

TO DIVERSIFY NONPROFIT BOARDS

“Excellence in governance is essential for the sustainability of voluntary sector organizations. Greater diversity will get us there.”

Ratna Omidvar and John Tory, Co-Chairs,
DiverseCity: The Greater Toronto Leadership Project

START WITH RECRUITMENT

1 Make a public commitment to diversity.

A public commitment to diversity can help attract new board members from under-represented ethnic and racial groups. This commitment can be expressed in ways that emphasize how diversity will help the organization better serve its clients.

2 Take a diversity audit of your board.

Start by collecting demographic information about your current board, as well as applicants to future openings. Some people worry this is illegal or discriminatory – it is not. Collecting information on racial and ethnic characteristics is permitted if it is to address the under-representation of visible minorities and other historically under-represented groups.

3 Focus on the skills the board needs to meet its strategic priorities.

Diversity efforts are intended to strengthen the organization as a whole. The board must find the financial, legal and management skills it needs to do this. But it also shouldn't underestimate the

importance of understanding and reflecting under-represented groups. Fortunately, finding both sets of skills is possible – there is a large and talented pool of immigrants and visible minorities in the region from which to draw.

4 Set explicit goals in the selection process and develop a strategy.

An organization may determine that at least half of new board members should be from an under-represented group. It is important to build diversity into the entire recruitment process. For example, design a transparent application process and consider using non-traditional outreach methods such as DiverseCity onBoard. Also consider diversity in the screening methods and interview questions used.

5 Recognize a variety of experiences and expertise.

Often boards think and act alike because members share similar life experiences. Valuing volunteer and work experience gained abroad, as well as leadership gained in ethnic organizations or small community groups is important. Also look at the volunteers and committees of your organization and whether they are diverse. If not, increase the diversity of these groups. These can be important training grounds for future board members.

“It's not about checking a diversity box. It's about finding board members with the greatest understanding and the strongest relationships within Toronto's diverse communities, arts practices and disciplines.”

Susan Wright, Toronto Arts Council

"Change over time is inevitable. But our sector shouldn't wait – we should lead to ensure full inclusion for our community. It's essential for nation-building."

Rahul Bhardwaj, Toronto Community Foundation

MOVE TO INCLUSION

6 Aim to create a critical mass.

Research has shown that there is strength in numbers. While there is debate in the literature about what the minimum threshold should be, it has been suggested that once there are three members on a board that share similar characteristics, these individuals will feel more comfortable sharing a dissenting opinion.

7 Encourage diverse board members to take on additional responsibilities.

Organizations should ask new and diverse board members to sit on or lead special committees and projects. These opportunities should not be limited to those dealing with diversity issues. This inclusion will encourage full engagement and commitment to the organization, and will improve board retention.

8 Train all board members on diversity issues.

Orientation, mentoring and training for board members is essential to a well-functioning board. This should include helping board members to better understand the various access points for providing

input such as contacting senior staff, participating in events organized by the organization, and participating in board committees. It should also include training on the importance of diversity and on the skills required to achieve cultural competence.

9 Mainstream diversity in the organization's activities.

A board should engage staff to align diversity efforts to the organization's mission, mandate and activities. All activities should be evaluated to determine how well they support diversity efforts. New programs and services can be evaluated using a diversity and equity lens.

10 Measure results of diversity by its impact.

Inclusion is about being sensitive to differences and transforming organizations to be more effective, responsive, transparent and accountable to the community. It is on this impact that the success of diversity efforts should be measured.

"Diversity on boards helps sport organizations stay relevant and be responsive to new communities."

Doug Gore, Ontario Trillium Foundation

"There are many benefits to diversity on boards. Our sector can't afford to exclude a growing and influential segment of the population from our leadership, especially as it relates to governance and fundraising."

Susan McIsaac, United Way of Greater Toronto

These 10 Tips were written by Sandra Lopes, Manager of Policy and Research, Maytree, and adapted from: Chris Fredette, *Leadership Diversity in the Nonprofit Sector: Baby Steps, Big Strides, and Bold Stances*, available at: www.diversecitytoronto.ca/counts

DiverseCity: The Greater Toronto Leadership Project is a partnership of Maytree and the Greater Toronto CivicAction Alliance



Maytree promotes equity and prosperity through leadership building.



Catalyzing collective leadership on tough issues and big opportunities facing the Greater Toronto region.



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