

FEATURE
STORY

THE MANY FACETS OF DIVERSITY: THREE REASONS WHY IT MATTERS



BY KELLY OTTE

Diversity in associations and nonprofits has multiple facets. Diversity of race, ethnicity, gender, age, sexual orientation, ability and others, among board members, staff and

volunteers is essential in associations and nonprofits for three important reasons:

One: Diversity helps serve needs of our member community. Diversity among the people working and volunteering in organizations helps ensure people being served are represented at the decision-making table.

Two: You can't do a good job without proper representation and relationships between your organization and the community. Relationships with businesses, people and institutions are essential for successful organizations. Lack of diversity means you are limiting the organization from having strong ties to all areas of the community.

Three: It's the right thing to do. We live in a diverse world. If we expect to do the best we can for our members and the multitude of people who benefit from our services, then we must do our very best to represent the entire community.

Who sets policy and makes decisions matters a great deal to the people who don't see themselves in the faces of the leadership. The people who say it doesn't matter typically do see themselves reflected and do not feel excluded.

I believe because of the responsibility nonprofits have to the entire community, we have a higher moral obligation to be inclusive. And if you receive government funding, then you may have a legal obligation as well.

Easier said than done, I know. We are a people who are polarized around the conversations about what makes us different. But there is a way to get started. First, decide what diversity means for your organization. What is the ideal make up for your board? Start with the demographics of who should be served by your organization and the demographics in your community. Should your make-up be reflective of the community or the people you serve? These can be vastly different concepts but you have to talk about them to make decisions.

Remember diverse people aren't just the color of their skin, or their abilities, or their age. Diverse people also represent areas of expertise. There are black bankers, Hispanic people of affluence, women law enforcement officers, physicians

with disabilities. Far too often I have heard people say they need doctors, bankers, law enforcement officers and people of affluence. And African Americans, Hispanics, women and people living with a disability. No no no. That says you don't care if they make a quality member of the board just so long as they are black, or Hispanic or have a disability. It leads to that person being ostracized right from the beginning because no one believes they are there for any other reason than to look pretty.

“We are a people who are polarized around the conversations about what makes us different. Talking about diversity freaks people out and yet it’s something we need to get good at.”

I’m most definitely not suggesting any of this is easy. Talking about diversity freaks people out and yet it’s something we need to get good at. I’ve been working on my own awareness for years and get it wrong all the time. There are others who do a much better job than I do, and who are unyielding in their

efforts to represent the entire community. It’s not about being perfect. It’s about recognizing how important it is and putting it way up on the priority list in how you lead your organization. It is, quite simply, imperative. ◆

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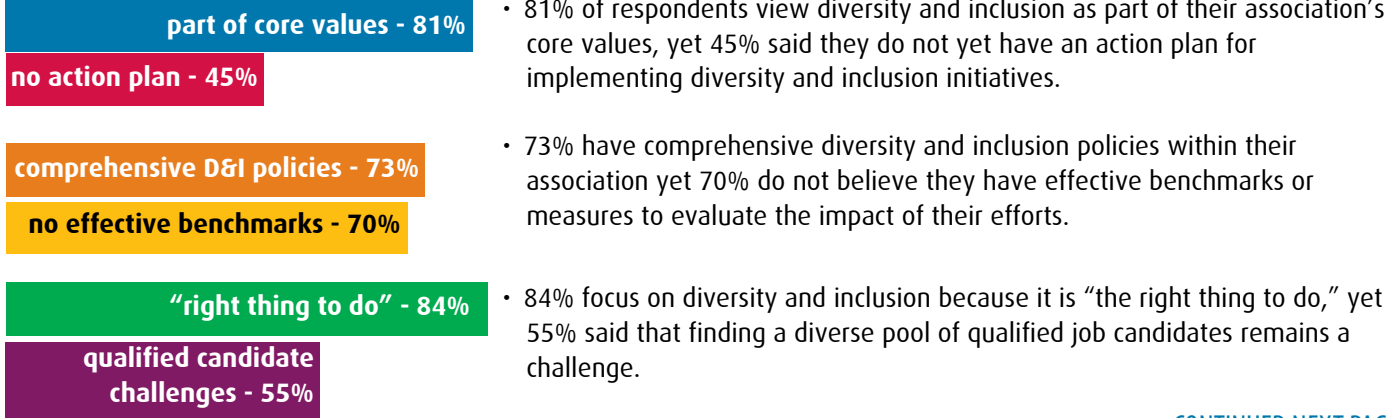
How many twenty-somethings serve on the board? These can be some hard working, up and coming professionals who tomorrow will be deciding how to care for all of us. You need them and you need to be very nice to them. Decide the ideal demographics for your board, then compare it to whom already serves on the board. And then fill those gaps.

diversity and inclusion in associations

From *Diversity and Inclusion: Core Values Among Associations* a national study commissioned by VettedSolutions

Find the full national study online at www.fsa.org/reports and watch for your chance to participate in a Florida survey coming in January.

