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MORE WOMEN LEAD FOUNDATIONS, BUT MEN REMAIN AT THE TOP OF THE CORPORATIONS THAT FUND THEM.

“Gender stratification of work” is rampant in corporate philanthropy, say experts.

ACBJ ILLUSTRATION, GETTY IMAGES



By **Meera Raman** – Reporter, Boston Business Journal
Sep 6, 2023

This is the second article in a Boston Business Journal series on the state of corporate philanthropic giving. [Read the first in the series.](#)

In Massachusetts, women overwhelmingly fill the top roles at philanthropic foundations affiliated with the state’s largest corporate givers. But at the same time, they are far underrepresented in the chief executive roles of those same companies.

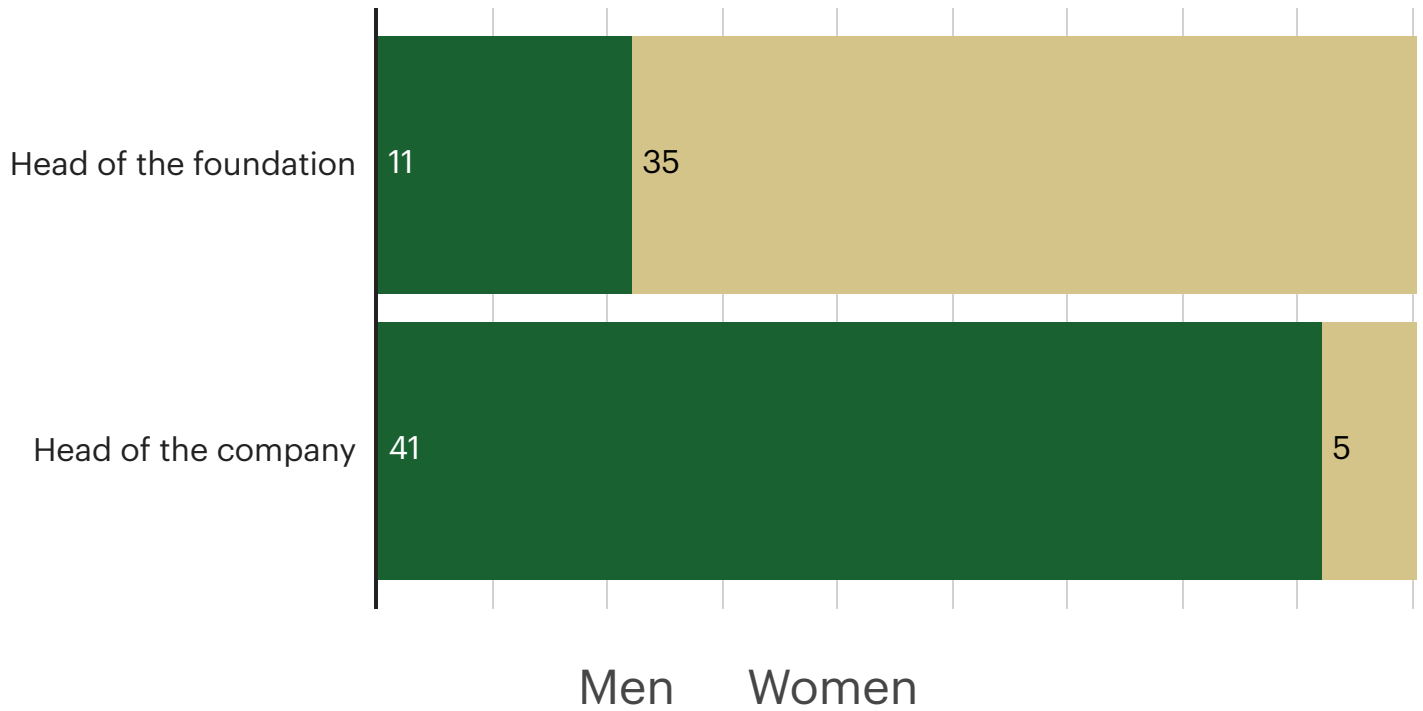
The leadership gap is known as the “gender stratification of work” – philanthropic work has long been considered “women’s work” while CEO roles are gendered as “a man’s job.” Experts say that perception is rampant in corporate philanthropy.

