

Beyond Numbers and Compliance: Valuing of Cultural Diversity in National Nonprofit Capacity-Building Organizations

By Catalina Vallejos Bartlett

**“Just simply asking about
it sends an important
message.” - Patricia Nash**

The nonprofit sector and society as a whole are debating affirmative action, finding ways to address diversity in the workplace, exploring definitions and approaches for cultural competency in capacity building. Legal and political realities steer most organizations in the direction of avoiding overt discrimination and even proclaiming the value of cultural diversity. Still, it is worth exploring what flagship organizations are doing beyond minimally complying with employment laws and social pressures to be respectful of diversity.

For the six representatives interviewed for this article, including four executive directors, issues of cultural diversity definitely transcend legal compliance in Washington, D.C.-based national nonprofit infrastructure organizations. They embrace a blend of formal and informal policies and practices that help shape the organizational culture. Each provided an overview of cultural diversity activities at staff, board and program levels. They shared the policies, practices and values, as well as complex challenges, which have driven ongoing efforts to create and sustain a diverse workforce and inclusive organizational culture.

Formal strategies have focused on expanding cultural diversity through codifying policies and practices in organizational initiatives, departments, and statements (e.g., personnel handbooks and mission/vision statements), and/or modeling values and perspectives as a major part of the CEO's responsibilities. Executive directors underscore their need to exemplify personally and professionally the attributes that contribute to a welcoming environment. Other formal programming includes initiatives that focus on (1) emerging leaders, (2) formation of affinity groups based on identity, (3) management focus and (4) specific issues. Such efforts provide a mechanism for ensuring that a wide range of voices and experiences begin to be acknowledged and incorporated into the organization's policies and culture.

Some informal strategies include (1) distribution of job openings through a variety of nontraditional networks, (2) efforts to maintain an open workplace that encourages discussion, and (3) commitment to encouraging respectful challenges to existing policies and practices.

Alliance for Nonprofit Management
1899 L Street, NW 6th Floor
Washington, DC 20036

t 202 955 8406

f 202 721 0086

info@allianceonline.org

www.allianceonline.org

Contextualizing Cultural Diversity: Initiative or Value?

All the executives with whom we talked speak of cultural diversity as an imperative and a shared value that should reflect society and permeate the entire workplace. It cannot be viewed as a single program or initiative that risks marginalization within the organization. “Organizations of the future need to be made up of the total mosaic of our culture as much as possible,” Roni D. Posner, Executive Director of the Alliance for Nonprofit Management, declares. “In terms of sustainability of organizations, diversity is absolutely essential. I don’t see how any organization can or will survive without focusing on the mosaic.” Similarly, Audrey R.

Alvarado, Executive Director of the National Council of Nonprofit Associations (NCNA), says, cultural diversity “is not about starting an initiative. It’s got to be an integral part of the values and the way people live. Otherwise, initiatives can become separate items that can be checked off the list. It’s about how people treat each other; it’s about human relations.”

Effective human relations are fostered in a workplace that embraces cultural diversity in the way groups operate as well as the values they articulate. In some respects – particularly, its mission orientation — the world of nonprofits is a “caring sector” that lends itself to such practices. Kathleen

Enright, Executive Director of Grantmakers for Effective Organizations (GEO), considers diversity “part of a value system that is embraced in the nonprofit sector to a higher degree than the corporate sector in my personal experience. That is one of the nonprofit sector’s assets.”

Patricia Nash, Director of Communications and Marketing at Independent Sector (IS), notes that the nonprofit world has been a place of success and of access to leadership—particularly for African Americans and women—because often it champions causes they and others care deeply about and act on: community and children.

Snapshot: Composition of National Nonprofit Organizations Regarding Race and Ethnicity

Alliance for Nonprofit Management: The Alliance’s board of directors has 14 members, seven of whom identify as being of African, Asian, Hispanic/Latino ancestry—as do three from a staff of seven. On the board, there is an equal amount of men and women. On staff, one is a man. As the board membership rotates, the Alliance is consciously recruiting to maintain diversity.

BoardSource: At BoardSource, 14 of 38 staff members (42%) are people of color.

