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Why Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Matter for Nonprofits

The National Council of Nonprofits stands with others for equity and justice and in denouncing racism, intolerance, and exclusion. Yet taking a stand is not enough. We, along with many other charitable nonprofits, have been on a path of exploration to identify how to [build the core values of diversity, equity, and inclusion into all our nonprofit's operations](#), as well as model those values as we advance our mission.

We believe that embracing these organizational values is a way to intentionally make space for positive outcomes to flourish, whether in direct services or in the nonprofit capacity-building or public policy spheres. We urge each nonprofit to examine and articulate its own values and be guided by them. How will our nonprofits apply those values in their daily operations?

The National Council of Nonprofits is asking these questions and will continue to highlight resources such as those below that nonprofits can use to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in their work, in their employment practices, in their board rooms, and in their communications.

We started – and continue – with honest internal dialogue that encourages our staff and board members to reflect, listen to each other, and learn from one another's experiences. We're also engaged in a multi-year dialogue with state networks of

nonprofits to explore how our members can best advance this work throughout the sector. We have learned from other nonprofits how they are incorporating these values while advancing their missions, and we're eager to share.

For some organizations, simply doing what is right may be enough to spur action. Others may be moved by data showing that diversity can boost the quality of [decision-making](#) and that a diverse workforce is [smarter and higher-performing](#) and fosters [enhanced innovation](#). And when board members, employees, donors, and others who shape the values and activities of a nonprofit come from a wide array of backgrounds, they bring unique perspectives that influence how the nonprofit approaches its mission in more inclusive and innovative ways.

At the National Council of Nonprofits, we have been on an intentional journey to assess how our organization can champion diversity, equity, and inclusion as values for our sector. On this page, we've curated resources that we have found helpful in this work for ourselves as individuals, for our organization, and for our network.

We hope the following practice pointers, questions to consider, and resources will offer inspiration and guidance about how to embrace diversity, equity, and inclusion as fundamental values – and how to integrate these values throughout the operations and activities of your nonprofit.

Practice Pointers

- Many organizations find that it's helpful to begin with an exploration of terms and definitions. This can help spark deep conversations about how we individually interpret and experience discrimination of whatever nature. This [Social Justice Glossary](#) from the YWCA offers a common vocabulary for difficult conversations.
- Understanding your own and your team's implicit/[unconscious biases](#) is key to opening doors to equity. [Project Implicit](#) offers a tool to test your implicit associations about race, gender, sexual orientation, and other identities.
- As one starting point, you may find Americans for the Arts' [Statement of Cultural Equity](#) to be of interest. Remember, though, that values written on a page are only a start: they must be woven throughout programs and policies and demonstrated by your organization's actions.

- There are many skilled practitioners and consultants in the sector that can assist your nonprofit in navigating the internal work to create more awareness about and take action on diversity, inclusion, and equity. See below under “Resources” and “Practitioners” to find help, some low- or no-cost and some paid.
- Diversity without inclusion doesn't necessarily advance equity. See [Equity in the Center President Kerrien Suarez's February 2023 post](#) for a thoughtful discussion of shifting from "transactional" DEI work to "transformational" race equity work.

Questions to Consider when Creating a DE&I Action Plan for Your Nonprofit

- How transparent does your organization wish to be about the steps it is taking to become more diverse and encourage inclusive practices? How does your organization communicate its values to the public, to paid staff, and to volunteers?
- Are organizational values published on the nonprofit's website or otherwise shared publicly? Does it make sense for your DE&I commitments to be inward-facing, outward-facing, or a combination of both?
- Do community, grassroots, or young leaders in low-income, under-served and/or marginalized populations within your nonprofit's community have a voice in your organization? Do they have authentic influence?
- How can your nonprofit open its board recruitment and staff hiring pipeline to talented candidates from among underrepresented groups?
- Is your organization's commitment to diversity, inclusion, and equity part of the orientation message for new board members and incorporated into onboarding new teammates and volunteers?
- Does your organization expect its collaborative and community partners to uphold its own values?
- How will your nonprofit assess the progress you are making towards your goals of diversity, inclusion, and equity? What will success look and feel like?

Resources for Your Nonprofit's Learning Journey

- [Awake to Woke to Work](#), from Equity in the Center, includes a glossary, a comprehensive list of resources, and a framework for how to look at the levers that influence and support a nonprofit's race equity culture.
- The [Race to Lead](#) report series explores the results of surveys conducted in 2016, 2019, and soon 2022, and challenges the way the nonprofit sector has been approaching the racial leadership gap. Other reports in the series address LGBTQ nonprofit staff and women of color in the nonprofit sector.
- Nonprofits with limited resources may want to check out USC's [Diversity Toolkit: A Guide to Discussing Identity, Power and Privilege](#) with ideas for "DIY" facilitation that can stimulate conversation and learning. See also [How to Begin Equity Work in Your Organization with Little or No Money](#) from the North Carolina Center for Nonprofits and [Embracing Equity: Race Equity and Inclusion Action Guide](#) from the Annie E. Casey Foundation.
- The Michigan Nonprofit Association offers an affordable [Diversity, Inclusion & Equity Assessment Tool](#) designed to help nonprofit organizations assess their current status and future progress on the journey to put these values into practice. (Level 1 Individual Assessment is free to MNA members.)
- [RespectAbility](#) offers a series of free resources for creating an inclusive culture for people with disabilities, from recruiting, accommodating, and promoting employees with disabilities to ensuring that events are accessible and language is welcoming.
- [Racial equity tools](#) is a library of resources designed to support individuals and groups working to achieve racial equity.
- After Americans for the Arts created its new Statement on Cultural Equity in 2016, the organization shared its process so that others could learn from its example: [10 Steps We Took to Create The Americans for the Arts Statement on Cultural Equity](#).
- Learn about Trabian Shorters' work on Asset-Framing in this [series of videos from the Skillman Foundation](#), or read Trabian's article ['You Can't Lift People Up by Putting Them Down': How to Talk About Tough Issues of Race, Poverty, and More](#) in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* (paywall).

