LEADING WITH INTENT

Reviewing The State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on Nonprofit Boards

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Introduction & Summary of Key Findings

One of BoardSource's fundamental principles regarding board leadership and governance is that "context matters" — that boards should assess opportunities, strategies, and action plans *within the context* and ecosystems in which boards operate rather than approach their work as if they function "within a vacuum."

Context also matters as we consider the findings of our report entitled *Leading with Intent: Reviewing the State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on Nonprofit Boards*. The statistics and trends that we've noted in this report regarding the diversity, equity, and inclusion ("DEI") practices of nonprofit boards are informative — and they become even more illuminating (and evoke more questions) when we assess them within a greater context.

For example, the findings in this report indicate that:

1. **Boards may be getting slightly more diverse, but they are far from representing the communities they serve.** This finding prompts questions such as:
   - Who are the people who currently comprise boards?
   - What skills, expertise, cultural/ethnic backgrounds, and lived experiences do they bring?
   - How do all of these factors impact the way that board members view their roles, their perspectives on (and knowledge of) their communities, and how they make decisions and prioritize their work?
2. **Board recruitment practices are not aligned with diversity goals** — which leads us to ask, "What does this indicate about how boards view the importance of board diversity within the context of other traits, competencies, and areas of expertise for which boards recruit?"
3. **Boards that include people of color are more likely to have adopted DEI practices than boards that do not include people of color** — prompting us to ask, "Do boards that include people of color fundamentally view their work differently than boards that do not include people of color?"

Context also matters, of course, on a more "macro" level, and we must note that the data in this study were collected prior to at least three major societal events and phenomena that have impacted the way that we engage in the racial inequity conversation in this country:

- The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic and its disproportionate impact on communities of color
- The tragic murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor and other Black people at the hands of law enforcement
- The insurrection (led by white supremacists) that took place at the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021

Each of these incidents has shaken our country to its core, and forced us to be more intentional in centering racial equity in our conversations, strategies, and action plans to improve ourselves, our boards, our communities, and our society. Would our study have yielded different results if we were conducting the study now vs. prior to the three "society-altering" events we've noted? We do not know, but we believe it is fair to say that each of these incidents has caused nonprofit sector leaders to see the issue of racial inequity in a new light — because the context of the world around us has changed.

We hope that you find *Leading with Intent: Reviewing the State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on Nonprofit Boards* to be helpful and informative for your own racial equity journeys, as you seek to become more equity-focused individuals, boards, and organizations in the communities — and contexts — in which you live and serve.

Board Composition through a Diversity & Equity Lens

What We Found

Boards may be getting more diverse, but they are far from representing the communities they serve. While the study does not have a steady sample and therefore comparisons to past surveys are challenging, it is encouraging that the boards surveyed in 2019 included a higher percentage of people of color than in the most recent study (22% versus 16% in 2017). That said, only 38 percent of executives felt that their boards represented the communities they serve, and 66 percent of executives expressed dissatisfaction with their boards' racial and ethnic diversity. It is also noteworthy that only 29% of board chairs felt that their boards represented the communities they serve, and 45% of board chairs expressed dissatisfaction with the boards' racial and ethnic diversity.

There are additional interesting findings in this report related to age, gender, disability status, and sexual orientation on boards. We have highlighted these findings in the charts below, while choosing to focus more deeply on race as the primary focus of this report.

Race & Ethnicity	Chief Executive	Board Chair	Board Members
White/Caucasian/European	87%	83%	78%
Black/African American/African	5%	6%	10%
Hispanic/Latino/Latina/Latinx	3%	5%	5%
Asian/Asian American/Pacific Islander	2%	2%	4%
Multi-Racial/Multi-Ethnic (2 or more races or ethnicities)	3%	2%	1%
Native America/American Indian/Indigenous	<1%	<1%	1%
Other race/ethnicity	1%	1%	2%

Gender	Chief Executive	Board Chair	Board Members
Female	74%	53%	53%
Male	26%	47%	47%
Non-Binary	<1%	<1%	<1%

	Chief Executive	Board Chair	Board Members
Not Transgender (Cisgender)	99.3%	99.6%	99%
Transgender	1%	<1%	1%