Council on Foundations: In 1996, the organization set two major goals related to cultural diversity on staff. First was that 25% of managerial (director and officer level) positions would be staffed by people of color by 2000. Second, half of all other staff would be people of color. The Council achieved its goal in managerial positions in May 2000. Since then, however, that percentage has slipped to 16.7%, reinforcing the need to find the most promising ways to recruit and retain a culturally diverse management team. Currently, non-managerial staff is 62.3% people of color, and overall COF staff is 46.7%.

Independent Sector (IS): Approximately half of IS employees are people of color and 70% are women.

National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy: NCRP’s board membership is 50% people of color, including 16.7% African American/Black ancestry, 16.7% Asian/Pacific Islander, 10% Latino, and 6.7% Native American. It has a 60-40 male-female ratio. The NCRP staff, too, is 50% people of color, including 8.3% Black/African ancestry, 25% Asian/Pacific Islander, 16.7% Latino. Staff are 50-50 in terms of male-female.

National Council of Nonprofit Associations: NCNA employs a total of eight staff members. Seven of the eight are women. Three of staff members are African American, three are white, and two Latino. NCNA is led by a Latina. NCNA’s board is made up of 14 members. Nine of the members are women. Eleven of the board members are white, two are African-American, and one is South Asian-American. The first vice chair of the NCNA board is African American.

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations: The Board President is a woman of color as is one of four staff members.

Editor’s Note: These figures, gathered from each of the organizations named, compare favorably to nationwide figures of U.S. nonagricultural employees - 12.1% Hispanic/Latino and 11.4% Black as of 2002. No similar figures were available in this national census report for employees who identify with other ethnic groups.

Identifying the Locus of Change: Board, Staff and Programs

Executive directors concentrate their formal and informal diversity efforts most visibly at the board, staff and program levels. Each organization has realized gains using a broad definition of cultural diversity that, while inclusive of gender and race/ethnicity, also incorporates age (younger and older), sexual orientation and other aspects of identity and culture. “Diversity isn’t just about race or gender,” Nash acknowledges. “It’s about religious beliefs, different political perspectives, so much more than what you typically think of, so we have to find ways to build that into the culture, too.”

Marianne P. Eby, Esq., Acting CEO of BoardSource earlier this year and at the time of the interview, defines diversity broadly as “adding characteristics that are different than the current composition of the group.” Although individuals hail from different backgrounds and cultures, she notes, those backgrounds “may not necessarily be related to the employment protected categories,” which can form the basis of discrimination claims. In fact,

It could involve someone with an Asian perspective or someone from a rural background. It may be an African American or someone with corporate experience [or] you [may] have a client on the board who receives the services of the nonprofit. Strong and sustainable organizations can be achieved more successfully with people who can have a healthy debate about ideas and who might approach the problem from very different perspectives.

Even with a broad definition of cultural diversity, change is most effective when efforts go beyond

counting numbers and cultivate the wisdom of individuals and groups, Posner finds, adding:

My job as ED with the board is to bring all the individual beauty and genius together to inspire a collective whole among them [and to channel] individual energy into a collective masterpiece. With staff, my job is to make sure they have the resources they need to be brilliant at what they do, and to be their greatest cheerleader [and] fan. So, by respecting them and supporting them, they fly.

Whether working with a staff of four (GEO) or nearly 40 (BoardSource), viewing the organization holistically from the vantage points of board, staff and programs is of paramount importance. At each level, nonprofit organizations attempt to address diversity in the sector, increase diverse membership in all areas and stimulate critical thinking and training on the issue. For example, participatory hiring processes can make a

difference. GEO involves all staff, Enright says, which is important because it “helps start relationship building and team building.”

Boards can act as change agents in their governance role in developing policies and procedures. Independent Sector, for instance, is not required to comply with certain laws by exemption, but the board has chosen to report annually on its employment profile to maintain a level of awareness about diversity, according to Nash.

GEO, like other organizations, seeks broad diversity in types of funders who join—focusing on such characteristics as professional background, cultural/ethnic identity, geographic base, outcomes measurement and evaluation focus, and foundation size, according to Enright.

