



MINNESOTA WOMEN:
CITY & COUNTY
EMPLOYMENT

COUNCIL ON THE ECONOMIC STATUS OF WOMEN

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Government is a major employer of women, accounting for more than one of five jobs held by women in the United States in 1977. Government jobs often provide a greater degree of job security and more comprehensive fringe benefits than private sector jobs, factors which are important to women as an economically disadvantaged group.

The democratic ideal of government by representation implies a commitment to equal opportunity on the part of government employers. In addition, government has a major role in regulating private sector activities. For these reasons, government is expected to serve as a model employer, basing personnel decisions on the best interests of the citizens who support the system. Does the public sector provide leadership in the employment of women?

Government jobs range from very specialized work in large bureaucracies to generalist positions in small one-person offices. A "public employee" in Minnesota may work for the federal government, for the State of Minnesota, or for one of several other jurisdictions: a county, city, school district, or township.

This report examines the status of women employed by counties and municipalities in Minnesota. These jurisdictions are often called "local government," a term which excludes school districts and townships for the purposes of this report.

Minnesota has 87 counties, each governed by an elected board of commissioners and administrative officers. In 1980, there are 18 women among the state's 441 county commissioners, accounting for four percent of all county commissioners. Counties have authority for planning and zoning, to establish housing and redevelopment authorities and to direct property assessment in addition to administering state programs: welfare, elections, vital statistics, tax levies, and highways. A new law passed in 1978, the Community Social Services Act, significantly expanded county responsibility for social services.

The state has 855 cities, governed in most cases by a mayor and city council. The number of mayors who are women has more than doubled in the last five years, increasing from 22 to 54, but it remains at only six percent of all mayors in Minnesota. More dramatic change has occurred on city councils, where the representation of women has increased from five percent in 1975 to 29 percent in 1979. Cities provide police and fire protection, street maintenance, sewer and water services, parks and recreation. In addition, cities may choose to provide utilities, sell liquor, operate a hospital, maintain an airport, and provide ambulance services, among other options.

Two previous reports from the Council on the Economic Status of Women described the status of women employed in state-level government jobs. These reports showed that the great majority of women employed by the State of Minnesota continue to be concentrated in "women's work" which is lower-paid than "men's jobs." In January 1979, average salaries for state government workers were \$16,266 for men and \$11,648 for women, or 72 cents for every dollar earned by state-employed men.

In 1975, median earnings for full-time year-round workers in the general Minnesota labor force, both public and private sector employment, were \$12,693 for men and \$7,397 for women. This represents a ratio of 58 cents earned by women for every dollar earned by men.

Is the status of women employed by cities and counties significantly different? Do women in local government have equal access to employment and equal opportunities for advancement, in all jobs? Has the "earnings gap" between men and women been eliminated in Minnesota's local government employment?

In November 1978, a letter was sent to each city and county in Minnesota, requesting that they send copies of their completed EEO-4 forms for 1977 and for 1978 to the Council on the Economic Status of Women. The EEO-4 form is required of state and local governments by the federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) and lists public employees by job category, salary, race, and sex. These listings are compiled separately according to governmental function: financial administration, streets and highways, public welfare, and so forth.

Responses were received from 33 counties and 36 cities for a total of 25,052 employees in fiscal year 1978 and 23,176 employees in fiscal year 1977. Not all jurisdictions sent forms for both years, so no direct comparisons of numbers of employees should be made. Both jurisdictions were well represented in the sample, with data returned for 22,534 city employees and 25,694 county employees. The seven-county Twin Cities area accounted for 35,227 employees in the sample, while the rest of the state reported on 13,001 employees.

Definitions used by the EEOC and a complete listing of cities and counties included in the sample are shown in the appendix. Data is based on full-time employees only. The Twin Cities metropolitan area as referred to in this report is comprised of the following counties: Anoka, Carver, Dakota, Hennepin, Ramsey, Scott, and Washington.