Age	Chief Executive	Board Chair	Board Members
Under 35	4%	4%	9%
35 to 44	16%	20%	21%
45 to 54	31%	25%	26%
55 to 64	38%	28%	26%
65 or older	11%	23%	17%

Sexual Orientation	Chief Executive	Board Chair	Board members
Heterosexual or Straight	90%	94%	94%
Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual	9%	6%	6%
Other	1%	0.1%	0.1%

Disability Status	Chief Executive	Board Chair	Board members
Without disability	95%	97%	95%
With disability	5%	3%	5%

DEMOGRAPHIC ALIGNMENT WITH COMMUNITY SERVED

Does your board's composition represent the demographics of the population served by your organization?	Chief Executive	Board Chair
Yes (based on either demographic data we have collected or on estimates of demographics of the population we serve)	38%	29%
No, the composition doesn't reflect the demographics of the population served by our organization	62%	71%

RACIAL/ETHNIC DIVERSITY BY BOARDS WITHIN STUDY

All-White (0% POC)	127	19%
Majority White (1-39% POC)	414	63%
Racially Diverse (40-99% POC)	94	14%
All-POC (100% POC)	24[1]	4%

Takeaways for Further Consideration

It may seem surprising (and disappointing) that the sector's progress in becoming more diverse has been relatively minor, given the data indicating that most executives feel that the boards do not represent the communities and are dissatisfied with their boards' racial and ethnic diversity. Based on *Leading with Intent* data and broader insights from BoardSource's work in the nonprofit sector, we believe there are several factors that could be impacting these results, including the following:

▸ **Chief executives appear to be more dissatisfied than board chairs regarding their boards' lack of racial and ethnic diversity.** Depending on the organization, chief executives may have some input into board recruitment, but they do not control board decisions regarding who joins the board. Chief executives are more dissatisfied (by a margin of 66% vs. 45% for board chairs) with the lack of racial and ethnic diversity on their boards. Since board chairs express less dissatisfaction, then boards (particularly their Governance or Nominating Committees) may not be treating this issue with the level of urgency that would lead to more significant change. Chief executives, we would suggest, are closer to the day-to-day work of the organization and have a clearer perspective on how the lack of racial and ethnic diversity impairs the organization's decision-making, programming, fundraising, and overall impact. These factors may have led to the heightened degree of dissatisfaction with the board's racial and ethnic diversity expressed by the chief executives and the more moderate sense of dissatisfaction expressed by the board chairs.

▸ **All-white boards may struggle to change.** Of our sample, there were 127 respondents (19% of the sample) that reported that their boards are all white in their demographic makeup. Almost two-thirds of this group said that the board's racial and ethnic diversity is important for the board's overall ability to provide strategic leadership and governance to the organization as external ambassadors for its mission (66%) and within the boardroom (67%). But, despite these findings, it is troubling to note that even among this group of organizations, only 18% were placing a high priority on demographics in board recruitment.

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1 Because the sample size of this group is so small, this group is not broken out for individual analysis.

▶ **Some boards are reluctant to change well-established recruitment policies and practices.** Our *Leading with Intent* findings confirm what we often hear from boards with regard to board recruitment practices: boards typically identify potential new board members by asking themselves, "Who do already we know?" Based on *Leading with Intent*, the top two methods for identifying potential new board members are "board members' personal or professional networks" (96%) and "CEO/ED's personal or professional networks" (88%). By relying so much on these methods, boards that are predominantly white are more likely to identify board candidates that are very much like themselves – white individuals who are typically from similar socioeconomic backgrounds with similar lived experiences and perspectives. As long as boards continue to approach board recruitment with this mindset, the lack of diversity in nonprofit leadership is unlikely to change significantly.

