

# Promoting Diversity:

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Only **14% of 30,000** registered non-profit fundraisers are racial minorities.

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*Promoting Diversity: How Savvy Nonprofits Do*  
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# What It Takes: How a Charity Confronted Its Lack of Diversity and Found New Strength

By TIMOTHY SANDOVAL

**K**RISTY ARNOLD arrived for the job interview armed with impressive credentials and a burning question. A nonprofit veteran who had worked for years with disadvantaged families and youths, she had a Ph.D. in counseling as well as experience evaluating youths in the juvenile-justice system and applicants for mental-health benefits.

She was, in short, a terrific candidate to run the Washington, D.C., office of [Lift](#), a national anti-poverty organization that helps parents and caregivers in low-income families build confidence, key relationships, and financial stability.

Racial, ethnic, and cultural diversity had long been important to Arnold — she wrote her dissertation on how black counselors address racial and cultural issues with clients of color — and coming into the interview, she wanted to know whether Lift took diversity seriously. Her question: How was Lift making its staff diverse and its

culture inclusive?

“At this point in my career,” says Arnold, “I probably can’t work anywhere that isn’t diverse — diverse in race, diverse in gender, diverse in all sorts of values and practices.”

Lift might be one of the few nonprofits that could point to tangible action — and results — when questioned on diversity. The organization in 2010 began a rapid expansion that introduced significant racial diversity to the staff as it grew nearly sixfold in size. Today, 60 percent of its employees are people of color. Through regular yet often emotional conversations, the group has worked to remake its culture so that people of color feel accepted and that decision making at all levels considers issues of race and equity.

Perhaps most important, Lift has diversified its leadership — something few nonprofits have done. It has both promoted people of color from within and recruited





Lift

As it expanded in recent years, Lift, a national social-service group, added significant diversity to its ranks. Some 60 percent of its staff are people of color. Top row: Kristy Arnold, executive director; Collin Kee, national development coordinator; Miriam Kirubel, national program manager. Second row: Andrea Ruggirello, national grant-writing associate; Molly Mayer, operations associate; and Arceli “Pinky” Bacsinila, chief financial officer.

them from the outside. It has then worked to provide those new leaders with support, particularly in fundraising. Today, seven of its nine top executives are people of color.

In short, Lift has grown into the kind of charity where people like Arnold, who took the job in 2016, feel included and thrive.

But getting there has been a journey.

## Blind Spots

[Kirsten Lodal](#), the group’s CEO, started Lift in 1998 with Brian Kreiter when both were students at Yale. She took a gap year to build out the organization, then called National Student Partnerships, which mobilized volunteer college students to work with people in poverty to help them find jobs and

connect with social services.

In the 20 years since, the organization has grown to \$6.6 million in revenue, with offices in Chicago, Los Angeles, New York, and Washington.

Lodal has been hailed as a social entrepreneur. In 2015, she received the John F. Kennedy New Frontier Award, which honors Americans under 40 making a difference in communities through public service. Past honorees include Wendy Kopp, who, like Lodal, devised a successful nonprofit, Teach for America, while a college student.

The expansion begun in 2010 was part of a strategic plan to professionalize, bring on more permanent staff, and rely less on volunteers and AmeriCorps participants. But as Lift assembled this plan, something nagged at Lodal.



Lift

Lift diversified its once all-white leadership by promoting qualified staff from within and bringing in talented outsiders. The nine individuals include four African-Americans and three Asian-Americans, including one who identifies as Indian-American.

Diversity had always been a value she felt the organization cherished. It had conducted training on issues of diversity and inclusion, and it had people of color on staff and on its board.

But Lodal, who is white, knew she likely had blind spots. She grew up in an upper middle-class household in the Washington, D.C., area and attended a private high school before Yale — a much different profile than the organization's clients, who are predominately people of color. As Lift grew, it needed staff who shared a background with its clients and who could help to better address their needs.

"I really started looking at: What's going on in terms of my leadership, the culture?" she says. "Where do we need to start to get help to make sure that this organization is one where staff can feel supported and [can] thrive — and not like they are being asked to all become mini versions of me or my co-founder?"

Sol Anderson says he felt this cul-

tural dissonance when he started as a program manager in Lift's Chicago office in 2012. An African-American, he had grown up in a working-class neighborhood in Grand Rapids, Mich. His grandparents had been Mississippi sharecroppers and moved north in the 1950s for a better life.