Programs and products, often representing an organization’s direct services to the sector, are critical to the perception of an organization’s success. BoardSource, for example, works in 32 countries and, while attempting to avoid imposing a U.S. perspective, it also highlights western

SOME LOW-COST IDEAS FOR INCREASING AWARENESS OF CULTURAL DIVERSITY WITHIN NONPROFIT ORGANIZATIONS

- Develop a wide variety of relationships—within the membership, with peer organizations, etc.—that enrich your understanding of cultural diversity (*Alliance for Nonprofit Management*).
- Create discussion groups around principles or statements of inclusiveness taken from the mission and vision statement or strategic plans (*Independent Sector, Alliance for Nonprofit Management*).
- Host cultural sharing events that bring local storytellers from diverse backgrounds in to tell their stories (*Council on Foundations*).
- Develop a conference track for a constituency group that pairs mentors and protégés for the duration of the conference (*Independent Sector*).
- Create an idea team or similar entity through which staff members can provide suggestions anonymously (*Council on Foundations*).

cultural practices for emerging democracies to consider. “An organization that only thinks about staff and board diversity, and doesn’t think of it in terms of products and services, is missing the biggest piece because therein lies the ability to change the world,” Eby says.

One constituency that has gained considerable attention is young leadership. Formal and informal efforts recognize their valuable contributions by developing their knowledge and skills as a different generation of leaders. Rick Cohen, Executive Director of the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy (NCRP), notes the nonprofit sector’s tendency of hiring younger employees “and keeping them in subordinate positions because they are cheap.” His solution has been to promote and hire young leaders in senior positions (one as Director of Research, another as Director of Communication) and encourage experimentation and learning. Also, he has increased board efforts to recruit young adults. These efforts, in Cohen’s opinion, counter the typical “adult response to younger leaders’ suggestions: ‘We’ve tried it, we’ve done it, it doesn’t work.’ It’s the easiest way to quash creativity. I’ve had to stop myself and be willing to try things.” Alvarado observes that younger employees often do not receive recognition and acknowledgment, “so I give them more responsibility and more public affirmation for their work.”

Formal efforts to promote new leadership include the Council on Foundations’ Emerging Philanthropic Leaders Fellowship Program. Annually two individuals who have met eligibility criteria are chosen and matched with senior leaders. “Initially, we thought the mentor would be the teacher,” admits Stephen Parsons, Director, Inclusive Practices. “We found, however, that the mentor is learning a lot from the protégé.”

A part of Independent Sector’s Nonprofit Leadership Initiative

cultivates new leaders, especially people of color. The Emerging Leaders Program at its annual conference is designed to encourage CEOs and senior VPs to mentor people who demonstrate leadership and have five years’ or less experience in the non-profit sector. Leadership skills are enhanced through dialogue on emerging leadership, fostering new relationships between new and

seasoned professionals, and creating an informal alumni support network. Nash believes this model works for organizations that want all voices represented at the table, even while operating with reduced budgets in economically difficult times. Nash says there are many “anecdotes of those who have gone on to run organizations and then came back and said what [the program] did for them.”

Formal efforts to develop young leaders:

Council on Foundations - *Emerging Philanthropic Leaders Fellowship*

Each year, Council on Foundations selects two individuals for the two-year fellowship. The fellowship recipient is matched with a mentor and must meet certain qualifications, one being a focus on historically underserved communities. Some benefits for the fellows include regular email and telephone contact with the mentor, support to attend two COF-sponsored conferences, and travel costs to tour the mentor’s organization. Visit www.cof.org for more information.

Independent Sector - *Emerging Leaders Program at the Independent Sector Annual Conference*

A special track for emerging leaders is incorporated into the annual conference. Potential emerging leaders must meet four criteria and register for the entire conference. Activities are designed to strengthen relationships between emerging and recognized leaders in the nonprofit sector. An informal network and dialogue serves to solidify relationships and act as a support. Visit www.independentsector.org for more information.

Other model programs:

American Council on Education (ACE) - *ACE Fellows Program*

The ACE Fellows Program is a national, individualized, long-term professional development program in higher education that offers on-the-job experience to its fellows and participating institutions. Components include the design of an individualized learning plan, attendance at three required ACE Fellows Seminars, and engagement in a mentor/intern relationship. Fellows are required to return to the nominating institution for at least one year following the Fellowship year and to focus on a strategic issue jointly defined by the Fellow and the nominating institution. For more information, visit www.acenet.edu/programs/fellows/about.cfm.

Echoing Green Foundation - *Echoing Green Fellowship Program*

The program’s mission is to provide “social entrepreneurs” with the guidance and support to build a successful start-up public service organization. A highly competitive program, it provides financial support, technical assistance, accountability to outcomes, and an ongoing fellowship network. Individuals are awarded two-year fellowships and receive \$60,000 stipend plus health and dental coverage; partnerships of two are awarded combined fellowships that total \$90,000. Visit www.echoinggreen.org for more information.