▶ **Boards are willing to change but don't know where to find diverse candidates.** There is a commonly-held misconception among nonprofit leaders that there is a small pool of diverse candidates that are qualified to be board members. While not the focus of *Leading with Intent*'s research, we know that there is no shortage of qualified, diverse candidates – but boards often are not aware of where to find them or how to recruit them successfully. We recommend several tactical steps that could help boards connect with more diverse candidates (and candidates outside of their networks in general), such as:

   ◆ Posting diversity-focused board searches on sites that attract individuals with a passion for volunteering such as volunteermatch.org and boardmemberconnect.com and on sites that attract a broader range of potential board candidates such as LinkedIn or Indeed.com
   ◆ Connecting with local chapters of ethnically-focused professional and civic associations such as the National Black Chamber of Commerce, the Hispanic National Bar Association, and the National Black MBA Association
   ◆ Engaging staff members — particularly those who are involved in external outreach and may identify individuals from other organizations who exhibit the ethnic diversity, skills sets, areas of expertise and range of lived experiences that would enhance your board
   ◆ Engaging the full board — challenge every board member to be intentional in expanding their personal outreach and ambassadorship to diverse potential board candidates

Perceptions of the Importance of the Board's Racial & Ethnic Diversity

What We Found

Boards generally believe that the board's demographic composition matters. When asked how important the board's diversity was to a set of board and organizational factors, *Leading with Intent* found that the majority of chief executives said that their board's racial and ethnic diversity was "very important" to both its internal (within the boardroom) and external (in the community) leadership:

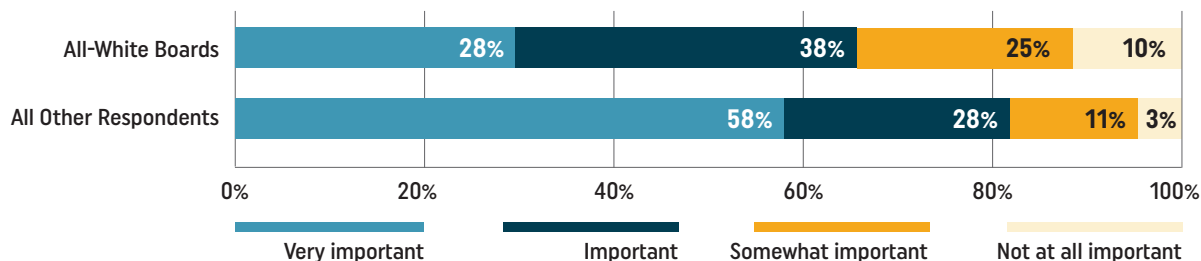| How important is the board's racial and ethnic diversity to...	Chief Executives				Board Chairs			
	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important	Very Important	Important	Somewhat Important	Not at all Important
Providing strategic leadership and governance to the organization as external ambassadors for its mission	52%	30%	14%	4%	44%	30%	19%	6%
Providing strategic leadership and governance to the organization within the boardroom	53%	29%	14%	4%	43%	33%	19%	5%

Additionally, chief executives and board chairs were asked to reflect on how the board's overall demographic diversity impacts the organization's work across a number of dimensions. The vast majority of chief executives and board chairs reported that the board's diversity (or lack thereof) has an impact, but this includes significant feedback about the ways in which that impact can be negative versus positive:

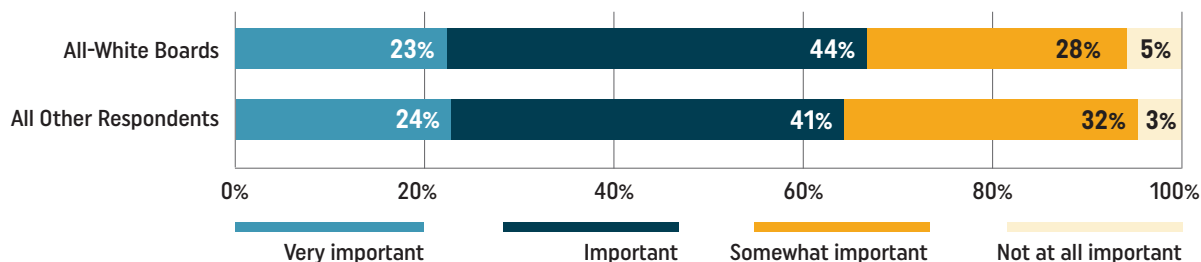| How does the board's current level of diversity impact the organization's ability to...	Chief Executives		Board Chairs	
	Positively	Negatively	Positively	Negatively
Expand donor networks	38%	39%	41%	33%
Enhance the organization's standing with funders and donors	41%	33%	52%	19%
Attract and retain top talent for the board	39%	33%	54%	22%
Cultivate trust and confidence with the community served	47%	30%	55%	24%
Enhance the organization's standing with the general public	45%	29%	53%	16%
Understand how best to serve the community	45%	29%	51%	38%
Understand the organization's current operating environment	44%	26%	48%	20%
Strengthen programs and services	39%	28%	53%	19%
Understand the organization's work	44%	23%	53%	14%
Plan effectively	43%	23%	48%	14%
Attract and retain top talent for the staff	23%	14%	40%	7%

