Racial Equity and Inclusion on Your Board

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Today’s Conversation

- Overview of BoardSource and Its Commitment to Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity in the Nonprofit Sector

- *Leading with Intent* study and National Data on DEI

- The “Disconnect” between Attitudes and Actions

- Non-Diverse Boards – Org-wide Implications

- My Experiences and Conversations in the Field

- Five Questions that Boards Should Discuss

- Strategic Steps in Board Recruitment and Retention

- Recommended “Mindsets” for Board Members

- Tools and Resources for Individuals and Boards
Overview of BoardSource’s Vision

▪ **Vision**: A world where every social sector organization has the leadership it needs to fulfill its purpose and create a just world where all can thrive.

▪ **Core Belief**: It is *impossible* for the social sector to achieve this vision without a commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity.

  o **Diversity** in board composition (skills, expertise, lived experiences, racial/ethnic background, access to networks, etc.)
  o **Inclusion** in building a board culture of trust, candor, and respect for everyone
  o **Equity-focused** in understanding and developing strategies in the societal context in which the organization operates
The Data: We’ve Got a Long Way To Go . . .

- The nonprofit sector isn’t as diverse as it should be, as indicated by our national survey data:
  
  - 87% of nonprofit chief executives are white
  - 78% of nonprofit board members are white
  - 19% of nonprofit boards are *entirely* white
  - 71% of board chairs said that the board’s composition did not represent the demographics of the population served by the organization
  - Only 26% of boards place a “high priority” on demographic diversity when they recruit board members
Board Recruitment Strategies Are Not Aligned with Diversity Goals

- Top two methods for identifying new board members:
  - Board members’ personal or professional contacts (96%)
  - CEO/ED’s personal or professional contacts (88%)

- There is a disconnect between attitudes and actions:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Importance</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High priority</td>
<td>26%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium Priority</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low priority</td>
<td>22%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Not a priority</td>
<td>8%</td>
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- 82% of chief executives say racial diversity is important to external leadership
- 70% of that group is dissatisfied with board’s racial composition
- But only 50% have aligned board recruitment practices with diversity goals
Org-wide Implications of a Lack of Racial and Ethnic Board Diversity

- Boards lacking in racial/ethnic diversity *self-report* that their boards’ racial/ethnic make-up *negatively* impacts their ability to:
  - Understand the organization’s operating environment and work
  - Attract and retain talent for both board and staff
  - Enhance the organization’s standing with funders, donors, and the general public
  - Understand how to best serve the community
  - Cultivate trust and confidence with the community served
My Experiences and Conversations in the Field

- This work often leads to “uncomfortable” moments for white nonprofit leaders (and for me) -- here are four quotes that I’ve heard within the last 18 months on this topic:

  - “I was so angered by the first 30 minutes of the racial equity training session that I shut down for the next two days of training.”

  - “Could we use softer terms than “white privilege”? I just don’t want white leaders to be “put off” by the terminology.”

  - “Do we have to focus on diversity for our board? We’re a nonprofit that focuses on the environment, not on affordable housing, economic development, education, or health.”

  - “If we’re so focused on adding people of color, then I suppose you don’t value my board service anymore.”
5 Questions That Boards Should Discuss

▪ Do you think your Board’s current racial composition negatively or positively impacts your reputation in the field?

▪ If someone were to make assumptions about your organizational values based solely on your board composition, what would they be likely to think?

▪ Is your lack of commitment to racial equity impacting your ability to attract and retain talent in your workforce?

▪ Are you ever at risk of making decisions without fully understanding how these decisions may affect those you serve?

▪ If you were to make a deeper commitment to racial equity, what would that mean for your mission, your work, and the people you serve?
Board Recruitment Strategies

- Develop an action plan, policies, and procedures to address self-identified weaknesses
  - Use a board recruitment matrix to identify areas you want to address
  - Set expectations up front with board candidates, especially related to fundraising
  - Assess candidates’ level of comfort and experience on prioritized topics
  - Move beyond regular channels for board recruitment
    - Post board searches
    - Connect with local chapters of national ethnic professional and civic associations
    - Engage staff
    - Engage every board member
Board Retention Strategies

- To support greater retention:
  - Establish written diversity policies
  - Implement a detailed orientation process
  - Assign a “buddy”/mentor
  - Provide equal access to board leadership opportunities
  - Pay careful attention to board social inclusion practices
  - Ask board members of color for feedback on the recruitment process they experienced
    ✔ What worked?
    ✔ What didn’t work?
Recommended “Mindsets” for Board Members

▪ **Be Courageous**: “Lean in” to the “discomfort” in discussing these issues; don’t be afraid to hear or speak the truth about inequity. It’s part of the work, and you can’t get around it if you want to make progress.

▪ **Be Curious**: Keep learning (read, watch, listen, notice, connect, engage, act, reflect, stay inspired).

▪ **Be Committed**: Acknowledge that making statements and declaring intentions aren’t enough; assess what you’ve done and decide what you will commit to doing.
Tools & Resources for Your Racial Equity Journey

Additional Resources (Board)

- The Four Principles of Purpose-Driven Board Leadership
- The Four Principles of PDBL -- Board Conversation Starter Guide
- Leading with Intent 2021
- Leading with Intent 2021 -- DEI Findings
- BoardSource DEI website
- BoardSource COVID-19 website
- Equity in the Center publication: Awake to Woke to Work: Building a Race Equity Culture

Additional Resources (Individual)

- 21 Day Racial Equity Habit Building Challenge
- Racial Equity Tools -- Glossary