At Lift, Anderson straddled two worlds awkwardly. When he talked with the organization's "members" — as the nonprofit calls its clients — he had a natural rapport. They reminded him of his family and people from his old neighborhood, where most everyone lived paycheck to paycheck.

Back in the office, however, he says he had to "code-switch" — act and talk differently than he did when with the members or black people in less formal settings.

The transition felt jarring, then inauthentic. "The code-switching had gotten so stark that I could feel myself doing it, which was weird," he says.

## **‘Cultural Audit’**

Anderson arrived at Lift just as it was beginning to commit more fully to diversity. In early 2011, it had hired the firm [Cook Ross](#), a consultancy that specializes in diversity and inclusion, to help. The firm recommended that Lift conduct a “cultural audit” in part to gauge how employees who were people of color felt about the organization and gather insight for recruitment of volunteers and employees.

More than 130 people were surveyed — three quarters of its staff, volunteers, and board members. A doctoral student in sociology from the University of Pennsylvania also did one-on-one interviews.

The audit revealed some concerns. Many black respondents felt the organization’s culture wasn’t inclusive or culturally sensitive. Some employees also said the idea of diversity, which they felt was often framed in racial and ethnic terms, should be broadened to include sexual preference and political identity.

The audit spurred Lift to change in significant ways. Cook Ross helped Lift shape its recruiting practices to ensure more diversity in hiring. For instance, the firm pushed the group to post job ads with such organizations as Howard University’s alumni network and Harvard’s affinity groups for black and Latino alumni. Lift also tapped into professional organizations that serve people of color, and it set aside money to pay recruiting firms to do more thorough searches to find diverse applicants.

The organization also asked staff of color to help find new employees. “Diversity begets diversity,” says Erin Ridgeway, Lift’s talent manager.

Apart from recruiting, the audit prompted deep discussions about the organization’s culture and such topics as how to overcome unconscious bias. The efforts weren’t cheap: Lift, to start, budgeted \$100,000 for Cook Ross’s services as well as other expenses related to its diversity work, which was paid for through targeted fundraising.

Anderson remembers his first meeting about diversity and inclusion. “The first conversation wasn’t awesome, to be honest,” remembers Anderson, now the executive director of Lift’s Chicago office. When code-switching came up, it seemed that one colleague thought it simply referred to how people can act differently with friends than they do at work. That wasn’t quite the point. Black people face a difficult reality, Anderson says, one in which they can be looked down on — whether it’s acknowledged or not — for “acting black” at work.

Employees and board members credit Lodal for pushing the work, even when it was uncomfortable. She has dug deeply into the issues herself, signaling to staff their importance.

“I think she’s been really courageous,” says Patience Peabody, the group’s former vice president for communications. “She does things because she knows that they are right. She surrounds herself with folks who will push her and challenge her.”

Leslie Traub, a partner at Cook Ross, says Lift embraced its diversity work with an unusual intensity. “They really pushed themselves to sit in the fire — to really challenge their thinking and their perspectives,” she says. “They were very, very willing to hear the perspectives of the people in the organization.”

## Not Staying Silent

In 2013, Lift published a [progress report](#) on its diversity and inclusion work that included the audit's findings. "We have come a long way," it said, while acknowledging the work really had just begun.

The next year, the organization's new direction became evident after the police shooting of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Mo. Lift doesn't have a presence in Missouri, and it doesn't advocate on police issues, but staff felt compelled to respond. As protests raged in St. Louis and nationwide, the organization issued a [statement](#) declaring that "what's occurring in Ferguson is emblematic of a more common and subtle experience of racism and the inequality of opportunity that is present day-to-day across our country."

The group's diversity working group drafted the language over 48 hours. Lodal was involved, and board members read the statement. Six of the 10 people who worked on it were people of color, including Peabody, who is black. "The magnitude and diversity of the voices and hearts that were embedded within that would have felt different" if fewer people of color had worked on it, Peabody says.

Some Lift supporters questioned the decision to speak out. Was Ferguson really a battle for social-service organizations like Lift? "We got some negative feedback from people just saying, 'This is a step too far,'" Lodal says.

Her reply? "How on earth can a direct-services organization working with a vast majority people of color be silent when these things are happening?"

## Promoting From Within

For many years, Lift had only three leadership roles — the chief executive, a development officer, and a chief operating officer. All were white.

Over time, Lift has expanded its leadership team in part by promoting individuals from within the organization. Today, the nine top leaders include four African-Americans, two Asian-Americans, and one Indian-American. The group's four regional directors are key to fundraising, yet only one came to the job with an extensive background in development. Anderson, in Chicago, and Unique Brathwaite in New York were promoted from positions as program directors. Arnold, the head of the Washington, D.C., office, had never solicited money before.