There are variances in the way that boards that include leaders of color and all-white boards see the importance of racial and ethnic diversity. While they are generally aligned in responses about the importance within the board room, boards that include leaders of color are much more likely to signal that the board's racial and ethnic diversity is important in its external leadership role as it relates to internal and external board roles. The majority of boards that include leaders of color (58%) reported that the board's racial and ethnic diversity is "very important" to its external ambassadorship versus 28% of all-white boards.

Interestingly, both sets of respondents placed much lower importance on the board's diversity as it relates to the board's internal work within the boardroom.

IMPORTANCE OF RACIAL & ETHNIC DIVERSITY AS EXTERNAL BOARD AMBASSADORS

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
All-White Boards	28%	38%	25%	10%
All Other Respondents	58%	28%	11%	3%

IMPORTANCE OF RACIAL & ETHNIC DIVERSITY WITHIN THE BOARDROOM

	Very important	Important	Somewhat important	Not at all important
All-White Boards	23%	44%	28%	5%
All Other Respondents	24%	41%	32%	3%

Takeaways for Further Consideration

There are two noteworthy findings in the "Importance as External Ambassadors" and "Importance within the Boardroom" data that warrant deeper exploration. The first is that the boards that include leaders of color placed far greater emphasis on the importance of racial and ethnic diversity as it related to external ambassadorship than all-white board respondents reported. This finding may indicate that boards that have representation from people of color may have a greater appreciation of the importance of the board's connection to the community — and the message that the organization may be sending to the community if the board does not include people of color.

The second noteworthy finding is that both sets of boards indicate that the board's racial and ethnic diversity is much more important externally in their ambassadorial role versus internally in their in-boardroom leadership. We wonder about some of the underlying assumptions that may have led to these results, such as:

▶ Do boards fully recognize the importance of racial and ethnic diversity in their boardroom deliberations and decision-making? Do they understand the impact that a lack of racial and ethnic diversity could have on their decision-making and strategic role?
▶ Are boards primarily viewing racial and ethnic diversity as a necessity for the organization's reputation in the community, but seeing less value in racial and ethnic diversity as they relate to the various other roles and responsibilities of the board?
▶ Are boards aware of the fact that racial and ethnic diversity is important to *every* aspect of the board's roles and responsibilities?
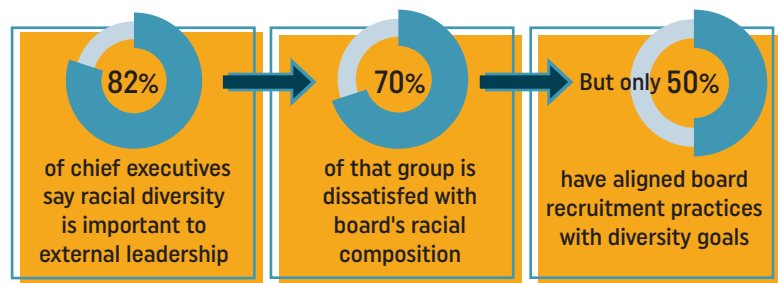
Diversity as a Lens for Board Recruitment

What We Found

Demographic diversity is a high priority in recruitment for a quarter of boards (26%); thirty percent of boards reported that it is "low" or "not a priority." This would seem to indicate that — without greater emphasis and focus — boards are unlikely to become significantly more diverse.

What importance does the board assign to demographic characteristics (e.g., race/ethnicity, gender, age, etc.) when recruiting board members?	
High priority	26%
Medium Priority	44%
Low priority	22%
Not a priority	8%

THE DISCONNECT BETWEEN ATTITUDES AND ACTIONS

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

This is further affirmed by the finding that — even within the subset of chief executives that report that racial and ethnic diversity is important to their board's external leadership and that they are dissatisfied with their board's current racial and ethnic diversity — only half have aligned their board recruitment practices with their diversity goals. The illustration above highlights this disconnect.

