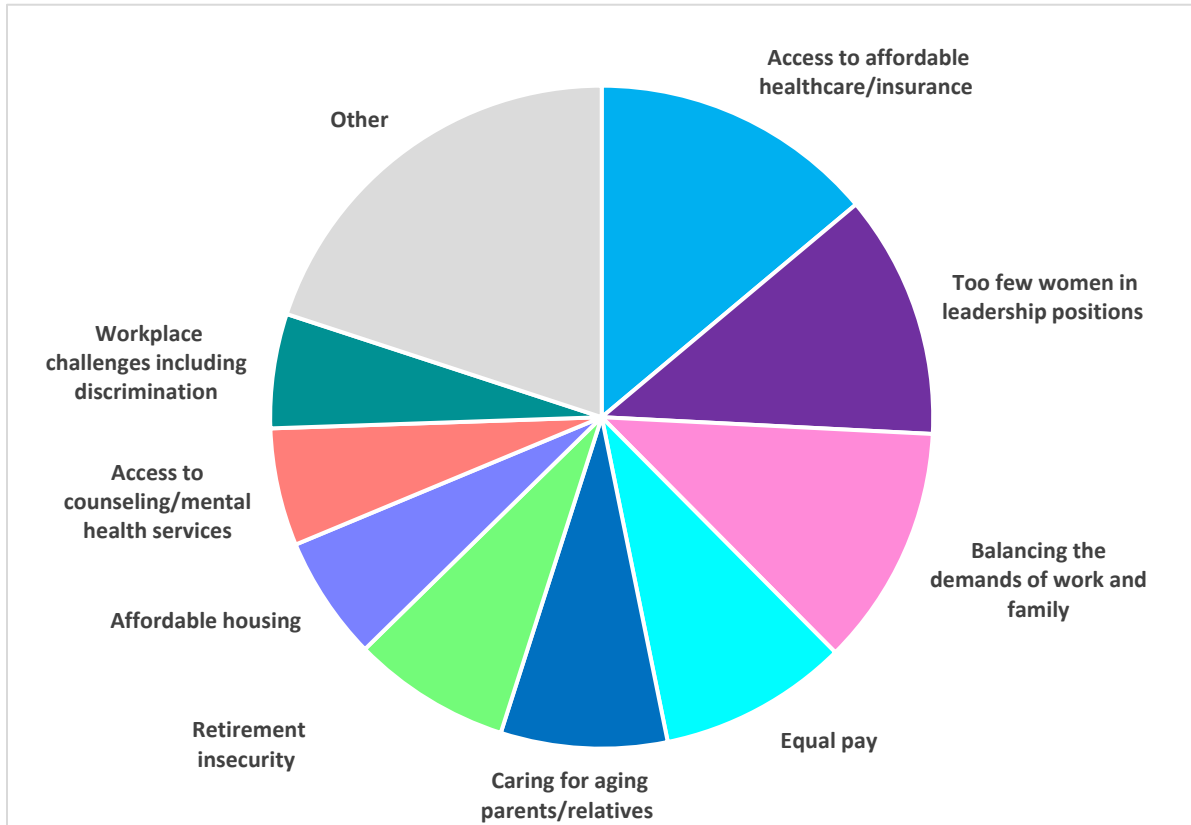
In 2015 and again in 2020, the Wyoming Women's Foundation with assistance from WCWI published the Self-Sufficiency Standard for Wyoming. The Self-Sufficiency Standard is the amount needed to meet each basic need at a minimally adequate level, without public or private assistance. The calculator uses various data points such as family make up and county of residence to determine the minimum wage needed in order to be self-sufficient. This information allows stakeholders to make data driven decisions in the creation of policy impacting people across the spectrum. The data shows that the county that requires the lowest amount to meet self-sufficiency for a family with one adult, a preschooler, and a child of school age is Uinta County (\$42,800) and the most expensive county is Teton County (\$83,074).