Though fundraising is increasingly key to nonprofit leadership roles, Lodal says she's observed that few people of color are given the chance to learn what it takes to raise money.

"If there's a [race ceiling](#) in any way in fundraising, then you're going to see real advancement ceilings," she says.

Fundraising experience does not need to be the top qualification for leadership, Lodal says, and good leaders can be trained.

To help the regional directors learn on the job, the Lift national development team puts together training, does one-on-one counseling, and checks in regularly. At times, board members and other senior leaders accompany them on donor visits. The top leaders have also set goals to help the directors stay on track.



The directors say the organization encourages them to talk about the awkward racial dynamics of fundraising — namely, that many big donors are white and wealthy. Arnold says she's commiserated with fellow employees of color about how it feels to sit across the table from a white male donor.

The experience can be somewhat intimidating, especially to novice fundraisers, she says. One unpleasant mental image she carried with her initially was of her, as a black woman, groveling for money before a white man.

Her colleagues have urged her to think of herself as an equal. Their message, she says: "Even though I'm in a position where I'm seeking funds, it doesn't make me 'less than' in any way. It's just simply the nature of where [their] life has led versus where my life has led."

For leaders of color, knowing that they can discuss such issues openly is important. "That in and of itself helps," says Michelle Rhone-Collins, chief cities officer, who oversees the regional directors.

With white male donors, success sometimes requires extra work to build a relationship and trust, Rhone-Collins says she tells the executive directors. Barriers can come down if you learn a lot about a donor and grow close.

Deanna Singh, a Lift board member, says philanthropists are often part of communities with norms and cultures that may be unfamiliar to Lift leaders. Fundraisers have to decide on what terms they will engage and where they

will draw the line. Many fundraisers, for instance, learn about golf to develop relationships with donors, even if they've never watched or played the game.

But if donors do something that makes fundraisers uncomfortable — for example, by saying something insensitive about race — fundraisers may need to make a tough choice. Sometimes, such situations are teachable moments, sometimes they're not, she says.

"You have to decide what might diminish your integrity and what you think is still within the realm of what you're expected to do," Singh says.

## Emotional Conversations

Anderson, who felt the need to code-switch when he got to Lift, is now a de-facto leader of the working group continuing much of the diversity work. He says the organization's culture has changed, that he and colleagues feel more comfortable being themselves.

Talks about race and diversity occur regularly. "We've consistently gone to a deeper level with our conversations, so that's why I've kept coming back," he says.

Recently, Anderson was part of an effort to ensure that the organization takes on issues of equity and addresses disadvantages caused by race, gender, and sexual orientation. These discussions, which were seen as an extension of the diversity work, ended with Lift formally making equity one of the organization's core values.

Lift's conversations about diversity, inclusion, and equity aren't always comfortable. At an all-staff retreat

last fall, a facilitator led discussions about individual experiences with race inside and outside of Lift. Some people cried. Others got angry.

During the session, employees of various racial and ethnic groups were brought together to talk. The facilitator, however, suggested that Latino and Asian employees combine their talks, which met with objections.

Asian-Americans should have their own opportunity for a discussion, one participant said. Since the issues faced by Latinos and Asians are different, joining the two wouldn't make much sense.

"That, to me, was powerful," Ander-

son says. It's the type of honesty about race that the organization strives for, he adds.

There is no end date to Lift's work on diversity and inclusion, Lodal says. She wants to bring more diversity to the organization's four regional boards and its national board.

The group must never let up on recruiting or talking about race and diversity, she says. She fears that all its progress could be lost with just a little bit of turnover.

She says: "You can never, ever take your attention off that and off its importance."

# Becoming Diverse: One Foundation's Evolution

By TIMOTHY SANDOVAL

SIX YEARS AGO, the [Annie E. Casey Foundation's](#) staff was 58 percent white. Today, that figure is 43 percent.

What happened? The foundation's transformation into a majority-minority organization happened over two decades, says Kimberley Brown, director of human resources and talent strategies. Over that time, Annie E. Casey has grown a lot. Since 2012, it has added roughly 40 employees, for a total of about 200. That's given the foundation plenty of opportunity to bring on people of color. In addition, it's been purposeful in its recruitment and hiring.