But it is not all bad news. There is evidence that those organizations that take the time to think through and formally identify what they consider to be the ideal mix of diversity, skills, and connections they need on the board, there is much higher likelihood that they are placing emphasis on demographics in board recruitment:
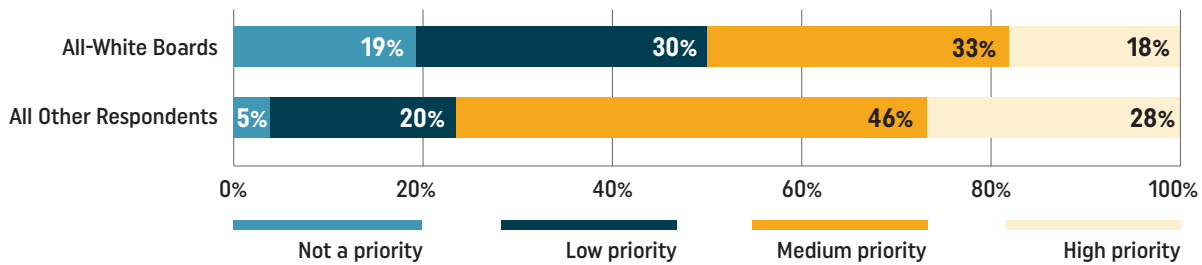
	Placed a high or medium priority on demographics in board recruitment	Placed a low or no priority on demographics in board recruitment
Organization has formally identified the desired mix…	81%	19%
Organization has not formally identified the desired mix…	57%	43%

It is also notable that organizations with more board leaders of color are more likely to have formally identified the desired mix of diversity, skills, and connections needed on the board and are much more likely to have prioritized demographics in board recruitment.

Has your organization formally identified the desired mix of diversity, skills, and connections you expect to be represented on your board (i.e., desired board composition)? AND What is the board's level of racial and ethnic diversity?	40-99%[2] POC	1-39% POC	All-white
Organization has formally identified the desired mix…	65%	60%	53%
Organization has not formally identified the desired mix…	35%	40%	47%

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2 There were 24 organizations who had boards comprised entirely of people of color, but this sample was too small to include as its own category.

WHAT IMPORTANCE DOES THE BOARD ASSIGN TO DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS (E.G., RACE/ETHNICITY, GENDER, AGE, ETC.) WHEN RECRUITING BOARD MEMBERS?

	Not a priority	Low priority	Medium priority	High priority
All-White Boards	19%	30%	33%	18%
All Other Respondents	5%	20%	46%	28%

Takeaways for Further Consideration

We believe that the key issue here is *intentionality* — our findings indicate that the more diverse the board, the greater the likelihood that the board has been intentional about identifying the desired board composition. We recommend that boards exhibit their intentionality in three primary ways:

▸ Identification of the desired board composition
▸ Implementation of a plan to reach the desired competition
▸ Monitoring of progress toward the board composition goals set by the board

Given that our findings indicate that only 26% of boards place a high priority on demographics in their recruitment processes, it appears that boards are doing a better job on "identification" than on "implementation" or "monitoring of progress" — an outcome which again underscores the gap between "attitudes" and "actions" on racial equity.

Board Chair & Chief Executive Perspectives on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Practices

What We Found

In assessing our findings regarding the board levels of engagement in DEI work, there are a few noteworthy observations. First, it is apparent that high percentages of executives and board chairs agree that their boards have (to "some or a great extent") engaged in the introductory aspects of DEI work, such as:

▶ Committing to understanding the diversity of the communities their organizations serve
▶ Discussing community needs in a way that acknowledges any disparities between different demographic groups among the people it serves

However, both executives and board chairs report significantly lower levels of engagement in areas that go beyond the initial phases of understanding and apply more directly to the organization's mission, work, and communities they serve, such as:

▶ Committing to raising its awareness and understanding of the relevance of racial inequity to the organization's mission
▶ Discussing the organization's programmatic outcomes in a way that would surface meaningful variances based on demographics
▶ Committing to addressing any gaps in organizational outcomes based on demographic categories

