

Assessing Board Diversity and Leadership Commitment to GBA Plus



Diversity within your organization’s leadership, including among your board members, is a key consideration in assessing your organization’s readiness and capacity to incorporate GBA Plus, as well as organizational commitment to the principles of equity, diversity, and inclusion, more generally. As Bernstein and Fredette (2024) explain,



building and retaining diverse leadership and governing groups is important, not just to demonstrate compliance with employment law and funder expectations (Bradshaw & Fredette, 2013; Miller-Millesen, 2003), or to improve ideation and decision-making (Forbes & Milliken 1999), or to expand stakeholder relationships and community understanding (Brown, 2005; Herman & Renz, 1998), but also because leadership diversity signals moral and ethical commitment to equity by legitimizing the value of underrepresented communities (Guo & Musso, 2007), and promotes engagement with and participation in power-redistribution efforts (Ray, 2019).¹



1. Ruth Sessler Bernstein and Christopher Fredette, 2024, "Decomposing the Impact of Leadership Diversity Among Nonprofit Organizations," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 53(1), pp.81-82.

Prioritizing diversity and inclusion within your organization's leadership, and the work they undertake can have a strong impact on the level of broader organizational buy-in to equity-focused work, such as incorporating GBA Plus throughout organizational operations. This is because the “tone from the top” signals what is important.”² There is a critical link between diversity within nonprofit leadership and the equity work done by organizations.³ A recent study found that “responding BIPOC-led organizations were [...] markedly more likely to have programs designed to serve equity-deserving communities” (Lasby 2023, p.9). In the settlement context, strong consideration should be given to including those with lived experience as newcomers at all levels of your organization, including within leadership positions, to ensure that their valuable perspectives are included at all stages of the work your organization does.

Assessing the current level of diversity—both in terms of social identities and experiences represented within organizational leadership, as well as the skillsets that people are bringing into these roles—is an important step as it creates a baseline reading that can serve to both show you what communities and groups are already represented, as well as if there any representation gaps that need to be addressed. These gaps can help inform your organizational recruitment practices moving forward by allowing you to focus on the areas where your board can be strengthened and to target your recruitment efforts accordingly. This matrix should be updated as board composition and organizational needs change to ensure that representation gaps continue to be addressed.

To assist with this process, a settlement-sector-focused board diversity matrix template (with an accompanying board survey template) has been provided below. These templates can be adapted to reflect your organizational context. They are meant to serve as a tool to help track the representation of various skills, experiences, and social identities on your organization's board. If you find that there are gaps in certain areas once you have completed the matrix, this is okay (and to be expected). No board will 100% represent every aspect of the template. That said, ensuring as much diversity as possible will mean a stronger board because of the different perspectives and experiences being brought to the table. The matrix can help you visualize where the gaps lie and in doing so, can provide a starting point for addressing them. It should also be acknowledged that there can be challenges to diversifying organizational boards, including, but not limited to institutional structure and by-laws, availability of candidates, and relatedly the competition faced by non-profits for board members. However, even in these cases, it is worth considering how your board composition can be more diverse and what changes you can make to work toward this.

2. Wendy Cukier and Nancy Mitchell, 2022, “Diversity in Leadership,” Charity Village, presentation slides are available at: https://charityvillage.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/50-30-Toolkit_For_Nonprofits.pdf

3. Lasby, 2023.

While board diversity is critical, it is also important that you ensure that all board members feel included once they are at the table. As Cardozo asserts,



There is a significant body of evidence suggesting that the sharing of diverse perspectives will always lead to stronger decisions. That said, I believe that focusing only on diversity will be meaningless unless we pay equal attention to all the aspects of inclusion at the board table. Without meaningful inclusion, a strategy to build a diverse board will, indeed, end up as an exercise in window dressing (Cardozo and Fullbrook, 2021, p.3, emphasis in original).



Meaningful inclusion and participation of board members will ensure that the diverse perspectives that you have assembled inform the work that your organization does.

Boards must think of diversity and inclusion as separate, but equally important, elements for organizational leadership. As WGOB explains,



Diversity is about representation; it describes who is invited around the boardroom table. Inclusion, however, is the act of ensuring that everyone at the table can fully participate in the discussions and decision-making that happen in the boardroom. It's through inclusion that everyone in the boardroom is able to share their unique perspectives and experiences, a process which improves discussions and ultimately benefits the organization. "Inclusion is the superpower that unlocks diversity."⁴



4. Women Get on Board (WGOB), n.d., Inclusive Boards: Unlocking the Power and Benefits of Diversity. Emphasis added.

A board focused on fostering a culture of meaningful inclusion “welcomes and celebrates differences, ensures that all board members are equally engaged and invested, [and] shares power and collective accountability for the board’s work, the organization’s mission, and its purpose.”⁵ Fucci and Cooper (2019) outline the five primary functions of boards, including strategy, governance, talent, integrity, and performance, and offer a thoughtful account of how to integrate meaningful inclusion within each of these areas of work.⁶ As you consider what meaningful inclusion should look like within your organization, this resource can serve as a helpful starting point.

Additional Resources

- L. Robin Cardozo and Matt Fullbrook, 2021, “Not-for-Profit Board Diversity & Inclusion: Is it Essentially Window-Dressing,” Rotman School of Management – The David and Sharon Johnstone Centre for Corporate Governance Innovation, University of Toronto. Available at: https://tspace.library.utoronto.ca/bitstream/1807/124595/1/Not_For_Profit_Board_Diversity_And_Inclusion.pdf (accessed 25 June 2024).
- Christopher Fredette, 2012, “Leadership Diversity in the Nonprofit Sector: Baby Steps, Big Strides, and Bold Stances,” a DiverseCity Counts Research Report available at: <https://continuing.torontomu.ca/upload/obc/diversecity-counts-5-full.pdf>
- DiverseCity, “Diversity in Governance: A Toolkit for Nonprofit Boards,” available at: <https://bcfarmersmarket.org/app/uploads/2020/09/Diversity-on-Non-Profit-Boards-Toolkit.pdf>
- David Lasby, 2023, “Shifting Power Dynamics: Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion in the Nonprofit Sector,” Imagine Canada, available at: https://www.imaginecanada.ca/sites/default/files/Shifting-Power-Dynamics-Equity-diversity-and-inclusion-in-the-nonprofit-sector_0.pdf
- Mike Fucci and Terri Cooper, 2019. The Inclusion Imperative for Boards: Redefining Board Responsibilities to Support Organizational Inclusion. Deloitte Insights. Available at: <https://www2.deloitte.com/us/en/insights/topics/value-of-diversity-and-inclusion/redefining-board-responsibilities-to-support-organizational-inclusion.html>
- Women Get on Board (WGOB), n.d., Inclusive Boards: Unlocking the Power and Benefits of Diversity. Available at: <https://womengetonboard.ca/inclusive-boards-unlocking-the-power-and-benefits-of-diversity/#:~:text=But%20what%20makes%20a%20boardroom,are%20equally%20engaged%20and%20invested>

5. Ibid.

6. Mike Fucci and Terri Cooper, 2019. The Inclusion Imperative for Boards: Redefining Board Responsibilities to Support Organizational Inclusion. Deloitte Insights.



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