Resources for Nonprofit Boards and Employers: Building Values into Actions

- It's becoming standard to disclose salary ranges in job postings, a practice that [helps to promote equitable hiring practices](#) (Nonprofit AF), especially for women and people of color. Our article [Can New Laws and Practices Address Pay Disparities?](#) from February 2022 rounds up recent data and legislation supporting salary transparency.
- The article [Black Women in Nonprofits Matter](#) by Dr. Danielle Moss Lee in *Nonprofit Quarterly* offers pointers for hiring and elevating Black women to leadership positions.
- To correct for systemic inequities in the sector and beyond, many nonprofits seek to hire or promote leaders of color. Yet, nonprofits often do not have the expertise or supports in place to make these transitions successful. The Building Movement Project's (BMP) report [Trading Glass Ceilings for Glass Cliffs: A Race to Lead Report on Nonprofit Executives of Color](#) focuses on the experiences and challenges of nonprofit leaders of color who have attained the top position in their organizations. An additional BMP report, [Making \(Or Taking\) Space: Initial Themes on Nonprofit Transitions from White to BIPOC Leaders](#), asks, "What is the responsibility of organizations with white leaders transitioning out of these roles to support incoming leaders of color?" Make sure you are familiar with BMP's research and recommendations before conducting a search, hiring, or onboarding a leader of color.
- Nonprofit HR conducts a regular survey of nonprofits regarding their diversity, equity, inclusion, and justice practices. Read the [2022 Nonprofit Diversity, Equity, Inclusion & Justice Survey Results](#) to gain insights, benchmarking data, and links to additional resources.
- Conventional nonprofit capacity-building has often been designed by white consultants for white-led, mainstream nonprofits. [Transformational Capacity Building](#) shares seven practices needed to "support the growth, self-determination, and resiliency of nonprofits of color by creating the conditions for organizations and the communities they serve to thrive." (Stanford Social Innovation Review, Fall 2020)
- In their article [A Turning Point](#), Eden Stiffman and Jim Rendon explored how some nonprofits were finding equitable and inclusive ways to navigate shrinking resources in the age of coronavirus and the George Floyd protests. Their insights can be applied to nonprofits in any situation (*Chronicle of Philanthropy*, no paywall).

- Also precipitated by the COVID-19 crisis but applicable to any time of constrained resources, the webinar [Personnel Strategies in the Face of Impossible Choices](#) (with Curt Klotz) considered how nonprofits can develop financially effective and equitable personnel strategies that uphold their values during an economic crisis. Curt's blog post [Building Equity into Nonprofit Finance](#) explores how values are evident in financial statements.
- Michele Berger of NEO Law Group identifies ways to embed aspirational ideas into the organization's Bylaws and other institutional structures: [Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Nonprofit Bylaws](#) (Nonprofit Law Blog).
- [Equity & Inclusion Lens Guide](#) (Nonprofit Association of Oregon)

Practitioners with Whom We Have Worked Directly (and from Whom We Have Learned Much)

- Led by [Dr. Atyia Martin](#), All Aces, Inc. created the [Diversity, Inclusion, and Equity Transformation \(DIET\) Framework](#) for Racial Justice in the Workplace and Beyond as an alternative to traditional DEI/D&I consulting.
- Learn more about Asset-Framing (mentioned above) by engaging Trabian Shorters, CEO/Founder of [BMe Community](#), for an [interactive executive master class](#).
- Building Movement Project's special [Race to Lead](#) initiative conducts research that both documents and shares insights regarding the nonprofit sector's gap in racial leadership.
- Gracie Johnson-Lopez and her colleagues at [Diversity HR Solutions](#) help teams build cultural competence.
- [Equity in the Center](#) helps organizations adopt a Race Equity Culture through convenings, tools and resources that increase the capacity of leaders to serve as change agents to drive race equity within their organizations.
- The Interaction Institute for Social Change offers [webinars and in-person trainings](#) on advancing racial justice in organizations, facilitative leadership, and related topics.

Additional Resources on Diversity for Boards of Directors

- [Diversity on nonprofit boards](#) (National Council of Nonprofits)

- [Beyond Political Correctness: Building a Diverse and Inclusive Board](#) (BoardSource)
- [Beyond the Board Statement: How Can Boards Join the Movement for Racial Justice?](#) (free 2-part webinar, *Nonprofit Quarterly*)

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