According to a recent national study on diversity and inclusions in associations, **leaders recognize the importance of diversity and inclusion, however many associations have not yet fully realized the value and benefits of diversity and inclusion.**



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Survey respondents' definitions of diversity and inclusion include ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, and age among the top four characteristics. In addition, religious viewpoints, socioeconomic background and geographic background were often incorporated. Diversity also includes differing viewpoints, philosophies, and perspectives.

Inclusion is the active, intentional and ongoing engagement with diversity. Intentionality and ongoing engagement seem to be the cornerstones to successful efforts and meaningful, long-term change and development.

The world view is shifting from diversity to inclusion.

The conversation cannot stop with just increasing the diversity within an association's board, membership, and staff. **The organization must also cultivate and maintain an environment that welcomes and fosters diverse persons, thoughts and opinions.**

Associations need to pay attention to creating open lines of communication, so everyone trusts they can express a comment or concern that will be heard and respected. A recent article in The Washington Post makes the case that unless and until someone expresses such a qualm, we have no way to know that we are behaving in an unwelcome manner.

diversity and inclusion in associations

From Association Forum

FSAE's counterpart in Chicago, Association Forum, recently held conversation circles/focus groups with homogenous groups of members: Black/African American, White, Latino/Latina and LGBTQ. While each conversation was unique, some key themes emerged from the conversations:

KEY THEMES: CURRENT STATE

- Many associations do not have stated goals around diversity and inclusion and many that do are not effective.

Some associations think they have made progress by merely stating a goal of diversity and not actually implementing it.

- Many do not understand the business case for a diverse staff and member community.
- Diversity in associations tends to exist from middle management down. There is little diversity within association leadership.
- Gender diversity is progressing faster than racial diversity.

- **People of diverse backgrounds cannot represent the voice of their entire population.**

People are diverse on multiple levels and their diversity should be embraced.

- Inclusion is the goal. The term "diversity" implies that some are outside the norm. There is no norm and we are all diverse.

KEY THEMES: STAFF RECRUITMENT AND TRAINING

- Associations must identify the best candidates for the job and hire based on skills. Associations can explore how to build a more diverse pipeline of candidates. They can

advertise job opportunities in places that attract diverse candidates.

- Associations need to create equal opportunities among staff to acquire the skills to advance into leadership positions.

KEY THEMES: BEHAVIOR IN THE WORKPLACE

- There is a perception that white professionals are more likely to ask for a promotion or an incentive when taking on new projects. Minorities are less likely to say "no" or ask for a promotion in similar circumstances
- There is a perception that the value of networking is inherently understood by white association professionals but not by other minority professionals. Networking is critical to advancing in the association industry.

KEY THEMES: ASSOCIATION BOARD

- Association boards are typically white. Based on the industry, there may be gender diversity. Many boards are still experiencing "firsts." Such as first Black, Latina or LGBTQ member of the Board.
- Typically nomination committees select board members that they know, so **the nomination process should strive to minimize an unconscious bias on behalf of the nominating committee.**



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diversity and inclusion in associations

What Can I Do?

From Diversity and Inclusion: Core Values Among Associations a national study commissioned by VettedSolutions

- Understand your unconscious biases. There are numerous resources and literature online to help explore and understand unconscious biases.
- Recognize where you have certain biases, and work to reduce them. We all have unconscious biases. These biases do not make an individual a racist/sexist/ageist/any other-ist. But they do impact how we interact with others, and improving those interactions begins with honest self-understanding.
- Instill the value of diversity and inclusion at every level of your organization, including incorporating them into the organization's core values.
- Develop and internally publicize a diversity and inclusion strategy for the organization.
- Add the advancement of diversity and inclusion to regular reviews of the strategic plan, projects, and employee performance.
- Know your organization's diversity and inclusion goals, their connection to its strategic plan, and how your work furthers those goals.
- Encourage diverse panels at presentations, industry events, and conferences.
- Address situations and comments that challenge the value of diversity or create a non-inclusive feeling. Do not hope that no one noticed; address these as teachable moments.
- Create/participate in training and awareness programs.
- Partner with another organization whose diversity and inclusion efforts you admire.
- Listen attentively to those who are different from you.
- Respectfully ask questions to understand diverse opinions/viewpoints. Educate yourself about these differences of perspective.
- Address assumptions about people with different backgrounds than your own, and avoid group stereotypes.
- Avoid looking to one individual to represent the entirety of the diverse population.
- Avoid implying the individual is the exception to the group stereotype.
- Avoid placing value on someone's message based on the individual's appearance, mannerisms, or accent.
- Seek feedback from individuals and groups on how best to communicate respect for their diversity and their ideas.
- Encourage openness in discussing personal opinions, feelings, and reactions.
- Speak with the people in the room with whom no one else is interacting.
- Work with diverse teams to achieve mutual goals.



Watch for your chance to participate in a Florida Diversity & Inclusion survey in January.