It has earned a reputation for retaining people of color, too. This — along with the foundation's [work](#) focused on race and ethnicity as a key in many underprivileged children's lives — means the foundation is attractive to people of color. "The Casey brand is a way in which we attract a lot of people," Brown says.

Here are some things the foundation does:

- Post to websites catering to diverse candidates. One of Annie E. Casey's

primary sources for collecting résumés is the Council on Foundations website. Casey often pays for an upgrade when posting there so its ads are also placed on sites aimed at people of color, women, the disabled, and other groups.

- Ask current staff to help. The foundation sometimes asks employees, many of them of diverse backgrounds, if they know anyone who is right for a particular job. The more diverse your organization becomes, the more likely it is that employees' professional networks will be diverse, too, increasing the odds you'll find talented people of color.
- Tap old networks. Annie E. Casey is known for its fellowship programs, like the Jim Casey Young Fellows program, which attract rising people of color. Sometimes those fellows are right for new roles within the organization down the line, Brown says. Or the foundation asks them if they know of anyone else.

# How to Overcome Implicit Bias in the Hiring Process

By TIMOTHY SANDOVAL

UNCONSCIOUS bias can affect all stages of an employer's hiring process, from initial résumé review to the final decision.

That's as much the case at non-profits as it is in the business world.

One well-known 2004 [study](#) showed, for instance, that job applicants with "African-American-sounding" names were less likely to be called in for interviews than those with "white-sounding" names, and the gap spanned all kinds of industries. Other [research](#) suggests that people start to apply stereotypes quickly upon meeting people they perceive as outsiders.

Even people with good intentions might [fall into the trap](#) of hiring people who are most like them.

If an organization does not evaluate whether its hiring process is fair to everyone, people of color and other minorities may never get a fair shot to work for it. But, as experts in nonprofit hiring and recruitment tell *The Chron-*

*icle*, organizations can take steps to reduce bias in their hiring practices.

**Take care when setting the minimum qualifications for positions.**

When developing a job description, think carefully about which skills a person actually needs to be successful. Sometimes the skills and experience required for jobs make it more likely that affluent — and mostly white — people will qualify. Sometimes, the requirements are simply proxies for desired traits.

"Often what [nonprofits] say they need as selection criteria doesn't actually tie to the job," says Monisha Kapila, chief executive of ProInspire, an organization that develops nonprofit leaders.

For instance, many entry-level nonprofit jobs require a lot of volunteer experience. But many low-income and minority college graduates work paid jobs while in school, reducing the likelihood that they'll spend a lot of



time volunteering. When these recent graduates compete for jobs at nonprofits, the lack of volunteer experience can put them at a disadvantage, Kapila says.

Instead of focusing on volunteer experience, she says, nonprofits might weigh relevant work experience more heavily.

**Ensure that recruitment goes beyond insider recommendations.**

In surveys, many nonprofits report that they favor recommendations from staff over other recruitment strategies. However, if your employees are mostly white, they may be more likely to have, and therefore endorse, mostly white friends or professional acquaintances, says Allison Brown, a consultant at Community Wealth Partners, a company that helps nonprofits create strategies to carry out their missions.

A 2014 survey found that 75 percent of white Americans have no minorities in their social networks with whom they discuss important matters, notes Brown, who has reviewed outside research on implicit bias on behalf of her firm, in part to develop practices to eliminate any bias in its hiring process. That suggests that leaving recruitment purely to endorsements from colleagues will limit who gets their foot in the door, she says.

**Reach out to minority communities.** Broaden your recruitment tactics to attract people of color and other underrepresented groups, Brown advises. That could mean circulating a job announcement to an email list or website with significant minority membership or readership, or staffing a table at a convention for an association or group

that serves people of color.

“When we’ve talked to organizations that have really representative teams, what they tell us is that they’re actively building relationships with communities of color, individuals of color, before the job even opens up,” Brown says.

To address a relative dearth of people of color applying for jobs, her firm is taking steps to build deeper relationships with organizations and alumni groups that serve people of color, she says. Community Wealth Partners also posts employment opportunities on job boards for graduates of Howard University, a historically black institution in the company’s hometown of Washington, D.C.

It’s equally important for people in leadership roles to expand their personal and professional circles, says Birgit Burton, founder of African American Development Officers, an organization that provides mentoring and networking opportunities for black fundraisers. “Be careful not to stay in your comfort zone” when networking, as tempting as it may be, she advises. Some members of her association are white, she notes, and they joined because they want to meet peers of color.