### [Voices of Women in America Survey, 2020](#)

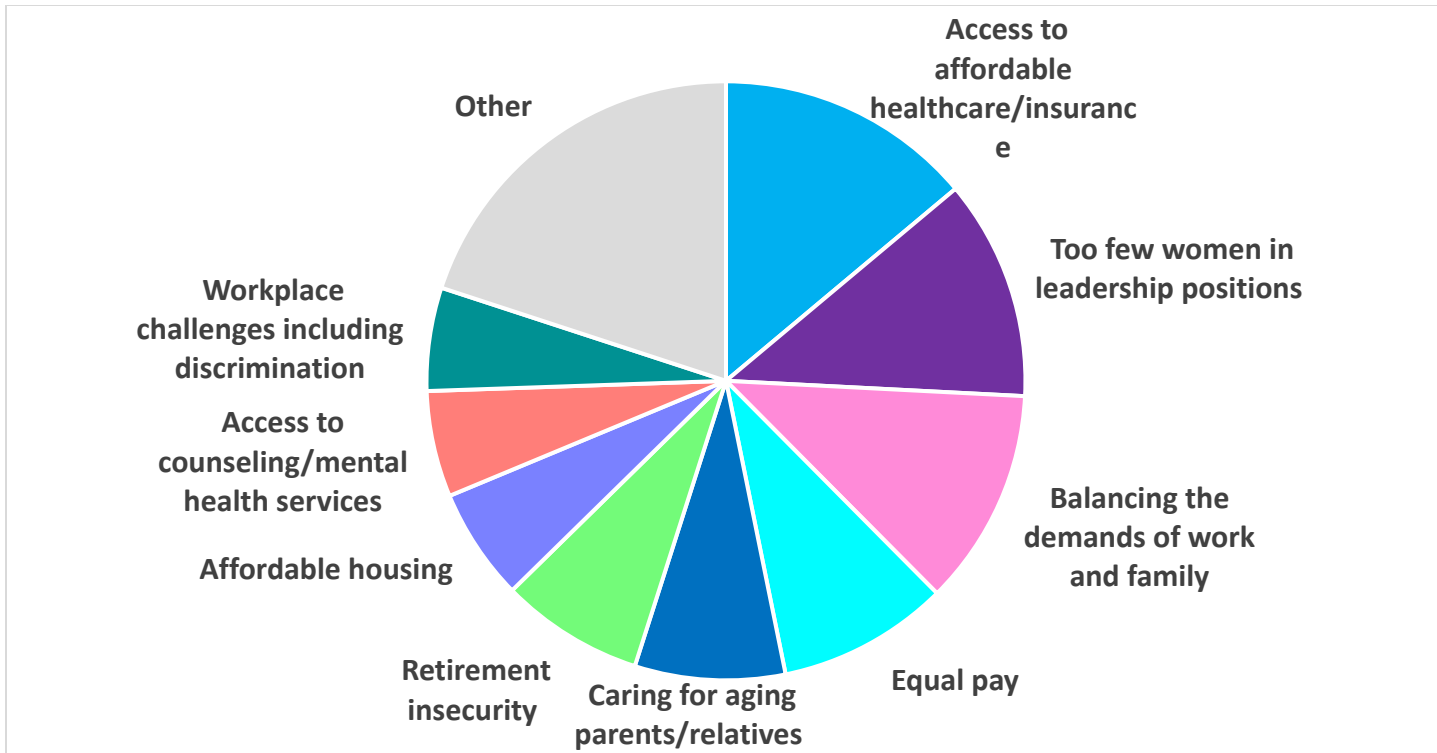
The National Association of Commissions for Women conducted a nationwide survey with the support of member commissions to ask women in participating states which issues are the most important to their state as a whole and to themselves personally. The Wyoming Council for Women heavily promoted participation in the survey through posts on Facebook and by sending it out to groups/agencies/boards that are involved in women's issues for dissemination. The outreach through the NACW and WCW took place over a 9-month period, from 2019 to 2020. The resulting data was disaggregated by state and provided to each commission to be used to inform stakeholders what issues are impacting women in their area. A final report with all of the data will be compiled and sent to the President and Congress.