Q. To what extent do board members do the following?		CEO	Chair
The Board has committed to understanding the diversity of the community the organization serves	Not at all or only to a small extent	33%	21%
	To some or a great extent	67%	79%
The Board has discussed community needs in a way that acknowledges any disparities between different demographic groups among the people it serves	Not at all or only to a small extent	38%	31%
	To some or a great extent	63%	69%
The Board has committed to raising its awareness and understanding of the relevance of racial inequity to the organization's mission	Not at all or only to a small extent	56%	52%
	To some or a great extent	44%	48%
The Board has discussed the organization's programmatic results and outcomes in a way that would surface meaningful variances based on demographics	Not at all or only to a small extent	56%	45%
	To some or a great extent	44%	55%
The Board has committed to addressing any gaps in organizational outcomes based on demographic categories	Not at all or only to a small extent	56%	50%
	To some or a great extent	44%	50%

Takeaways for Further Consideration

These findings have prompted us to reflect on what factors may be influencing these outcomes from the study, particularly these two possible considerations:

▶ **The data may reflect that many of these boards are in an earlier stage of their journeys to become more diverse.** Actions such as "committing to understanding the diversity of the communities they serve" and "discussing community needs while acknowledging existing disparities between different demographic groups served by the organization" represent relatively early steps in a board's racial equity commitment. It is reasonable to expect that a higher percentage of boards have taken these steps, as noted in our findings, but it also somewhat concerning, as it may indicate that boards feel a lack of urgency with regard to continuing to make progress on their DEI work.

▶ **The data may be illustrative of what boards view as being included in their roles vs. what boards view as being outside of their roles.** BoardSource believes that there is a clear connection between the board's composition, how it sees its role, and how it makes decisions. Boards that are all white or include few people of color may interpret their roles in ways that de-emphasize a focus on DEI work — a mindset that is problematic. Given our findings that the board composition in the sector generally is not representative of the communities being served, it is not surprising that aspects of DEI work that pertain to connecting this work to the mission and programmatic and organizational impacts do not show up as areas of strong board engagement. Many of the executives and board chairs surveyed may represent boards that: are relatively disconnected from the communities they serve; may feel that fundraising is their primary purpose; have little understanding of the ecosystems in which their organization is operating. Regardless of which of these factors may be impacting our findings, it is clear that there is a significant opportunity to re-emphasize to boards the importance of their attention to these aspects of their work as they increase their focus on DEI.

Board Composition and DEI Practices

Leading with Intent took a close look at variances and distinctions between boards that include leaders of color and boards that are all white, seeking to understand how board composition may impact a board's practices related to diversity, equity, and inclusion.

What We Found
Boards that include people of color have shown a higher likelihood than all white boards to:

▸ Discuss the organization's programmatic results and outcomes in a way that would surface meaningful variances based on demographics
▸ Commit to raising its awareness and understanding of the relevance of racial inequity to the organization's mission
▸ Discuss community needs in a way that acknowledges any disparities between different demographic groups among the people it serves
▸ Commit to understanding the diversity of the community the organization serves
▸ Commit to addressing any gaps in organizational outcomes based on demographic categories

DEI Practice	% adoption by boards that include leaders of color[3]	% adoption by all-white boards	Variance
The board has committed to understanding the diversity of the community the organization serves	69%	59%	10%
The board has committed to addressing any gaps in organizational outcomes based on demographic categories	78%	50%	28%
The board has discussed community needs in a way that acknowledges any disparities between different demographic groups among the people it serves	65%	57%	8%
The board has discussed the organization's programmatic results and outcomes in a way that would surface meaningful variances based on demographics	46%	38%	8%
The board has committed to raising its awareness and understanding of the relevance of racial inequity to the organization's mission	47%	30%	17%

Takeaways for Further Consideration

We would note two interesting takeaways from our findings:

▸ All-white boards do engage in all of the activities listed — but they engage in all of these activities at a lower rate than boards that include people of color.
▸ We found the largest variances between POC boards and all-white boards regarding adoption of DEI variances in two of the areas that require the deepest levels of commitment to DEI work:

  ◆ Commitment to addressing any gaps in organizational outcomes based on demographic categories (28% variance — 78% POC, 50% all-white)
  ◆ Commitment to raising its awareness and understanding of the relevance of racial inequity to the organization's mission (17% variance — 47% POC, 30% all-white)

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3 "Adoption" is defined as boards that reported that they had done this to "great" or "some" extent. Not included are those that said "small extent" or "none at all."

