



New Study from Him For Her and Crunchbase Finds Uptick in Gender Diversity Among Boardrooms of VC-Backed Private Companies

Despite progress, women remain absent from half of private company boards, lagging dramatically behind public companies; Study finds only 3% of private company board seats are held by women of color

San Francisco, CA -- March 1, 2021 –[Him For Her](#) and [Crunchbase](#) today released the second annual [Study of Gender Diversity on Private Company Boards](#) which revealed more women than last year on the boards of the most heavily funded, venture-backed private companies. The percentage of companies studied that include at least one woman on the board of directors rose from 40% last year to 51% in the most recent study. Despite the progress, dramatic gender imbalance persists in the boardroom, with nearly half of the private companies studied lacking a single female member. This year's study also explored racial and ethnic diversity within private company boards and found an even more startling diversity gap, with only 3% of board seats held by women of color. The collaborative study analyzed 359 venture-backed private companies based in the U.S., each with at least \$100 million in funding.

Multiple studies track diversity among the boards of U.S.-based public companies. However, the gender composition of private company boards has largely been ignored despite the fact that public companies represent just 1% of U.S. businesses. The ground-breaking benchmark study, [originally published](#) in December 2019, was created to shine light on the gender disparity in private company boardrooms and create a baseline for tracking improvement. The new study measures progress over the course of one year and provides a preliminary look at racial and ethnic diversity in the boardroom.

Key findings from the study include:

- In 2020, 49% of companies did not have a woman on the board, an improvement from 60% in the prior study. By contrast, not one board among the S&P 500 is all-male.
- Only 11% of the 2,457 board seats across the private companies studied were held by women, up from 7% in the prior year. For public companies, women held 28% of board seats among the [S&P 500](#) and 23% among the [Russell 3000](#).
- Just 72 of those 2,457 board seats (3%) were held by women of color. Comparatively, the report estimated that 18% of board seats were held by men of color. For reference, the report defined people of color as individuals who are likely to identify as Black or African American, American Indian or Alaska Native, Asian, Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, Hispanic or Latina.

- 81% of companies didn't have a woman of color on the board.
- Company founders and investors composed 75% of the board seats studied, of which 8% were held by women. Women were more likely to hold independent board seats but were still outnumbered among those by four to one.
- Most female directors were the only women in the boardroom. Just 18% of the companies studied had more than one woman on the board. While [research](#) suggests that boards need at least three women to capture the full economic benefits of diversity, 6% of the companies studied met this criteria.

The study analyzed board members by type — executive directors, investor directors and independent directors — and found that women were underrepresented in every category. Investors made up the largest number of private company directors with 53% of seats, with women holding only 9% of them. In a shift from last year, independent directors gained share to account for the second largest group with 25% of board seats, of which women held 20%. Executive directors accounted for the smallest group with 22% of board seats, of which women only held 7%.

The fact that the gender mix among independent directors is slightly less extreme than it is among investors and executive directors may point to the opportunity some companies are taking to introduce more diversity to the boardroom through the addition of independent seats. The percentage of companies that had at least one independent director grew from 71% to 84% over the last year, contributing to the growth of diversity of independent seats.

"The modest improvements we've seen over the last year suggest private companies are starting to address the lack of board diversity, but, at this rate, it will take another ten years to reach gender parity," said Ann Shepherd, co-founder of social impact venture Him For Her. "Meanwhile most private-company boards don't include a single woman of color. The good news is that there's no shortage of talented women ready for board service; business leaders simply need to look beyond their personal networks."

"This study shows initial progress toward correcting the gender imbalance on private company boards, but it reveals substantial room for growth," said Gené Teare, senior data journalist at Crunchbase. "Studies like this are critical for continuing to keep shareholders accountable. At Crunchbase, we believe data is essential to shed light on these issues and encourage changes that lead to a more diverse and equitable private sector."

Methodology

This tracking update largely reproduced the methodology for our [original benchmarking study](#) published in December 2019. For this update, we analyzed 359 of the most heavily funded, private U.S.-based companies to understand the composition of their boards as of Q3 2020, one year after the original study.

Leveraging the Crunchbase database, we identified 1,295 U.S.-based private companies founded since 2003 with cumulative funding of at least \$100 million as of June 30, 2020. To ensure that each company's board profile was current, we included only companies that published their board of directors on their website.

About Crunchbase

Crunchbase is the leading provider of private-company prospecting and research solutions. Over 55 million users—including salespeople, entrepreneurs, investors, and market researchers—use Crunchbase to prospect for new business opportunities. And companies all over the world rely on us to power their applications, making over 3 billion calls to our API each year. To learn more, visit about.crunchbase.com/ and follow us on Twitter @crunchbase.

About Him For Her

Him For Her is a social impact venture aimed at accelerating diversity on corporate boards. To bridge the network gap responsible for the sparsity of women in the boardroom, Him For Her engages business luminaries to connect the world's most talented "Hers" to board service. Since its founding in 2018, Him For Her has built a referral-only talent network of 2500+ board-ready women, a third of whom are women of color, and delivered free board-referral lists to 450+ companies ranging from start-ups to S&P 100. Him For Her creates warm introductions between board candidates and CEOs through its series of small events guest-hosted by renowned leaders such as Stacy Brown-Philpot, Danny Meyer, Brian Moynihan, Eric Yuan, and [many more](#). A 501c3 corporation, Him For Her provides its services free of charge thanks to supporters like Brad Feld & Amy Batchelor, Reid Hoffman, Jeff Weiner, Nasdaq, and others.