Wyoming had over 500 participants that took the survey. From that data, several patterns emerged. As with previous surveys, the perceived problems for women in the state of Wyoming and the issues that the participants were currently addressing in their own lives do not show up in equal amounts.

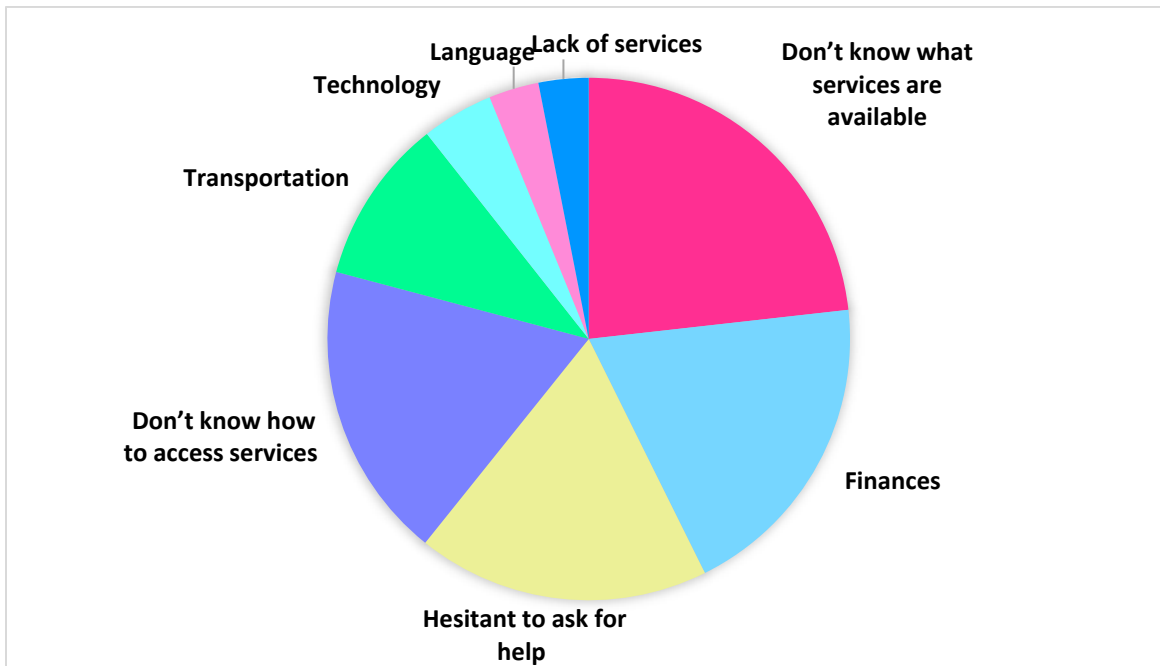
Participants were asked the most important challenges women where they live are facing and were allowed to pick up to five.



Participants were then asked what issues they are currently facing and again were allowed to pick up to five issues.



In the survey, respondents were asked what barriers are in place to keep them from addressing these issues. Many responses indicate that communication seems to be a problem.



As in previous surveys WCW has commissioned, there is a notable difference between what respondents perceive to be challenges in their community and what they are personally dealing



with. This could be explained by the demographics of the survey: the people who responded are different than the women of Wyoming as a whole. Despite the difference between perceptions of women in the community and personal challenges, patterns still emerge. If each woman in Wyoming were polled, the majority would cite struggles in one or more of the following categories:

- Access to affordable healthcare/insurance
  - Access to affordable childcare
  - Equal pay
  - Affordable housing
  - Balancing demands of work and family
  - Too few women in leadership positions
- Caring for aging relatives

### ***Status Report on Wyoming Women (to be published November 2020)***

A collaboration between the Wyoming Survey Analysis Center (WYSAC), Wyoming Women’s Foundation (WYWF), the Wyoming Council for Women (WCW) and the Equality State Policy Center (ESPC) will produce two issue briefs. These will present data that illustrates barriers to full participation in the labor force and elected leadership that women face in Wyoming today. They will also discuss economic growth opportunities for Wyoming through women’s participation in the workforce. Using both present-day survey results and long-term data, recent and current trends will be included to explore the economic status of women in Wyoming today.