These findings prompt us to reflect on several questions related to this outcome, such as:

▸ Do all-white boards fundamentally see their work differently than boards that include people of color? Are these findings indicative of a "disconnect" between all-white boards and the diverse communities they serve?
▸ Are all-white boards more reluctant to engage on racial inequity, given that these boards lack people of color who would help guide and execute this work?
▸ Are all-white boards less convinced that by becoming more diverse, the board will actually become more effective in fulfilling its mission, executing its programs, and impacting the communities it serves?
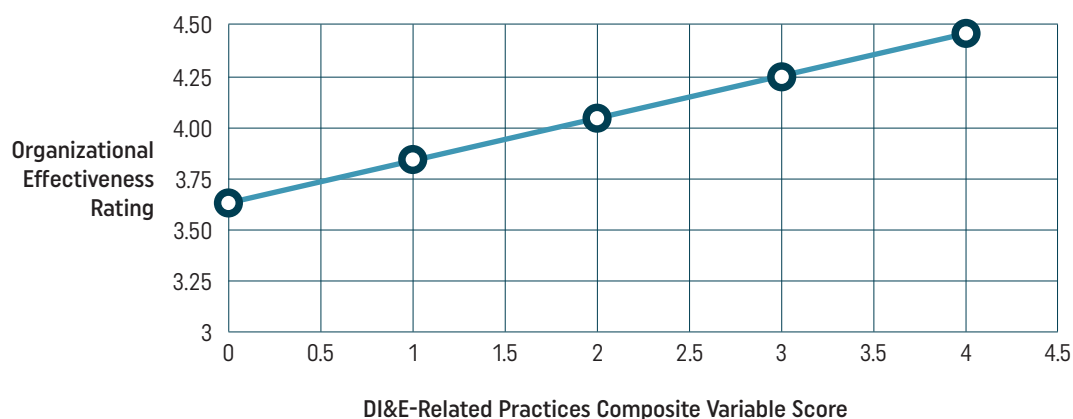
The Impact of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Practices on Organizational Effectiveness

What We Found

There may be a relationship between organizational effectiveness and boards that are investing in DEI practices. Executives who self-reported a high degree of organizational effectiveness also reported having a board that engaged in a greater number of DEI specific actions, such as:

▸ discussing the organization's programmatic results and outcomes in a way that would surface meaningful variances based on demographics;
▸ committing to addressing any gaps in organizational outcomes based on demographic categories;
▸ aligning recruitment practices with diversity goals and priorities;
▸ demonstrating a commitment to being inclusive in board leadership; and
▸ creating a culture that supports open, robust discussions and ensures all voices are heard.

In analyzing this data, we created a composite variable that looked at the number of DEI-related activities and practices within an organization. For every increase in this composite variable (meaning that executives reported more activities/practices), executives reported a 6% increase in their organization's effectiveness.

DI&E-Related Practices Composite Variable Score

Takeaways for Consideration

The data cannot prove causation or directionality between these variables. It is impossible to determine if organizations that have more DEI-related practices become more effective or if organizations that are more effective are more likely to adopt DEI-related activities. The data do, however, document a relationship between these dynamics and an increased likelihood that if one is true the other is also true, which we believe is noteworthy.

Opportunities for Reflection

Leading with Intent: Reviewing the State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on Nonprofit Boards highlights many opportunities for board reflection. As you consider how these opportunities relate to your board's composition, prioritization and decision-making, and its perspectives on its role, BoardSource offers the following suggestions for board reflection and consideration.

Reflect on the importance of board diversity to your board's work and its values.