Sustaining Cultural Diversity: Formal Strategies

Two common practices that nonprofit infrastructure organizations employ are: (1) codifying policies and practices in formal initiatives, statements, and even departments. Examples include personnel handbooks and policies, mission and vision statements, and guiding principles and core values; and (2) modeling these shared values and perspectives as a major part of the CEO's responsibilities.

Organizational Structure

Council on Foundations is one of the few organizations that created a department in the early 1990s devoted to inclusiveness issues. It developed as an outgrowth of conversations in the 1980s about race and ethnicity, when the Council realized that neither the field of philanthropy nor its own staff reflected the composition of the communities it served as grantmakers. Its current staff provides technical assistance, information and other resources that help members deepen their commitment to diversity.

Strategy and Policy

Enright says that GEO adopted an employee handbook with strong language about the need to provide a diverse, accepting workplace and the consequences to those who do not comply with that ethic. GEO also has developed a strategic plan that incorporates a formal commitment about diversity among grantmakers. Independent Sector, according to Nash, developed a values statement that evolved not in response to a specific problem, but rather to the question: "What do we need to do to go beyond compliance with the law?" Concepts for broader application throughout the sector are contained in *Obedience to the Unenforceable*, a document first published in 1991

that calls nonprofits to adopt a higher standard than just obeying the law in order to earn and maintain the public's trust, an important asset for fundraising and working in communities. IS, identifying nine essential values it sees all nonprofits holding in common, encourages its members and other organizations to "deliberate, form and adopt a creed of ethical practices that guides the organization," Nash asserts.

Parsons notes that the Council on Foundations' statement of inclusiveness drives both the internal and external workings of the organization. Moreover, members of the Council are asked to make a similar commitment. Often, he says the Council is asked to provide its policy to regional associations of grantmakers to share with the community at large. Also, COF has a standing Committee on Inclusiveness to identify ways that the Council and grantmakers can increase inclusiveness and thereby effectiveness through building awareness. Publications such as *Cultures of Caring: Philanthropy in Diverse American Communities* and Diana Newman's *Opening Doors: Pathways to Diverse Donors* encourage grantmaking organizations to diversify as both members of a community of nonprofits and employers who can effect institutional change. "Oftentimes, it really means getting the community involved in the whole process of where funding dollars are going to go," says Parsons. "And that's a challenge at times."

Longstanding personnel policies may not reflect a full commitment to diversity and equitable treatment of staff. Rick Cohen, upon becoming executive director of the NCRP, was determined to cultivate a "completely open and mutually supportive" workplace. He found the personnel policies—"part of a modern organization's formal, institutional commitment"—

were thin on a number of discrimination-related issues. A revised version now marks the organization's commitment, moving beyond rhetoric.

Affinity Groups

Among the most effective, visible strategies for institutionalizing cultural diversity has been the formation of affinity groups. The Council on Foundations recognizes 37 affinity groups—typically independent tax-exempt organizations (See page 6 for a select list.) They can be based on identity (e.g., Asian Americans), issues (e.g., aging or children, youth and families) or other interests (e.g., building effective organizations). Parsons says a strong partnership exists between affinity groups and the Council. "They are on their own and they apply to the Council for recognition," he observes. "[As] subject matter experts, they bring a very rich perspective to the process [and are invited] to Council committees, planning committees, and focus groups."

The Alliance for Nonprofit Management established its own People of Color Affinity Group. Its purpose is to strengthen the presence and recognize contributions of people of color in the capacity-building field while advancing principles of inclusiveness, collaboration and quality. Posner said the group

evolved organically at the 2001 conference in Cleveland. Some people got together in a room, then in small group conversations, then at a breakfast roundtable. Each time, the interest and numbers grew, and it got bigger after the conference. It is not something we consciously started. It happened, and we are delighted.

It taught us that when your organization promotes diversity, it needs to be organized in a way to support diversity.

The People of Color Affinity Group, she continued, “gave birth” to the affinity group process. What followed was a recognition and development of affinity groups that directly affirmed similarities and differences about various membership subgroups. In 2002, emerging professionals—those who are younger or newcomers to the field—also coalesced. Posner realized she was not qualified to join either of these groups. “I say that jokingly, but it had a real impact on me,” she admits. “For the first time as ED, there were groups forming that I didn’t have a place in given the purpose of the groups. I re-learned the truth that people are different and have different needs. We are not all the same; we’re not one big group, not all the time anyway. It’s been an awakening, a realization.”