Workplace gender stratification is perhaps best seen in corporate philanthropy – by looking at the number of men who occupy corporate CEO roles while the foundations of those companies, again overwhelmingly, are led by women.

The Business Journal reviewed the leadership of 46 of the state’s largest corporate charitable foundations and the companies to which they are attached. Out of the 46 foundations, 35 of them, about 76%, are led by women. Meanwhile, only five of the companies with which those foundations are affiliated – about 11% – are led by women.

GENDER DISPARITY BETWEEN ROLES

A Business Journal analysis of 46 of the largest corporate charitable foundations in Massachusetts showed that women overwhelmingly hold the chief role. But in the companies attached to these foundations, women are underrepresented, as men still dominate the majority of the CEO jobs.



Source: BBJ surveys and other research

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Gender stratification of work

Gender equity experts say the increase in C-level women running corporate foundations does signal advancement, but at the same time, the gender discrepancy between roles also upholds workplace gender stereotypes. That binary, therefore, is an illusion of progress, experts say, because it still bars women from a direct pathway to the corner office.

On top of that, even as gains are happening for women in corporate charitable foundations, those gains have not extended across racial and ethnic lines: Most C-level corporate foundation roles are represented by upper- to middle-class white women. This results in the people who are represented at the top of the

foundations being very different from those receiving the money, who are often part of underrepresented communities, experts say.

The gender discrepancy between the CEO position and the corporate foundation head position is a prime example of “occupational segregation,” said Andrea Silbert, president of the Eos Foundation.

Women are tracked into nonprofit roles “by society and by companies,” Silbert said.

That’s because philanthropic work is associated with traditional gendered values placed on women: empathy, collaboration, listening, fairness, giving and ethics, said Jean Beaupré, dean of the school of business at Nichols College and the founding director of the Institute of Women’s Leadership.

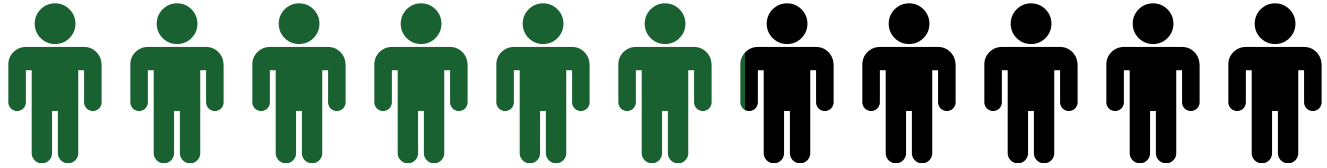
“There’s an expectation that women have these qualities, so there is a clear alignment between the nonprofit world and the qualities that women are expected to bring,” Beaupré said.

Danna Greenberg, a professor at Babson College whose research looks at issues of gender and work, said it’s a common phenomenon that even while women are represented at high levels in corporate foundations, they are scarcely seen on the corporate side in roles with a direct pathway to the corner office.

“The idea that earning the money and being the top leader is still seen as a man’s job, and the philanthropic, giving and support role is seen as women’s work, is highly concerning to me,” Greenberg said. “These numbers lead me to be concerned that we’re playing into some of those stereotypes about gender identification and who’s a good leader for what kind of a role.”

MALE LEADERSHIP AT CORPORATE CHARITABLE FOUNDATIONS

Men lead 11 out of the 46 largest corporate charitable foundations in Massachusetts. Out of those 11, six of them are also the CEO of the attached company.



55

Source: BBJ surveys and other research

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Nod to diversity still leaves ‘pink collar’ jobs

Because many companies are striving to diversify their executive teams, having women run the corporate foundation allows the company to say it’s committed to diversity without having to place a woman in the corner office, experts contended.

“Corporations want to have a more diverse staff, so they make sure the roles that are more typical for women are filled by women,” Silbert of the Eos Foundation said.