Make it an ongoing priority for your board to acknowledge how diversity will enhance its connection to the community, its programs, and its impact. We recommend initiating board conversations on the questions below:

▸ Have we considered how a lack of diversity could be creating gaps in our awareness and understanding of important issues? Have we compared the current composition of our board in terms of the skills, expertise, cultural/ethnic demographics, and lived experiences to the optimal composition we would like to achieve so that we include a wider range of perspectives? Does our board's composition signal a sincere commitment to understanding and sharing power with the communities we seek to serve? What do we understand about why it matters that we become more diverse? How will it impact the way that we lead our organization?

▸ If our board is lacking in racial and ethnic diversity, how is that impacting us? What do we lose by not being diverse? What signals are we sending about who we are and what is important to us?

Recruit for board diversity in a strategic and respectful way.

▸ Are we cultivating and recruiting candidates with diverse backgrounds and experiences? Are we expanding the board candidate search beyond our customary board recruitment networks (i.e., expanding our networks by posting diversity-focused job searches on websites such as indeed.com or LinkedIn, or reaching out to local chapters of national ethnic professional or civic associations such as The National Black MBA Association, The Hispanic National Bar Association or The National Black Chamber of Commerce)?

▸ When we identify a potential board candidate of color, do we have a clear understanding of all of the ways that they would be able to add value to the board's work, in addition to their lived experience as a person of color (i.e., their skills, areas of expertise, networks, etc.)? Are we clearly and specifically naming the various ways that the candidate would add value and help the board fulfill its mission?

Commit to building an inclusive and welcoming board culture.

▸ Are we positioning new board members to have a positive, long-term experience with the board; are we welcoming new members to the board and meaningfully engaging them in the work through participation on committees and/or task forces? Are we assigning a mentor or "buddy" for them to contact with questions and/or ideas that they may initially feel more comfortable sharing one-on-one than in the context of the full board?

▸ Are we examining our long-standing practices regarding board social gatherings to make sure that they are inclusive to board members of color? If they are not inclusive, are we willing to make the necessary changes to make them welcoming to all board members?

▸ Are we being intentional about inviting new board members of color to share their perspectives and opinions — opening the door to different ideas and conversations in the boardroom?

▸ Are we acknowledging the value of the perspectives of new board members of color by leveraging their input to develop enhanced strategies and action plans that advance our mission by more directly addressing the needs of those we serve?

▸ Are we dedicating time for reflection on how our strategies and action plans have been impacted by the addition of more diverse voices and viewpoints? Are we reflecting on how we as a board have, perhaps, been fundamentally changed — changed in ways that will help us better identify the work that needs to be done and the most impactful approaches to doing it as we go forward?

Consider the level of depth of your DEI practices and assess how you can go deeper.
▸ Are we going beyond the early stages in our DEI work? Are we recognizing the full breadth of DEI work for which we are responsible?
▸ If we are still in the early stages of our DEI work, have we identified why we haven't progressed further?
▸ If we have not yet reached the deeper stages of our DEI work, do we recognize how this may negatively impact our ability to execute several key responsibilities, including:

  ◆ Understanding the organization's operative environment and work
  ◆ Attracting and retaining talent for both the board and staff
  ◆ Enhancing the organization's standing with funders, donors, and the general public
  ◆ Understanding how best to serve the community
  ◆ Cultivating trust and confidence with the community served

▸ Given that there is a possible relationship between the adoption of DEI and organizational effectiveness, are we recognizing that we may not be able to reach our optimal level of impact until we prioritize our DEI work?

Dedicate time for continuous learning.
The board's commitment to racial equity requires board members to operate in a mode of continuous learning. Board members should leverage opportunities to leverage tools and resources for their individual and collective racial equity journeys, and they (particularly white board members) should resist the temptation to avoid the "discomfort" that often accompanies a serious exploration of how systemic racism has been (and continues to be) present in our society. In the effort to engage in continuous learning, we ask boards to consider the following:

▸ Are you willing to participate in racial equity training and prioritize other opportunities to listen, read, learn, and share?
▸ Are you willing to accept the possibility of being "uncomfortable" as you increase your knowledge and awareness of the qualitative and quantitative data that captures the extent of this country's (and perhaps your locality's) history of racial inequity?
▸ Will you initiate meaningful conversations with fellow board members and others in your network about what you've heard, read, and learned, and invite them to share their perspectives, too?
▸ Will you work to ensure that your board will not intentionally avoid race equity issues in its conversations and will center racial equity in its work?

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