With the POC as trailblazer, other groups are forming. Executive Directors of management support organizations (MSOs), and consultants specializing in nonprofit executive transitions, connected and then held pre-conference meetings at the Alliance’s 2003 Annual Conference in Houston. Also, conference participants began exploring formation of groups for gay-lesbian-bisexual-transgender capacity builders, professionals working to strengthen faith-based organizations, people engaged in international work, etc.

SELECTED COUNCIL ON FOUNDATIONS AFFINITY GROUPS

The Council on Foundations supports the following affinity groups (select listing):

Asian Americans/Pacific Islanders in Philanthropy (AAPIP):

AAPIP seeks to advance philanthropy’s understanding of immigrant and refugee communities by increasing resources to marginalized populations and supports capacity building of key APA organizations. Visit their website at www.aapip.org.

Association of Black Foundation Executives: This affinity group strives to encourage increased grantmaking within African American communities and to increase the number of African Americans in Philanthropy. Visit their website at www.cof.org/affinity/affinityindex.htm

Disability Funders Network: This affinity group is focused on increasing grantmaking opportunities for people with disabilities and to promote their inclusion in the field of philanthropy. Their website is www.disabilityfunders.org.

Funders for Lesbian and Gay Issues: Its two-pronged mission is to increase the knowledge of critical funding needs within lesbian, gay and bisexual communities and to educate lesbian and gay organizations on how to access resources. Visit their website at www.lgbtfunders.org.

Hispanics in Philanthropy: Despite being the largest minority group in the U.S. at 13% of the population, Latino-based organizations account for less than 1.5% of private grantmaking. This organization seeks to close that gap by encouraging organized philanthropy and the nonprofit sector to invest in Latino leadership and the civic vitality of Latino communities. The website is www.hiponline.org.

Women & Philanthropy: This membership association, now 26 years old, is a catalyst, convenor, information and advocacy network for the full engagement of women and girls as central to the health of the community and nation. Women & Philanthropy has worked to increase women’s presence in foundations and women’s leadership in the field of philanthropy. Its decentralization strategy includes new initiatives and caucuses based on issues, geographic location, and identity. For information, see www.womenphil.org.

Women’s Funding Network: This international partnership of women’s funds, donors and allies is committed to ensuring that women’s funds are valued as “investments of choice” that support full participation of women and girls within societies and communities. The Network’s website is www.wfnet.org.

Sustaining Diversity: Informal Strategies

Although many organizations do not have formal diversity programs or initiatives, they do employ a number of informal practices to ensure a welcoming climate for diversity or, as Cohen seeks, a “revived and recommitted effort to increase diversity.”

Informal strategies include such practical approaches as distributing job openings to broader circles via (1) informal networking with advisors, (2) different advertising sites, or (3) work with recruitment firms that focus on diverse candidates. “It’s not enough to [post] it in the normal places, such as *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* and the *Washington Post*,” Nash says. Independent Sector also asks vendors for diversity policies, descriptions of their workforce, or their activities to promote cultural diversity. “We’re trying to go beyond employment to hold our contractors and vendors to a higher standard as well,” Nash adds. “Just simply asking about it sends an important message.” Within the *Alliance*, encouraged by a national member task force on inclusiveness, consistent efforts have been made to recruit diverse staff. Plus, with meetings, publications, and projects, the question is usually asked whether diverse cultural perspectives have been included.

Workplace Environment

Creating an open, welcoming workplace that encourages discussion was noted repeatedly as one of the most important informal approaches to promoting diversity.

Some executive directors do that in meeting with staff individually, others with senior management on a regular basis. Some, like Independent Sector, have initiated small group discussions about the impact of the values statement on personal and professional treatment. This exercise promoted learning among employees, transcended typical lines of authority, and strengthened respect for diversity as part of the organizational culture. As a result, an ethics committee was formed to determine if more formal and informal activities should be instituted, says Nash. Although most organizations provide options for discipline regarding a violation, that usually does not happen. Rather, as Nash puts it, “it’s the other, more subtle ways that it’s just as important to work on.”

