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Diversity on Nonprofit Boards

Having diverse perspectives on your nonprofit's board of directors is critically important. **Each person will bring their own personal and professional contacts and life experiences to their service on a nonprofit board.** With a diversity of experience, expertise, and perspectives, a nonprofit is in a stronger position to advance equity, plan for the future, make prudent decisions, and take full advantage of opportunities.

A diverse board that is also sensitive to cultural differences is usually one that has a stronger capacity to attract and retain talented board members - as well as to be in touch with community needs.

The power of diversity

- **Better decision-making:** When a nonprofit board is facing a major decision, diverse perspectives on the board are better qualified to identify the full range of opportunities and risks.
- **Better connections:** When a nonprofit's board reflects the diversity of the community served, the organization will be better able to access resources in the community through connections with collaborative partners, policy makers, and often, potential donors.

- **Better discernment:** A diverse board will improve the nonprofit's ability to respond to external influences that are changing the environment for those served and in which it is working.
- **Better networks:** Boards that are not diverse risk becoming stagnant: if all the board members travel in the same social circle, cultivating board members who bring new perspectives and strengths will be a constant challenge.
- **Better support for the CEO:** If the nonprofit's ED/CEO is a person of color, a diverse board can be important to the ED/CEO feeling that their board trusts them, as Sean Thomas-Breitfeld reports in [an article based on the Race to Lead initiative](#)
- **Better insight:** Perhaps most importantly, diverse boards bring understanding of the lived experiences of the people your nonprofits serves, as well as others in the community.

Practice Pointers

- Cultivate new board members who can expand the board's collective cultural awareness. Look for candidates with a variety of professional expertise, cultural backgrounds, and spectrum of life experiences, who can help the nonprofit respond to future needs. Consider diversity of ability, age, ethnicity, gender identity, geography, immigration background, race, religion, sexual orientation, and socioeconomic status.
- What are your current board's strengths and where could it be strengthened? Conduct a [self-assessment](#) of your board to find out. Michigan Nonprofit Association offers a special [self-assessment focused on diversity, inclusion, and equity](#).
- Spark candid conversations about diversity, and other important issues with BoardSource's [Five Questions to Get You Started](#), which can help with discussions around racial and ethnic diversity.
- What should the board look like in the future? Consider where the organization is going and what skills, experiences, contacts, and professional/personal backgrounds will be most helpful to the organization in the near term - but also in the future.
- What is the board's current culture? Is it welcoming to individuals of diverse backgrounds? When you invite someone to join the board, how are you helping them feel comfortable and become engaged with the mission, their role, and

their colleagues on the board? Cultural sensitivity helps make new board members immediately feel valued - and ups the chances that they will remain engaged.

- Think about what a new board member's impression of your organization will be. Onboarding board members with a thoughtful [orientation](#) can help manage expectations and presents an opportunity to introduce veteran board members to the newcomers, as well as establish mentoring relationships that can help knit together a diverse group.

More About Diversity in Nonprofits

- [10 Steps to a More Diverse Board](#)
- [Why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Matter for Nonprofits](#)

Additional Resources

- [Resources for building a diverse and inclusive board](#) (BoardSource)
- [Leading with Intent: Reviewing the State of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion on Nonprofit Boards](#) (BoardSource)
- [Leading with Intent](#) (BoardSource)
- [Can minors serve on a nonprofit board?](#) (Nonprofit Law Blog)
- [Practical strategies for diversifying your board](#) (webinar - Nonprofit Quarterly/BoardSource)

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