**7 Steps to Increase Board Diversity for Nonprofits**

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[**https://www.cfgcr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CFGCR-Board-Inclusion-RoadMap.pdf**](https://www.cfgcr.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/CFGCR-Board-Inclusion-RoadMap.pdf)

The demographics of nonprofit boards tend to follow the trends of corporate boards. In recent years, corporate boards are recruiting more women for their boards, and they’re having good success. There’s also a move to recruit different ethnicities to boards, and that effort has been a bit slower. The conversation of diversity within nonprofit boards is just as important as it is within corporate boards. While women and people of color help to diversify boards, it’s important not to overlook other dimensions that shape discussions and bring diversity into the boardroom. In considering your recruitment efforts, consider these attribute markers:

* Age
* Gender
* Background
* Ethnicity
* Culture
* Experience
* Nationality
* Sexual orientation
* Education
* Professional background
* Level of ability
* Socio-economic status
* Geographic

Boards are more in tune with the needs of the people they serve when they are comprised of the same demographics. Strong debates are healthy, and many perspectives coming together in the boardroom make for robust discussions and good decision-making.

The lack of diversity can cause “groupthink” and lead to harmful outcomes in the communities where they serve. Best practices for nonprofit board diversity encourage nominating committees to do comprehensive outreach in their recruitment efforts.

**Diversity Adds Value for Nonprofit Boards**

When nonprofit boards approach diversification with the intent of adding value to the organization, they’re better able to tackle problems from many different angles. Forbes magazine points to diversity and inclusion as key drivers of internal innovation and business growth.

That can only happen when boards allow diverse members to engage and take their opinions seriously. It’s vital for boards to avoid recruiting diverse board members out of tokenism or for the sake of appearances. When diverse members voice their opinions, it helps others consider alternate points of view. Together they can identify and pursue opportunities for innovation. Healthy, well-rounded debates help nonprofit boards investigate issues thoroughly and critically.

If your board has been in existence for some time and it still lacks diversity, it’s important to consider why the board hadn't focused on diversity to this point. Your board will thrive by having a mix of personal, experiential, and other varied demographics.

If the board is relying completely on referrals from current board members, they’re probably recruiting people just like themselves. That doesn’t do much for nonprofit board diversity. However, all isn’t lost.

When nonprofit boards understand the reasons they need to increase diversity on the board and make a commitment to seeking and recruiting a fully diverse board, it’s the first step to breaking past practices and moving in a better direction.

**Here are 7 steps to get you on the path to nonprofit board diversity.**

1. **Bring biases out of the closet.**

The first step is always the most difficult, but it’s important to get the elephant out of the room. Put the issue of nonprofit board diversity on your agenda. When the item comes up at your meeting, have an honest, open discussion about it. Do your best to uncover any biases. As a group, identify specific issues that are contributing to overlooking diverse recruits or not reaching out to them at all.

1. **Examine your recruiting and nomination processes.**

Biases can shape the recruiting process if the committee doesn’t have a diversity policy that outlines how to recruit a diverse board. Review your postings for board member recruiting and assess what kind of people they’re likely to draw. Be sure to add a statement of inclusivity in your print and online postings if you have an open process. Also, check for any potential biases during the review process. Make sure that all candidates feel equally comfortable and that no one feels pushed out.

1. **Take a survey of your entire organization about diversity.**

Evaluate whether the board’s demographic matches that of the people it serves. If they’re vastly different, and your survey results indicate that your members and others in the community don’t recognize a diverse board, there’s always a chance to make change as board vacancies open up.

1. **Get the board in alignment with your vision for diversity.**

Nonprofit board diversity won’t happen without a concerted effort on everyone’s part. Don’t be afraid to be the lone wolf when it comes to taking a stance on diversity. Often, it just takes one person to bring it up for others to join the vision. As the momentum for a diverse board builds, be non-confrontational in your approach. Biases, in one form or another, are common. Please note: This is also an area where the board can take an inventory of its current practices and examine whether they unintentionally exclude diversity. For example, does the meeting time present a scheduling burden for working parents? Is the annual meeting in an off-site location difficult to reach by public transportation?

1. **Decide on a new recruitment strategy**.

If what you have been doing is not working, it is time to change things up. Cast a wider net to find some new people. Tap into social media outlets like Facebook and LinkedIn. Network with other nonprofits that have diverse board policies and find out what works for them. At the Foundation, the CEO was authorized to reach out directly to those he had worked with on various initiatives that might not have been known to the board committee responsible for board development. CEOs and other staff can help bridge outreach goals for the board. Reach out to your community and begin authentic conversations about your goals to be more diverse and inclusive. During your recruitment process, it is important to focus on each candidate’s skills and experience first, then their unique attributes that add to your DEI goals. Be intentional about your goals. All things being equal, it is appropriate to prioritize under-represented populations.