Other historically gendered roles in corporations include human resources, marketing and communications. Those roles also happen to lack operational heft and rarely lead to power positions such as CEO, COO or CFO. It creates an illusion that women are advancing, Silbert said, when in reality they are still not getting a seat at the table, or even a foot in the door.

Greenberg concurred that women are often hired into positions that are historically labeled as “pink collar” jobs. Meanwhile, data shows a dearth of women in the very top jobs.

A March 2023 report by the Eos Foundation looked at the 75 largest public companies in Massachusetts and found that women's representation among the highest-paid corporate executives grew from 10% in 2020 to 16% currently. But women remained notably stalled just before reaching the CEO's office: Women held 76% of human resources executive positions, and 56% of executive marketing/communication positions, but only 20% held division head positions, and only 16% were in the COO/president roles.

"People who become CEO are coming from the operating side, and women don't get those opportunities," said Beth Chandler, president and CEO of YW Boston. "They will be head of HR or head of the foundation, but they don't have an operating mind, because they aren't given the opportunity to get those positions. It's a cycle."

Women are kept in a cycle of these gendered roles, with many being promoted from the corporate side of the business to the foundation side, but rarely the other way around.

"Many companies don't want to look externally for talent, and are looking at the women they already have in the company to fit those roles," said Betty Francisco, CEO of Boston Impact Initiative. "It's a move from one gendered role to another."

In some cases, existing female executives are tapped to also oversee foundations. For instance, Linda Boff, the chief marketing officer of GE, is also the president of the GE Foundation. Likewise, Nancy Stager was the chief HR officer at Eastern Bank for 25 years and also took over the foundation about five years in, which has been her sole focus for the past three years.

Stager said she doesn't see the corporate and foundation parts as separate, but part of a whole.

"We really look at it as an integrated package," Stager said in an interview with the Business Journal. "Our foundation is fundamental to what we do as a company ...

so it made sense to slide over,” she said.

RACIAL MAKEUP OF FEMALE FOUNDATION LEADERS

The Business Journal was able to confirm the race of 20 out of the 35 women who lead the foundations through surveys and archived articles. Out of the the 35 women, 10 identify as women of color.

Source: BBJ surveys and other research

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Race discrepancy

Historically, philanthropy has been “upper- to middle-class white women’s work,” Greenberg said. That’s represented in the leadership at the state’s largest corporate foundations.

The Business Journal was able to confirm the race of 20 out of the 35 women who lead the corporate foundations, through surveys and archived articles. About 29% of the women who lead the corporate charitable foundations are women of color.

Francisco of Boston Impact Initiative said that the prevalence of white women heading foundations may be due to the fact that more often than not, women who are picked to lead the corporate foundations are chosen from within, and the companies are already overwhelmingly white.

Women of color face a double barrier of both gender and race. While data shows that organizations are increasing diversity, those gains are often seen only for

white women.

“While companies may be patting themselves on the back for getting more women in these roles, I would challenge them to include a more diverse racial profile into their foundation leaders,” Greenberg said.

This is despite many of the foundations using their grants to serve under-resourced and racialized communities.

However, the person who decides how much money will go where isn’t always the head of the corporate foundations, Francisco said. Each organization is different. For example, at the Cummings Foundation, they put together a team of 90 community volunteers to decide grant recipients.

Even if the leader of a foundation doesn’t look like the communities that they are serving, the real impact doesn’t come from their identity, but how they communicate with communities, Francisco said.

“Leaders have to have a real deep understanding of what the issues are that are impacting a community,” Francisco said.

Maya Shavit contributed research to this story.

This article was reported through a fellowship supported by the Lilly Endowment and administered by the Chronicle of Philanthropy to expand coverage of philanthropy and nonprofits. The Boston Business Journal is solely responsible for all content.

T H E L I S T

The Highest-Paid Chief Executives in Massachusetts

Total 2022 compensation

Rank	Prior Rank	Person
1	1	Ingram, Douglas
2	2	Robins, Jason
3	3	Viehbacher, Christopher

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