

What about the Next Generation of Leaders of Color?

Advancing Multicultural Leadership in the Nonprofit Sector

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The fact that the nonprofit sector has not kept pace with the rapidly shifting population of our nation has been the subject of many recent reports and articles. But what is often missing is a discussion about why, ultimately, it matters and what we can do about it.

The latest U.S. census data reports that the nation’s racial minority population has reached 100.7 million – this represents one third of U.S. residents. And by all predictions, the racial and ethnic diversity of the country – and its workforce – will continue to increase so that by the year 2010 nearly half of the total workforce will be classified as what traditionally have been known as “minorities.”ⁱ This same level of diversity is not, however, reflected in the staff and boards of directors working and volunteering in U.S. nonprofits. The nonprofit sector is approximately 81 percent white overallⁱⁱ as are the executive directors who are leading these organizations.ⁱⁱⁱ Our nation’s boards are even less diverse: 86 percent of board members are white and 51 percent of boards are composed entirely of white members.^{iv}

There does, however, appear to be more racial diversity within other staff positions in nonprofits. In CompassPoint’s *Ready to Lead? Next Generation Leaders Speak Out*, a national study of nearly 6,000 next generation leaders, 28 percent of respondents were people of color. This is somewhat tempered however by the fact that among *senior managers and directors* – those who report directly to the executive director – there was less racial diversity than the whole sample. This suggests that in most nonprofits, as you look higher up the organizational chart, you will generally find increasingly fewer people of color.

What factors might be contributing to this?^v

There is evidence to suggest that people of color often face a disproportionate number of barriers to nonprofit leadership positions than whites. One area of particular concern from our study was that people of color more often than whites experience disadvantages in the realm of job advancement and promotional opportunities. Specifically, next generation leaders of color are more likely than whites to feel the need to leave their organizations in order to advance their careers, they are more likely to leave the nonprofit sector for their next job, and they feel a greater need to prepare for executive level positions.

<i>Ready to Lead? National Survey Findings: Responses of People of Color (POC) and Whites (W)</i>		
	POC	W
Percent of whole sample in senior manager/director positions	28%	33%
Committed to staying in nonprofit sector for next job	45%	55%
To continue to develop professionally, feel need to leave current organization	60%	53%
To continue to develop professionally, feel need to get an advanced degree	46%	36%
To become an ED, need to further develop technical /management skills	52%	42%
To become an ED, need to further develop leadership capabilities	36%	31%
To become an ED, need to further develop external connections/networks	48%	43%
To become an ED, need to further develop ability to lead/supervise/manage staff	33%	28%

What does it matter?

We have high moral and ethical expectations of nonprofits. After all, these organizations are at the epicenter of civil society, the place where so many of our nation's social justice movements began, were nurtured and continue to be sustained. The idea that nonprofit employers are lagging in terms of equality and inclusivity is unacceptable to most of us who care deeply about social change organizations and what they stand for.

There is another equally compelling reason beyond principle that needs to be considered. *If nonprofits fail to include a diversity of perspectives, might they be undermining their mission impact?* To effectively assess social needs, design relevant and culturally appropriate programs and services, and implement those interventions requires the full inclusion of people who have similar experiences and an authentic understanding of the populations they aim to serve.

Despite the barriers and sector shortcomings outlined above, there were also promising findings in the *Ready to Lead?* study. Next generation leaders of color spoke passionately about their work and wanting to make a difference in their communities. Moreover, a significant *10 percent more people of color than whites reported that they aspire to become executive directors.* As is evidenced by the national statistics listed above, there is no doubt that we need to recruit more people of color into the sector, but we also need to do a better job of supporting and developing the talented and committed people of color among us to ensure that this tremendous potential is realized.

"I would love to be that person that people look up to and for African American girls to say, 'Hey, look, she's running a whole organization. This is something I can do as well.'"

"As an Asian American public interest attorney, I feel that it's necessary for me to establish a record of leadership that will hopefully encourage other people to engage in this type of work."

-- *Ready to Lead?* respondents

Developing Multicultural Leadership Programs: Going Beyond Diversity Goals

Most nonprofits and funders recognize that leadership development programs are one effective strategy to support and develop a healthy nonprofit workforce. Considering the need for greater diversification in our sector's workforce begs this crucial question: *How should we structure leadership development programs to ensure accessibility and relevance for diverse groups and their varying needs?*

Many organizations, including our own, have often approached this question by focusing efforts upon recruitment of trainers from diverse backgrounds and effective outreach to participants. While this is important, it does not directly lead to creating relevant leadership programs for the next generation of leaders from communities of color. Moreover, we need to deepen our understanding of multiculturalism and recognize that oppression based on age, class, gender, sexual orientation *and* race are significant factors in designing and providing relevant leadership programs.

