



SEEKING A DIVERSE BOARD

Many nonprofits recognize that the communities they serve are much more diverse than their boards. This has heightened an awareness of the need for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) at the board level. This is essential since DEI work leads to inviting historically excluded individuals to the table, and as a result more equitable outcomes from the services the nonprofit provides. But the question continues to be, “How do we accomplish that DEI work?” While [Social Venture Partners Boulder County](#) (SVP) is just at the beginning of this journey, we want to share what we’ve learned so far with other organizations like us who are working toward the goal of diversity, equity, and inclusion.

We also want to make clear that these efforts work most effectively when carried out in tandem with DEI and anti-racism training within your organization for both Board and Staff. Without this internal reflection on your organization’s culture and the inherent power and privilege that exists there it will be challenging to welcome new people who are from different backgrounds.

The SVP Board Development Resource Team encourages being creative about ways to reach underrepresented communities, while we acknowledge that outreach to existing networks continues to be an excellent way to attract new board members. One way to expand your organization’s network is to partner with other nonprofits serving or led by underrepresented communities. Building these relationships may encourage interest to join your board.

To that end, the SVP Board Development Resource Team has compiled a list of organizations in Boulder County serving underrepresented populations that may help some nonprofits seek out partnerships in programs, consultations, or other activities. These partnerships are not just about finding board members, but also about creating relationships with organizations. Partnerships may be as robust as joint programming, or as simple as attending each other’s events. Note that the list is NOT comprehensive and will be amended as new information is received from SVP partners, organizations serving diverse populations, or other sources.

In developing this list, the SVP Board Development Resource Team sought out organizations that were led by or served diverse communities. These included organizations serving a variety of ages, ethnicities, abilities, genders, and sexual orientations.

Please note that board diversity efforts should focus on encouraging the board to represent the population the organization serves, and by including people with lived experience in the area of service that the nonprofit provides. In addition, consideration should be given to recruiting multiple board members from diverse communities at once to broaden perspectives and avoid tokenism.

But there is more to diversity efforts than just finding people from diverse backgrounds or other underrepresented populations to serve on a board. It centers on building an inclusive board culture. Improving board culture doesn’t often happen by itself. It requires intentionality and vigilance, along with an audit of current practices and policies, to keep the improvement going.



Having an inclusive board culture is important for many reasons:

- It improves the intercultural functioning and efficiency of the board in everything it does
- It helps to engage new board members.
- Through that engagement, it enriches the quality of discussions, leading to better decision-making, learning, and connections. It reduces board turnover by making the experience of volunteer board members more meaningful and personally fulfilling

What does an “inclusive board culture” mean? It encompasses several important aspects of board functioning. Some of those are:

- Encourage and welcome diverse opinions. Every voice on the board is important and should be heard. All people should feel welcomed and valued.
- Accept disagreement and take it with mutual respect.
- Conflicts between board members should be resolved directly and not be allowed to fester.
- Recognize that “great is the enemy of good.” Actively engage, be prepared to ask clarifying questions in an effort to move forward and look for ways to make progress toward the goal.
- Welcome, value and seek diversity proactively.
- Integrate cultural knowledge within individuals and board.
- Be aware of bias within society and within the organization.
- Recognize dynamics of power (sexism, racism, heterosexism, ageism, classism).
- Understand the impact of systemic inequities in society and the individuals served by their organizations.
- Openly engage in conversations of race and differences.
- Acknowledge the value of members of color perspectives and leverage their input to develop enhanced strategies.

Other considerations in trying to develop an inclusive and diverse board include:

- Building a “board matrix” to identify skills and perspectives needed on the board, now and in the future.
- Aligning board diversity with the mission, which will include having the right skills in addition to a diversity of opinions included on the board.
- Devote significant funds to DEI education for the Board and Staff. This budget line item is not only necessary to bring on experts to help with that training but show the intention of the organization to learn and grow.
- The board composition should reflect the stakeholders in the organization. Depending on the services offered by the nonprofit, diversity of gender identity, ableism, age (particularly the elderly, youth, and even early childhood), or other characteristics in addition to race and cultural background may be critically important and should be considered.
- Discussing how the board thinks that increasing diversity will improve organizational outcomes. For DEI work to be effective, it must be intentional. And by recognizing its value up front, the benefits of DEI will be more fully realized.



- Broadening the scope of the board's thinking to address not just obvious inequities experienced by those the nonprofit serves, but also the implicit inequities that have been entrenched in society and have affected the clients of the organization.
- Realizing that the job of creating an inclusive board takes time. Between working on board culture, preparing the board to appreciate diversity of thought as well as diversity of its members, welcoming new members onto the board, and integrating them into the work of the board, a lot of difficult work is involved. This work can't be rushed; it will be most effective if it is internalized by each board member and the entire organization.

If the board is prepared to embrace the work it takes for DEI work to be effective, partnering with diverse organizations can provide a pathway to increasing board diversity. If your organization is interested in networking with other local nonprofits that serve underrepresented populations and to see if there is a pathway to partnership that will enhance your board and our entire community, please contact SVP Boulder County at staff@svpbouldercounty.org or 303.840.0165.