



# KALEIDOSCOPE

## Diverse Boards—Are You Prepared for Real Change?

By Maria Gitin Torres, CFRE

Diversifying your board does not end when you see new and different faces around the table. It's also less likely to happen in the first place without a bit of organizational reflection.

Ask yourselves the following question: As an organization, are we ready to listen and adapt to new perspectives brought forth by a diverse board? If the answer is an honest and committed "yes," then you have a good starting point. If your motivation in building a more diverse board is to better serve your constituents and donors, you will have a much easier time doing so.



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If, on the other hand, your motivation for recruiting a more diverse board is to fill a quota or meet funder requirements, you may have a difficult road ahead of you. People join an organization completely, not partially. They expect to be heard and to see the things change that they know to be wrong or in need of improvement. That's just human nature. If you were hired as a fundraiser, but you were not allowed to use all of the skills at your disposal, would you stay at that organization for long? Most likely not—and neither will a diverse board member.

Who is a diverse board member or donor prospect? Anyone who does not fit the regular demographic of your current board—people of color, gay and lesbian individuals, people with disabilities and perhaps women or even younger people. Remember, diversity is more than skin deep.

Young people, especially, are oftentimes overlooked for board positions, but what wonderful passion they bring! They aspire to see great results through nonprofit organizations. Furthermore, they are impatient to see results, particularly through methods that are beyond the conventional, classic model. However, if you say you want young people on your board—or any diverse person—be prepared. You're going to hear some new approaches to problems. That's what having diverse voices on the board is all about.

### Ask, Don't Assume

A very important element of the process of recruiting a diverse board is to listen for and talk with people about the expertise they bring. People do not want simply to be the diverse token on a board. They are successful individuals—professionals, community members and student leaders. You may value their viewpoints as representative of a diverse group that your organization serves, but evaluate them on what they bring to the table as a whole.

People are often so afraid to say the wrong thing that they become tongue-tied talking about diversity. My advice is to be sincere. Become interested and get involved in their community. Attend their events. Have a presence. This kind of involvement speaks volumes.

We all have assumptions and biases. The key is to realize this and welcome any opportunity to break

these molds we create for others in our minds. Unfortunately, you can't monitor what you say and think all the time. Being genuine and sincere is really the only way to truly reach out. Believe me, if you have less than sincere and open motives, it will be obvious to your prospective diverse board recruits.

### **Cultivation**

Here's some advice any fundraiser can relate to: Cultivate future board members in the same way you cultivate donors. This involves building a relationship. Ask questions. Get people's opinions. If your organization is not diverse on board or staff, you might even ask them why they think that might be. Make the conversation honest and open. Listen to and accept their views. Don't argue or defend your organization; rather, indicate what you personally are committed to doing to move the organization forward.

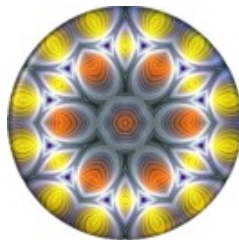
For any board position, look for people who are the right match and are passionate about the cause. Consider what's in it for them. Why would they want to be on your board? For diverse individuals, answering this question may be deeper than just whether or not they are passionate about your cause. It also includes whether they want to be part of the culture of your organization and whether they believe in its willingness to change when change is due.

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*Maria and her associate Samuel Torres Jr., Esq., will co-present "Embracing Diversity: Cultivating Common Ground" on Wednesday, April 1, at the AFP International Conference on Fundraising in New Orleans with former AFP Diversity Committee chair Kay C. Peck and former AFP Foundation chair Cliff Johnson. Samuel and Maria also will lead a workshop on "Building Diverse Fundraising Boards" at the AFP Golden Gate (San Francisco Bay area) Chapter's Fundraising Day May 4th.*

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