Cohen has taken the approach of one-on-one meetings with staff members. Understanding the culture to be changed, and inviting respectful challenges, has been critical components of the job. “[T]here is no template,” he explains. “It’s like picking up clues and finding out how deep an issue is or where it comes from. The other dimension is that changing the formal structures, which requires a change in personnel policies, is laborious and boring, hardly the most exciting activity to engage in on a daily basis but it requires the discipline of getting it done.”

An open environment creates a “healthier dynamic” for creating products and messages, Cohen asserts. It also encourages active dialogue in offices where the nature of people’s

work often keeps them isolated from each other.

Parsons says that senior leaders at the Council on Foundations similarly are committed to candid discussions and to inviting the respectful challenge. “We all have a perspective and an individual experience that can make a richer environment. The leaders really do care about staff and it’s not just making sure you have tokens filling slots.”

Another avenue is the idea team, composed of a cross-section of roles and responsibilities (managerial and non-managerial), and allowing employees to raise issues anonymously. Often, modifications have been cost effective and led to organizational change. “If I feel passionate, I can go to my boss for a candid discussion without a fear of retribution,” Parsons says. “There really is an atmosphere of candor.”

One popular informal strategy at Council of Foundations has been the celebration of eight cultural traditions throughout the year that bring local community leaders together with staff to share their stories. It has generated interesting discussion, according to Parsons, and helped foster a work environment that constantly challenges the organization to grow. “The leaders don’t accept status quo,” he finds. “Internally, we recognize that certainly this year, when it’s been a very turbulent economic year, we need to look at building a greater awareness in our staff of what diversity means.”

SOME ORGANIZATIONAL ATTRIBUTES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO CULTURAL DIVERSITY EFFORTS

- Openness.
- Genuine respect for others.
- “Every person thinks they are unique and, in fact, everyone is unique,” says Eby.
- Good communication. “If I hear about a problem, it is good to bring a group together and not issue yet another policy,” commented Eby.
- Recognition that one does not have all the answers.
- Ability to challenge the Western philosophical pedagogy that is based on winning. According to Alvarado, “We must focus on the understanding that we are enriched through the collectivity of people coming together and the patience that leads one to have solutions, outcomes or plans. How do we make the space so we have full participation, from the person sweeping the floors to the one making decisions?”
- Genuine interest in the concept of diversity, not as a checklist or “flavor of the month,” but as an affirmation and valuing of individual as well as collective interests.
- Staff pride in ownership of areas of responsibility and involvement in organizational activities.
- Intolerance, according to Nash, of “slighting comments toward any groups or humor that might not be funny to everybody, whether it’s political jokes, gender, race, religion, or whatever.”
- Clearly articulated expectations.

SOME ORGANIZATIONAL BARRIERS THAT IMPEDE CULTURAL DIVERSITY EFFORTS

- *The myth that there are no qualified candidates from underrepresented groups.* “We have to get past that,” Posner remarks. “It’s an easy out. It’s all about relationship building from one person to one organization to the next and the next, until you find what you’re looking for.”
- *The CEO as sometimes the last person to learn of a problem in the organization.* Solutions: Dialogue with top team members, staff groups or departments about difficulties and/or have a vehicle for expressing concerns. (BoardSource has a question box in the lunchroom.)
- *Fear of retribution (e.g., loss of career mobility) if people speak up about sensitive issues.* The main way around that, according to Eby, is to set up a culture that rewards people for constructively speaking up. “You can’t talk about that, you just have to do it.”
- *Ongoing nature of the work and the importance of embedding the concepts and practices within the organization.* “It’s not something you do just once. It is important to recognize that organizational culture is constantly evolving, is not set in stone, and therefore the manager has to be aware enough to tap into and encourage good ideas...[and] to remove some of the stressful elements that can cause dissatisfaction and loss of productivity,” Alvarado says.
- *The slow, arduous process of organizational change.* “Organizational culture is so deep rooted and so poorly understood,” says Cohen. “The differences between practices and policies and the behavioral dimensions of how organizations function is so huge that it’s hard when you don’t see changes in daily behavior.”

Understanding the Role of the CEO

Interviewees overwhelmingly agreed that the CEO must model the kinds of behavior and values that he or she wants staff to emulate, as well as craft organizational policies and practices. Cohen described this with a technology analogy: If the executive director is trying to increase the use of technology in the workplace, but does not turn on the computer, the staff are unlikely to meet the objective. “The ED has to live up to as much as possible and emulate the values he or she wants to carry out,” Cohen declares. “It doesn’t matter what the issue is, he or she can’t get the organization to move when there is a chasm between statement and behavior.” According to Nash, the most important component is that “people feel welcomed, respected and able to thrive in an organizational environment that values their participation and perspectives. An ED

or president can certainly set that standard very high.”