1. **Portray diversity in your promotions.**

A picture is worth a thousand words. Review your website, brochures, and presentations. Social media offers the ability to reinforce your interest in bringing greater diversity to your organization. Do your messages reflect the type of diversity that you want to attract in new board members? If not, it’s time for an update on the promotional media that you use for outreach. See Board Composition Matrix in the Tools on age 53.

1. **Draw potential recruits from your current membership and your community.**

Tap into the individuals that you serve. Seek out those who have demonstrated an interest in your events, activities, and fundraisers. Engage those who have shown an interest in your mission. Have you considered that they may be the best people to serve as your next board members? Once you have reached your goal of nonprofit board diversity, make a conscious effort to avoid tokenism and allow diverse board members to serve their intended purpose. If you only selected them to check a box, they probably are not serving as true board members, and you are defeating your purpose. Boards that are successful in developing a culture of inclusivity will benefit as the boards become more adaptable, more effective, and excel with risk management.

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Below are four recommended principles to follow when recruiting a more diverse board:

1. Focus on what people will do rather than who they are or what abilities they possess. Do not assume that someone will take certain actions because they belong to a particular socioeconomic, racial, or ethnic group. A Board of Directors must explicitly communicate its expectations of responsibilities for its members.

2. In order to eliminate the possibility of tokenism, consider adding more than one new board member from and underrepresented group at a time. By doing so, individuals can feel like they are part of an incoming class and will have a friend in their early tenure. Having a class can also help avoid the perception that any one individual represents a whole community's views can be avoided. New individuals may also feel encouraged to seek leadership roles.

3. Recruit board members from organizations beyond traditional community-based organizations. Consider reaching out to sororities and fraternities, alumni organizations, and minority professional and business groups.

4. Review current expectations for board membership to make certain they are beneficial and supportive of an inclusive board of directors, rather than making exceptions for "diverse board members”. Remember, having specific giving levels or requiring members to secure donations can create unintended barriers to board recruitment efforts. Good board members may offer time, talent and expertise that far outweigh monetary gifts.

**Sample Diversity Statements**

**National Wildlife Federation**

**Our Statement**

The National Wildlife Federation strives to increase diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice in all elements of our work and with our partners, to support the interdependent needs of wildlife and people in a rapidly changing world. To live up to our values of collaboration, empowerment, inclusivity, mindfulness, and a focus on our mission, we believe:

We are better collaborators and will only achieve our mission when our staff and partners reflect the full diversity of our country, including but not limited to: race, gender, ethnicity, sexual identity, socio-economic status, age, ability, religion, and political philosophy.

We can carry out our work with greater mindfulness and inclusivity if we recognize the social, economic, and political contexts that shaped the early environmental and conservation movements, and resulted in cultural biases that permeate our institutions today. Only by understanding and addressing these biases will we justly and equitably engage with one another while pursuing our conservation goals.

We work more effectively by empowering staff, affiliates, members, and partners to support and ensure that this commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice is incorporated into our vision, organizational structure, budget, and work.

We recognize the urgency of this work and are committed to the ongoing changes that are necessary to fully incorporate diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice into our structure and values to fulfill our mission.

*Additionally, we have developed our*[***2020 Equity and Justice Strategic Plan***](https://www.nwf.org/-/media/Documents/PDFs/Equity/NWF-Equity-and-Justice-Strategic-Plan.ashx?la=en&hash=F0CCD4173ED5F006EC4FC5208ECEDEE48143A77B)*where you can see how equity is deeply tied to our mission and the ways in which we will continue to broaden and expand this work.*

**The Nature Conservancy values**

**dignity and respect for all.**

We believe conservation is best advanced when diverse teams, partners, and local communities are working together to better understand and protect our planet. In support of TNC’s [values and mission](https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/who-we-are/our-mission-vision-and-values/), the Global Diversity, Equity and Inclusion (GDEI) team is dedicated to an inclusive workplace where our staff, volunteers, and external partners represent, appreciate, and uplift the communities we serve and intend to serve. To develop our staff's cultural competencies and build on our DEI foundation across the globe, the GDEI team is currently working on measuring DEI across TNC, building up our team, investing in trainings and educational opportunities, and strengthening our GDEI vision.