## **WCW Recent and Upcoming Projects**

### ***Entrepreneur of the Year***

The Woman Entrepreneur Award, created in 2018, recognizes woman-owned businesses in Wyoming and is designed to increase the attention to and recognition of the contribution female entrepreneurs make to Wyoming's economy. Nominees must be women who own or operate a Wyoming-based business that has operated continuously for at least three years. Each nominee is highlighted on the WCW Facebook page and the recipient is honored with a ceremony in her home community. Participation and quality of nominations has increased each year, with nominations coming from communities across the state and from a diverse array of businesses, illustrating the essential position of small businesses in the state.

The 2020 Entrepreneur of the Year is Lexie Garrett, owner of Alexis Drake in Cheyenne. Previous winners are Ariane Jimison, owner of Pizza Carrello in Gillette, and Kylah Bowers, owner of Altitude Drug in Pinedale.

Alexis’s nominator says of her: “Cheyenne native Alexis “Lexie” (Johansen) Garrett designs and manufactures affordable and customizable luxury handbags and accessories under her brand Alexis Drake. A complete history of her entrepreneurial endeavor is at:



<https://alexisdrake.com/pages/the-brand> Unsaid on the website is the thoughtful and prudent development of her business, building Alexis Drake for the past 14 years while teaching art, obtaining her master’s degree, raising two children and working out of her garage. Lexie taught elementary school art full-time until 2016 when she transitioned to part-time, and a year ago packed up her classroom for good – shortly after moving Alexis Drake into her manufacturing and retail location in downtown Cheyenne. The past year workshop offerings were added, and bracelet, wallet and Apple watchband parties prompted all kinds of creativity and fun. She was nimble during the pandemic, learning to be visible in a quickly flooded social media environment as well as offering sewing kits, allowing for in-home creating. The orders continued, she staggered work hours, kept up with the demand, and still employs the same 7 people she started with.”

### ***2020 Wyoming Women’s Summit***

On September 24, 2020, the 2020 Wyoming Women’s Summit will be held virtually to bring together representatives from several groups and agencies that address women’s issues. Originally scheduled to take place in Cheyenne, the Summit was moved to a virtual platform due to COVID-19. Goals of the Summit include to elevate the profile of WCW to one as the central hub for Wyoming women’s organizations and statewide voice of women, to make connections with various groups to facilitate improved communication to further our goals and increase the impact of our projects and to build common ground on the current status of women in Wyoming and create a vision for where we want to see improvements.

