

The Board Explorer is a unique tool focused on bringing transparency to local government in Allegheny County. It sheds light on unelected board members of taxpayer-funded authorities, commissions, and other governmental agencies and their roles. It provides information about each member and invites analysis of this important part of the region's power structure. We created a dedicated [website](#) for this project and published additional introductory stories to help readers understand why this project matters. The site is searchable by member or entity names and topic (e.g., affordable housing, infrastructure, health). The database not only educates users on who decision-makers are, what decisions are being made and when, but it will also show the interconnectivity of individuals heading the entities.

We started with 16 boards involved — directly or indirectly — in development. As the region copes with the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and surging civil rights concerns, the operations of these boards are likely to affect our lives and futures more than ever. We published details on 14 additional boards that address public safety, public health and economic opportunity. Board Explorer now contains 473 board seats. In the near future, we will add more boards, further analysis and deeper looks at key members, including looks at the composition of the Allegheny County Conservation District, Allegheny HealthChoices, City-County Task Force on Disabilities, Clean Pittsburgh Commission, Gender Equity Commission, and Pittsburgh Shade Tree Commission.

Our reporting brings about change by building connections, inspiring the community to speak up and push for policy changes. This project shines a light on how decisions are made that affect the everyday lives of millions of Pittsburgh and Allegheny County residents. It empowers readers to navigate the network of decision makers and consider what perspectives are represented, as well as those that may be missing. The appointment-based makeup of the boards points to a power of the County Executive position in our region that largely goes unremarked and unexamined. Our project not only put names and faces to those making decisions that will affect the Pittsburgh region for decades to come, it examines the question of whether the boards are representative enough of their communities to produce equitable development. Board Explorer is a tool to illustrate the interconnectedness of those in power locally, pinpoint and discover potential conflicts of interest and identify who is accountable for distribution of resources in our community.

Through this project, we have already shown that there is a lack of representation of younger people under age 30 on boards across the county. Pending fact check, our research shows that 236 seats are held by men, 236 by women and one by a nonbinary individual, demonstrating gender balance on this level of Pittsburgh's power structure. We also have identified gaps in representation of specific constituencies; for example a geographic area with serious air-quality issues has no residents serving on the air quality

commission. Board Explorer has also demonstrated gaps in how the county is following procedures for filling board seats and term limits required by law.

We expect this tool to continue to be an accountability mechanism for our local government. The tool and associated articles have already generated more than 6,000 pageviews, a number that we expect to rise as boards are added and the pages are further optimized for search, helping people find information that they are seeking.