The Value of Who We Are

Moreover, CEOs bring their own personal and professional experiences to bear on their efforts to model the behavior and practices they seek in their staff members. Posner grew up within a tradition of Judaism that valued differences, embraced the “notion of family,” and respected the power of numbers. “I practice Jewish renewal. We focus on Tikkun Olam (repairing and embracing and cherishing the world) and inherent in that is the understanding that there are so many differences among the cultures of the world and that’s what makes it so wonderful.” Alvarado was an affirmative action officer and also relies on her experiences as a woman of color. Eby served as an employment lawyer for twelve years

and as the Vice President of Human Resources at the American Red Cross.

Cohen’s tenure is shaped by differences he has seen in external and internal treatment of employees, particularly women with families. “I was committed to making sure that there wouldn’t be a huge chasm between the articulated public values and the internal day-to-day treatment of employees and structure of that governance.” Similarly, Nash witnessed Sara Melendez, Independent Sector’s former president until last year, as “a champion of ensuring that our workforce and our policies promoted diversity, and because of her leadership and the culture she fostered here, it’s become a value that’s been inculcated and that serves [the] organization very well.”

PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS (IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER)

Alliance for Nonprofit Management www.allianceonline.org

BoardSource www.boardsource.org

Council on Foundations www.cof.org

Independent Sector www.IndependentSector.org

Grantmakers for Effective Organizations www.geofunders.org

National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy www.ncrp.org

National Council of Nonprofit Associations www.ncna.org

Measuring Success

Measuring success in cultural diversity efforts beyond numbers proved difficult to describe for interviewees precisely because such changes focus on attitudinal and behavioral change. “I don’t know how we begin to measure the changes in the way we think and speak and feel,” says Posner. “But we’re not really embracing diversity until we do that...the better the numbers, the more helpful. But it goes far beyond numbers.”

“How do we measure success?” Nash asks. IS does not have a formal way to measure such progress. “There are some hard and fast things, but really it’s about trying to assess how we are working together and the culture we have created in the organization, which are hard things to measure. We probably can do more in that area

to be sure we’re continually improving.” One method is the staff council, composed of one representative from each department who is not in senior management. It functions as an “unofficial ombudsperson group” to which employees can bring suggestions to work better together and from which ideas for action are presented to the appropriate staff person. For Eby, the bottom line is quality. As with anything, she wants to explore, “How do you test quality outcomes vs. quantitative outcomes? For the board, quality is based on strategic thinking and on a board that governs rather than manages. For staff, it is developing a creative, engaged, and dedicated workforce. Programs have all the difficulty of measuring outcome effectiveness. How might we measure?”

The Council on Foundations

currently records data on the presence of people of color but the hope, according to Parsons, is that other measures of success can be introduced. This is particularly salient, he notes, because although the organization affirms “human diversity in its many forms,” it does not record any data on a number of key recognized groups, such as persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay and bisexual employees. This is done primarily to protect the privacy of the staff, he acknowledges. “From my personal perspective, it’s a double-edged sword,” Parsons observes. “If we collect the data, we have to be careful about how we disseminate it, because others could reach an incorrect conclusion. However, the numbers alone do not tell the [full story].”

Conclusion

The executives interviewed view their organizations as in the process of being more inclusive and culturally diverse at the board, staff and program levels. All, however, are clear that it is an ongoing process; no one believed his or her organization has yet achieved full cultural diversity. “You’re never done,” Eby affirms. “When you’re a business person, you expect to set a goal and achieve it and move on to

the next project, goal, or accomplishment. This is one that every organization and society in general is decades away from accomplishing, so it remains on the priority list.”

In the final analysis, a welcoming climate cannot be hammered into existence or forced onto employees, according to Nash;

Culture is something you don’t mandate; it’s part of what you have built into policy and rules,

but it’s also the informal things that you do. It’s a totally integrated idea about applying and creating this change that can come from all levels, from any activity. The important thing is to be really conscious of that even as you select a vendor, for example, or put out a position. There is not one size fits all.