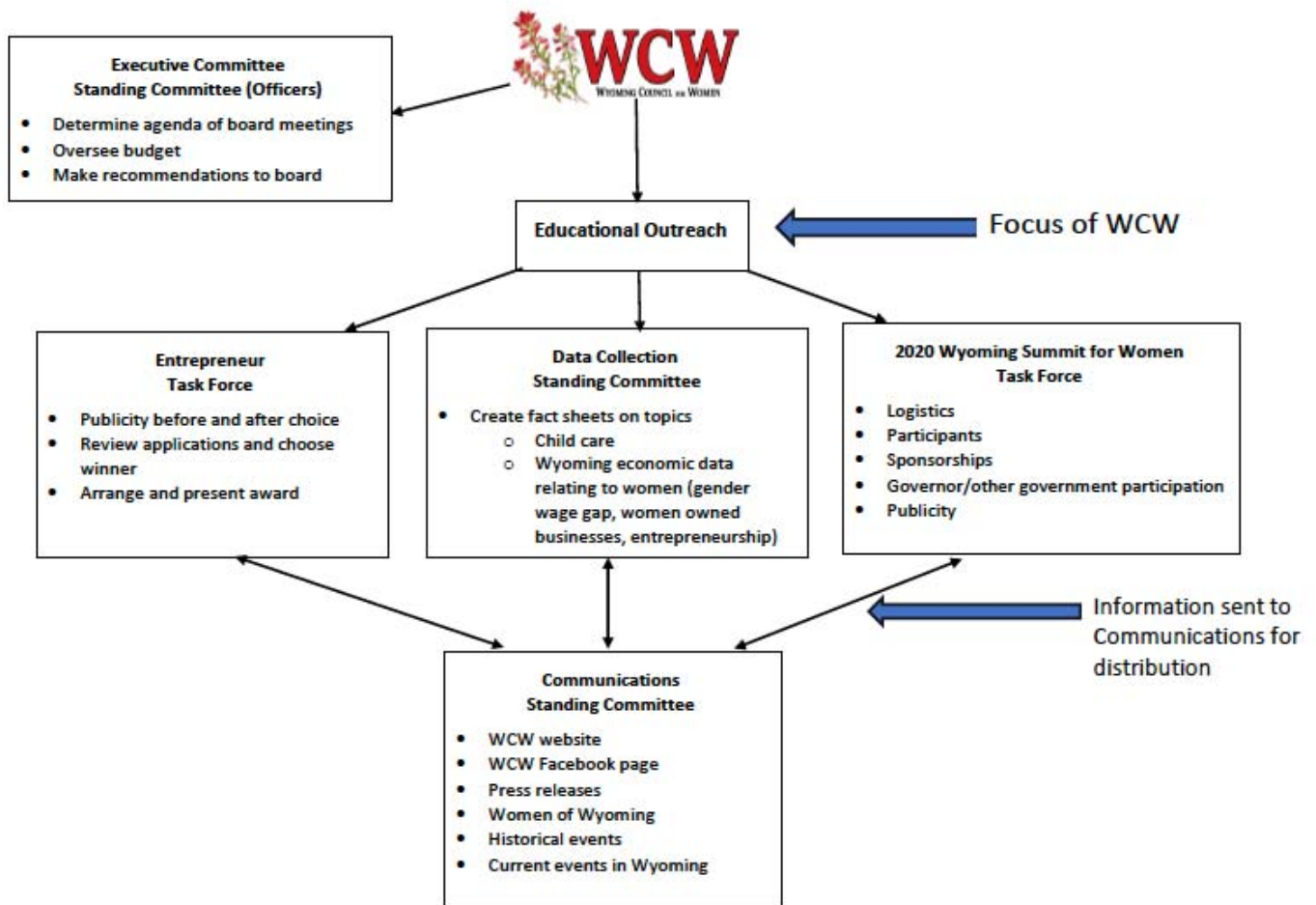
### ***Governor’s Woman of Distinction***

The Wyoming Council for Women accepts nominations for its Governor’s Woman of Distinction award on an ongoing basis. The award is issued as remarkable nominations are submitted, but not more than once a year. This is a “once in a lifetime” award and any or all of the following attributes are considered when considering nominees: she should have had an impact on women and/or families in the educational or employment sector, in community outreach, in health and wellness concerns, and/or in legal issues.

Previous recipients of the award include Sue Knesel of Gillette, Ann Redman of Cheyenne, Kathy Wright of Cheyenne, and many other impressive and impactful women across the state of Wyoming.

## **WCW Organizational Structure**

In August 2019, the WCW board decided to reorganize the committee structure to better address the goals created in the 2018 strategic plan. Education of key stakeholders through data collection and communication is indicated on the structure.



## Conclusion

In conclusion, WCW continues to address issues impacting women in Wyoming by pursuing various avenues. Through outreach to other groups addressing women’s issues, by commissioning and partnering with other groups to collect data through surveys and status reports, by participating and hosting key events, and by recognizing women making a positive impact in Wyoming, WCW endeavors to improve Wyoming for all its citizens. To date we have not created any partnerships with business technology organizations as that is not in our mission statement, vision statement, strategic plan, or enabling state statute. While we are careful to abide by the restrictions on lobbying the legislature, much of the data that we have collected detailing the concerns and challenges of women in Wyoming has been through vast amounts of research by many different entities to policy changes that could greatly impact these issues. If asked, we would be happy to provide advice on these policy changes.

**Wyoming Council for Women Board  
August 2020**

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