Like so many of our colleagues in the capacity-building field, we have been providing leadership development programs for many years. And while we have deep experience working with

people of color and within communities of color, it is not until the last several years that we have explicitly addressed the question of multiculturalism in the *design and execution* of leadership programming.

What follows are some of the dimensions of program design that we find important to consider, as well as a few questions that we continue to grapple with as we learn from each new experience.

The cultural backgrounds of participants: The racial and cultural background of the leadership cohort can have a significant impact on the overall learning experience. For instance, in our Women Executive Directors of Color Leadership Program, participants talked about leadership struggles that were firmly rooted in race and culture. One participant described barriers to getting funding based on these dynamics:

You definitely run into funders for whom it's hard that I'm a woman of color. I don't communicate in a way that they can feel, and the nature of funding is based on relationships. If the people funding you are white and you're not able to communicate in a way that elicits trust and confidence as much as someone they feel more comfortable with, it's difficult to get the funding.

Particularly in positions where people of color are underrepresented, addressing the ways that racial barriers can become entangled in job-related challenges are important conversations to facilitate inside programs.

Curricula development: Just as we believe that multicultural group settings can improve program outcomes, we think that curricula will be taught more effectively when it is designed and delivered using multicultural frameworks. We have found that a framework that examines the racial and ethnic cultural dimensions within a particular content area could have a significant impact on participants' learning.

For instance, The Fundraising Academy for Communities of Color was developed by CompassPoint and the Grassroots Institute for Fundraising Training (GIFT) five years ago to address two main issues: Many minority-led nonprofits were not raising significant income from individual donors, and there continued to be a dearth of people of color in the fundraising professional field. We created learning cohorts of executive directors and development staff of color and provided a framework for identifying the cultural dimensions of donor cultivation and asking for money. The results have been very promising: We have seen higher levels of participant engagement and learning than in fundraising trainings offered in other settings and 85 percent of participants reported improved fund development practices as a result of participating in the Fundraising Academy.

Furthermore, in a recent survey, 95 percent of respondents in minority-led nonprofits found significant value in fundraising programs designed specifically for communities of color. One person noted:

There aren't enough people of color who know how to effectively raise funds. I usually see white people in development positions, and I feel we need to develop the leadership of

people of color in those positions in grassroots organizations so the organizations reflect more of the community where they work.

We have confidence that these approaches to developing leaders of color are not just qualitatively different from traditional programs, but ultimately more effective. This experience has led us to ask the same questions about other content areas: What about people management, finance, or governance? Do they each require a framework for understanding racial and cultural dynamics? And if so, how do we adapt existing curricula accordingly?

Collaborating for Greater Impact

We do not have definitive answers or approaches to developing leaders of color, but we do believe in the importance of exploring these questions further in our own work and in partnership with others. We know that there are others doing innovative and exciting work in the area of leadership development and multiculturalism. However, many of us don't know about it and, worse, are not able to learn from it. If we worked together, our efforts would have exponentially greater impact. Collaboratively, we could establish best practices for designing multicultural programs, document the successes and failures, and disseminate these learnings with others around the country. If you have thoughts to share, please contact us CompassPoint Nonprofit Services.

About CompassPoint Nonprofit Services

CompassPoint is a nonprofit consulting, education, and research organization with offices in San Francisco and Silicon Valley, California. Through a broad range of services and initiatives, CompassPoint serves nonprofit volunteers and staff with the tools, concepts, and strategies necessary to shape change in their communities. In addition to training and consulting in leadership, nonprofit strategy, finance, fundraising, governance, and executive transition management, CompassPoint frequently publishes books, articles, and research reports on topics of relevance to nonprofits, funders, and capacity builders. **Visit www.compasspoint.org.**



ⁱ These statistics and others comparing the diversity of the nonprofit sector to the United States are from U.S. Census Bureau data and are cited in *The Nonprofit Career Guide*, by Shelly Cryer, 2008.

ⁱⁱ Same as above.

ⁱⁱⁱ *Daring to Lead 2006*, a national study of Executive Directors, reported that 82 percent of its respondents were white (CompassPoint Nonprofit Services, 2006).

^{iv} See *Nonprofit Governance in the United States*, by Francie Ostrower, (The Urban Institute Center on Nonprofits and Philanthropy, 2007).

^v This is a partial list of barriers reported in *Ready to Lead?* For a complete discussion of these barriers and other findings, download the full report at www.compasspoint.org.