**Audubon California's Statement on**

**Equity, Diversity, Inclusion, and Belonging**

*The birds Audubon pledges to protect differ in color, size, behavior, geographical preference, and countless other ways. By honoring and celebrating the equally remarkable diversity of the human species, Audubon will bring new creativity, effectiveness, and leadership to our work throughout the hemisphere.*

In order to achieve these goals, Audubon California has made equity, diversity, inclusion, and belonging an organizational imperative. Protecting and conserving nature and the environment transcends political, cultural, and social boundaries. Respect, inclusion, and opportunity for people of all backgrounds, lifestyles, and perspectives will attract the best ideas and harness the greatest passion to shape a healthier, more vibrant future for all of us who share our planet.

We are committed to increasing the diversity of our staff, board, volunteers, members, and supporters, and fostering an inclusive network within Audubon California's Centers and Chapters in all communities, from rural to urban. We respect the individuality of each member of our community, and we are committed to a workplace free of any kind of discrimination based on race, color, religion, sex, age, sexual orientation, gender identity and expression, disability, national or ethnic origin, politics, or veteran status.

Audubon California is committed to cultivating a workplace community free of discrimination based on gender identity and expression, where all of our flock feels welcome and seen. Audubon recognizes it’s important to never assume someone else’s gender. To that end, we implemented a voluntary initiative for all employees to share their pronouns in email signatures and interactions to create a more affirming workspace. More people proactively sharing our pronouns, regardless of gender identity or expression, fosters a workplace where the conversation is routine rather than a point of difference. Audubon California's employees of all gender identities and expressions are encouraged to participate, so transgender (including non-binary), gender non-conforming, intersex, and agender people don’t have to bear the weight alone.

**Nonprofit Board Inclusion Training Series**

**The Community Foundation for the Greater Capital Region**

[**https://www.cfgcr.org/nonprofit-board-inclusion-training-series/**](https://www.cfgcr.org/nonprofit-board-inclusion-training-series/)

**SUMMARY OF INCLUSION SESSIONS**

**Session I:** *Building a Foundation of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion*

The need and interest to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion have significantly increased in

the past year, especially on nonprofit boards. A common question leaders ask is “we care about

this issue, but where do we start?” In this session, Kathleen McLean of the McLean Group shared

strategies for how to begin the DEI journey at your organization. Participants learned the

historical context of systemic oppression in the United States and gained a better understanding

of the need for change, reviewed the common language of diversity, equity, and inclusion

terminology, identified ways to build a case for DEI, and prepared a change management

strategy. The following steps were shared to help participants further their journey:

* Complete a diversity audit: Take an assessment of the demographics of your community and ask, "Does your board reflect your community?"
* Develop a recruitment strategy: Start to build relationships with your community and your targeted audiences.
* Ensure your board is relevant: Always listen to what your community needs and how it is changing.
* Review your bylaws: Are there phrases, terminology, or policies that are exclusionary? Look to see how your organization needs to change to become more inclusive.
* Don't only focus on the people you know: Get outside of your comfort zone and engage with more diverse voices in all aspects of your life. Having diverse voices allows for more fact finding, divergent thinking, ideation, alternatives, and positive conflict.
* Don't engage in "either or" thinking: Stop thinking you will compromise skills and talent when striving to diversify your board. Focus on the competitive advantage and the robust understanding of opportunities your organization will have when embracing DEI on your board.

**Session II:** *Building a Culture of Inclusivity and Impact*

Amidst increased activism and greater pressure from funders and state legislation, there has been

a growing push for corporate and nonprofit leaders to increase board diversity, build more inclusive

cultures and drive equitable outcomes. Yet in the current climate, you may not know where to

begin in creating brave spaces that enable more effective cross-cultural communications. In this

workshop, Anniedi Essien and Christina Farnacci-Roberts of W.I.D.E Dynamic Dialogue equipped

leaders with strategies to shift from awkward silence and inaction to dynamic dialogues that help

shape creative assessment, planning and sustained progress with DEI efforts. Following the session,

the presenters provided these key takeaways from the session:

* Now is an ideal time to reevaluate your organization’s approach to traditional DEI work so you can be more responsive to emerging developments within a rapidly changing landscape
* Siloed approaches are ineffective to cultivate workforce well-being, and top nonprofits must keep pace with intersectional issues that touch upon diversity, inclusion, equity, belonging, justice, and wellness
* To boost community engagement, organizations must use a more holistic and integrated framework that recognizes the ways people’s multifaceted identities affect the way they are seen by, engage with and navigate the world around them
* Executive leaders must consider and leverage how the integration of Wellness, Inclusion, Diversity, and Equity (W.I.D.E.) can optimize performance, profitability, and impact Board leaders must reflect on how stakeholders’ intersectional identities and diverse experiences can be viewed as strengths that are leveraged to increase inclusivity, maximize impact, and improve cross-cultural communications
* Bias is a prejudice in favor of or against one thing, person or group compared with another and can be explicit (the attitudes and beliefs we have about a person or group on a conscious level) or implicit (the attitudes and beliefs we have that affect our understanding, actions, and decisions in an unconscious matter)
* EVERYONE has bias; it is inescapable and a natural function of our brains; however, it can and should be mitigated to avoid negative consequences
* Nonprofits should be aware of how unconscious bias insidiously embed itself into many facets of the work (particularly racial bias because it is a visible identity) and identify ways bias can affect volunteer recruitment, board representation, fundraising, capacity building, and program development, delivery, and marketing
* Board members and executive leaders can mitigate bias by using the following tactics:
  + engage in intergroup contact, counter stereotypes, and practice mindfulness
  + practice “blind” applications and use outcome-based criteria, create inclusive rules, and pause and justify your actions
  + expand the pool and diversify decision-makers at all levels

**Session III:** *Moving from Learning to Action*

Based on feedback from local nonprofits, the most difficult part of the journey to advance equity is

moving from learning to action. In the first two workshops, we learned how to build a case for DEI

and strategies to create inclusive cultures. This session explored how systemic oppression shows

up on nonprofit boards and outlined strategies to advance our DEI goals. The workshop began with

a two-hour training by Lyndon Cudlitz of Lyndon Cudlitz: Consulting, Educating, and Training, who

dived into these issues and provided actionable next steps. The training was followed by a panel

discussion with Hon. Dorcey L. Applyrs, DrPH, Marcia Cognetta, and Alfredo Medina, Jr., Ph.D.,

moderated by Angela Dixon. Each shared experiences serving on boards and provided strategies to

advance inclusion.

Lyndon shared this quote: “There is a significant difference between all are welcome here and

this was created with you in mind” by Dr. Crystal Jones to encourage board leaders to reframe

their thinking about their spaces.

The following suggestions were made related to JEDI (Justice, Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion):

* Diversity: Reflect and recruit to get different people on your board, including parents, people you serve, transgender people, people living in poverty, and people with disabilities.
* Inclusion: Build an inclusive culture by creating an inclusion statement; post board openings publicly; recruit contacts from historically excluded groups and encourage a community on the board.
* Equity: Ensure equity on the board by dismantling barriers for participation and engagement including: making the meetings at accessible times, holding it in spaces with all-gender restrooms, ensuring it’s accessible by public transportation, providing live captions for online meetings or another form of transcription or interpretation.
* Justice: Push forward and promote justice by creating procedures to uplift everyone on the board such as: organizing childcare support, advocating for restroom access, providing bus passes, or holding American Sign Language classes.

The session also dove into reframing the common struggles organizations articulate when they are

attempting to recruit diverse members:

1. We cannot find qualified candidates.

a. Instead, reframe to think, “Why don’t qualified candidates want to join us? What

barriers are preventing people from joining us?” How do we widen our circle?

b. Drop degree requirements and giving expectations

c. Highlight and value skills, knowledge, passion, life experience, and non-traditional

education

d. Examine your bias and assumptions, such as judging how well someone writes or

speaks English, who you consider palpable or professional. Instead of saying not a

right culture fit, ask if they add to our culture.

2. We need more diversity, but we don’t want to tokenize people.

a. Start with the women, BIPOC, queer and trans people, people with disabilities, and

immigrants already connected to your organization or networks

b. Make the board recruitment “asks” relevant to the whole person’s work, skills, and

experiences

c. Be honest and transparent during the recruitment about reasons for your outreach

to them and the current climate at the organization and on the board

d. Inquire about needs for a member to participate at their fullest

e. Don’t expect a person to recruit from their own community right away without

building a relationship and new levels of trust

3. I want to know what the XYZ community thinks. I need a second opinion, or I have a quick

question.

a. Compensate focus groups and community leaders from their expert consultation

b. Don’t use staff/board for consultation when it’s not in the job description

c. Pay consultants to save money, time, and reputation

d. Show your organization’s commitment to DEI and invest in where you say you are

e. Develop accountability partners of the same and different identities