

Study: Lack of Blacks, women on boards has economic impact

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It's no secret. When grants are awarded to organizations, the African-American community is often overlooked or sometimes gets the short end of the stick. That could all change if more Blacks were on the boards of economic development organizations and involved in the decision-making process, according to the University of Pittsburgh's University Center for Social and

Urban Research.

African-Americans and women are underrepresented on the governing boards of area economic development organizations, according to a report recently released by the research center.

Ralph Bangs, the director of the study, along with members of the Building One Economy Committee, announced the results of the study July 21.

Milton Washington, chair of the Building One Economy Committee, said the research project was an outgrowth of



WASHINGTON



BUSH

discussions among the members of the committee concerned with improving economic conditions in the Black community.

Washington said the report was created for three reasons: To outline reasons

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why diversity is important on economic development boards; to show levels of minority inclusion on the boards; and to suggest ways to improve diversity on various boards.

In March, data was collected and interviews were conducted of the 44 largest economic development organizations in the Pittsburgh region. Of those, 41 focus on general economic growth and three on economic growth in the Black community.

The results prove what many Black community leaders have known all along.

Of the 41 general economic development organizations, 6 percent (56) of the 881 board positions is held by African-Americans, and 16 percent (142) is held by women. Fifteen (37 percent) of the organizations have no African-American board members and 9 percent (23 percent) are all male.

According to Bangs, organizations that serve the city should have boards, executive committees and advisory committees comprised of approximately 30 percent African-Americans.

Organizations that primarily serve Allegheny County should have between 15 and 30 percent Black representation, she said.

Since women comprise about 50 percent of the working age population, the same percentage should exist on boards.

Organizations that are leaders in appointing African-American and women on boards are: African American Chamber of Commerce, Minority Enterprise Corp., Community Loan Fund of Southwestern Pennsylvania, Pittsburgh Partnership for Neighborhood Development, Steel Valley Authority, Mon Valley Initiative and the Greater Pittsburgh Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Bangs said the lack of diver-

sity on various boards is causing women and the Black community to financially suffer in different ways.

"A lot of the contracts and subcontracts in this region have gone to white male-owned firms. Like other parts of this country, we have severe problems in terms of who benefits from economic decision-making," said Bangs. "This lack of inclusion has resulted in the lack economic benefit both in terms of minority and women-owned firms receiving contract and also in terms of employment and income."

"Economic planning—we can see today with Plan B, hundreds of millions of dollars are being spent and some efforts are being made in some areas to get more benefits than in the past to African-Americans and women. But we have a long way to go," he said.

Bangs said leaders of organizations with less diversified boards reported that although they had made efforts to improve the number of African-Americans and women on their boards, they had "difficulty identifying qualified individuals."

Urban League President and CEO Esther Bush said, "A lot of things do not happen because we do not know each other. And I can't trust you if I don't know you. Building relationships are very critical so we can start to build trust. The women and African-American (representation) will grow as the trust grows."

The report recommends leaders of economic development organizations make formal commitments to creating and maintaining board diversity, set goals for diversifying boards, make special efforts to identify qualified Black and women candidates and review their progress on a regular basis.

For a complete copy of the report, call 412-624-5442.