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Nonprofits, you are the Champions for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

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At a recent gathering of state associations of nonprofits, we purposefully sparked a candid and invigorating conversation about diversity, equity, and inclusion. We know that similar conversations are happening all over – among grantmakers, in business board rooms, and throughout communities. As challenging as it may feel to have this conversation at your nonprofit, we encourage every nonprofit to strengthen itself by doing so, and not just among its staff members.

This conversation belongs in the boardroom, too.

Our boards of directors have a long way to go: While 64 percent of the country is white, according to the US Census, 89 percent of CEOs and 80 percent of board members participating in BoardSource’s national survey (as reported in [Leading with Intent](#)) are white. Those data also demonstrate that the larger the nonprofit organization, the more likely the board chair is to be white, over 40 years old, and male. National data also show that a glass ceiling still exists for women leaders of nonprofits, as well as a significant [gender pay gap](#).

As our network’s recent conversation illuminated, conversations about diversity must move beyond “checking-a-box” on a board matrix, because diversity is not just

about gender, or only skin deep. A moving testimonial encouraged us to appreciate that even in a room filled with people who look the same, there can be profound diversity of lived experiences. While we know that these conversations are essential for moving the needle, too often participants leave the room still feeling stuck. Even accepting that DE&I is something to embrace to strengthen our organizations may not translate into knowing how to take the next step.

So the trick is – how do we move beyond conversation, to meaningful action?

The key may be to explore *why diversity and inclusiveness matter*, because answering that question (which is fundamentally about mission) can lead to action. When your nonprofit is sharing “mission moments” in a team meeting or at a board meeting, why not ask, “How can being more inclusive at this juncture increase our effectiveness?” There is actually strong support for [how diversity makes us smarter](#). As Stephen Covey said, “Strength lies in differences, not in similarities.” A [study of global enterprises by Forbes](#) concludes that increased diversity ties directly to increased innovation and creativity. *“This is not only because people with different backgrounds bring new information. Simply interacting with individuals who are different forces group members to prepare better, to anticipate alternative viewpoints and to expect that reaching consensus will take effort.”* ([Scientific American](#))

Is your nonprofit a champion for diversity, equity, and inclusion?

Some nonprofits have captured their organization’s goals in connection with equity in a values statement; others do so through workplace policies that address diversity and inclusion.

Here are a few examples of how the nonprofit community is currently championing the values of diversity, equity, and inclusion:

- Some nonprofits have board governance practices or even policies that encourage the board to reflect the community served.
- Many nonprofits ensure that all their programs are accessible for those with special needs; and have made their [websites accessible](#).
- GuideStar is [collecting and posting diversity data](#) about charitable nonprofits.

- Some nonprofits are making sure that they are building a pipeline of leaders by convening “junior boards”: [Why Youth Diversity Matters](#).
- State associations in many states are now collecting diversity information along with salary and benefits data in state nonprofit compensation surveys that will yield greater detail about trends in nonprofit employment.

And here are other steps to consider:

- How might your nonprofit model inclusiveness in its professional development efforts? One idea: encourage staff to participate in community-of-color peer cohorts in your community.
- Host community conversations about DE&I.
- Nominate a “diversity and inclusion” champion or create an award to recognize staff and/or volunteers.
- Strengthen engagement with diverse local communities to build trust.
- Broaden staff recruitment sources.
- [Watch this video](#) with your staff or board and encourage discussion.
- Look for opportunities to learn about [unintentional bias](#), and [cultural competency](#) in education; and [cultural respect](#) in health care.
- Articulate a clear and compelling business case for increasing diversity and inclusion, such as the strategic imperative to create space for the perspectives and values of diverse individuals and communities when engaged in community problem-solving and mobilizing communities for action.

Around the country you may have noticed that state associations of nonprofits are engaging as champions of diversity, equity, and inclusion, through special educational programs, workshops, and peer learning cohorts. We invite you to join our network along this journey. One of our state association leaders described it as akin to a high school dance: “*Diversity is when you are **invited to the dance**; inclusion is when you are **asked to dance**; and equity is when you get to be the DJ!*” That line got some laughs – but it also helped us focus on how “being invited” is just the first step.

We invite YOU and your nonprofit to be a champion for diversity, equity, and inclusion. One simple step is to encourage your staff and other nonprofits to take the [Nonprofits, Leadership and Race Survey](#) created by the Building Movement Project. [Take the 2016 Survey](#) and add your voice to the conversation.

Resources

- [Overcoming hidden barriers to diversity & inclusion](#) (BoardSource)
- [The Voice of Nonprofit Talent](#) (CommonGood Careers)
- [The Denver Foundation's Inclusiveness Project](#)
 - [Why Inclusiveness?](#)
 - [Sample job description for an inclusiveness committee](#) (Denver Foundation)
 - [Inclusiveness at work](#): Resources include a sample assessment to determine organizational readiness; training modules, suggestions for gathering stakeholder perspectives etc.
- [Definitions of diversity, inclusiveness, and cultural competence](#) (Boulder County AIDS Project)
- [Lessons about Respect, Cultural Competence, and Collaboration in Veterans' Initiative](#) (Nonprofit Quarterly)
- [Diversity on nonprofit boards](#) (National Council of Nonprofits)
- [Policies, Processes, and Protocols: Three Keys to building a Diverse Workplace](#) (SSIR)
- [Achieving diversity in the nonprofit workplace: a step-by-step guide](#) (Third Sector New England)