**Don’t let someone’s race affect your résumé-review process.** Block out names and don’t look at photos of candidates at this early stage. That way you’re less likely to identify a person’s race or gender. Brown says her firm started this practice two years ago and is seeing more candidates of color make it past the résumé-review stage.

Community Wealth Partners has also built standardized metrics for scoring candidates that focus on

skills rather than on things that might disqualify people of color, like what college they attended.

“We’re really looking at someone’s experience in a more objective way,” Brown says.

Her company has added a few more people of color to its staff since its implemented new hiring practices, she notes. Currently, seven employees identify as people of color while 16 are white.

**Have standard interview questions.**

It may seem extreme, but try not to have interviews be too informal and conversational, Brown advises. Implicit bias can enter into interviews when a hiring manager acts warmly toward candidates they unconsciously prefer, possibly offering “second chances” on questions or allowing perceived similarities with the candidate to affect their judgment.

“You might be less likely to do that if you’re talking to someone who has a really different background to you, or that you subconsciously don’t relate to as much, because you don’t see yourself in them,” she says. That’s less likely to occur if an interviewer sticks to a script.

Interviewers at Brown’s firm try to

stick to the same questions for each candidate throughout the talking stages, from initial phone screens to more in-depth interviews. It’s not easy to break the habit of conversing more informally, she says, but she believes it’s led to a process that is more fair.

**Set criteria for final recommendations.** Whether several people confer on a hiring decision or one person makes the call, it helps to have a standard scoring system for candidates that is as free from subjectivity as possible.

Kapila, of ProInspire, says her organization has a “selection rubric” that spells out in detail what interviewers are going to assess, such as whether someone applying for a program-manager job appears to have good interpersonal skills.

**Keep evaluating whether biases exist.**

At each stage in the process, from the initial job posting through interviews and the final recommendation, evaluate whether candidates of color or other minorities are being weeded out. “Then you can really focus on, Why is that happening?” Brown says.

# How — and Why — to Hire a Diverse Nonprofit Staff

By TIMOTHY SANDOVAL

**P**ROVIDING job opportunities to all kinds of people is the right thing to do, but it's also a strategy nonprofits should use to improve their performance, says Erin Okuno, executive director at the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition and contributor to the racial equity blog Fakequity.

The goal “isn't diversity for diversity's sake; it's diversity to achieve the mission,” she says.

Many nonprofits tackle big problems with limited resources. That makes them especially reliant on creative problem-solving, which often requires access to a variety of ideas. And lots of charities serve disadvantaged communities, and the goals and opinions of those in the community should shape the work of those charities, Okuno says.

For these reasons and more, it's important for charities to hire people with varied world views, say nonprofit leaders and experts in workplace diversity.

## Barriers to Better Hiring

But there are obstacles that prevent many nonprofits from ramping up their efforts to recruit diverse talent.

The first is that it can take a lot of time to develop a thoughtful plan, and few nonprofits have that resource in abundance, says Heidi Schillinger, founder and principal of Equity Matters, a consulting firm that specializes in workplace diversity. She also writes for Fakequity.

Another hurdle, she adds, is nonprofit leaders' fear of asking the communities they serve how to improve their work. Leaders often think “we're asking for funding, [and that] we don't want to stop and ask people what's wrong with us,” Schillinger says.

And a third is an unwillingness on the part of charity leaders to accept that their organization — whose purpose is to do social good — has fallen short in the realm of workplace diversity.

“Seeing themselves as doing good work in the world sometimes makes it difficult to admit that they're not doing good work

in this part of the world,” says Martin Davidson, a University of Virginia professor of business administration who researches how diversity improves organizational performance. “The organization can get defensive.”

### **An Intentional Attitude**

If you suspect your nonprofit and the people it serves could benefit from having a more diverse staff, the first step is to determine which backgrounds, perspectives, and skills it needs to better fulfill its mission.

“Looking at what you’re trying to do and designing for the population you’re trying to support and then [working] backwards is a great way to find the diversity you need,” Okuno says.

That thoughtful attitude is essential to the success of any effort to increase workplace diversity, says Davidson. Without it, even well-intentioned efforts can backfire.

“Having more diversity can make things much better or much, much worse,” Davidson says.

One myth he wants to dispel is that the only diversity that matters involves “race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation,” he says. “In fact, diversity is those kinds of differences, and also personality style and thinking style and class background and creative ability and work ethic. These are all dimensions of difference that may be very important when it comes to doing work.”

That means remembering that not all women or all African-Americans or all gay people have the same perspectives, Okuno says: “My experience as

an Asian-American is different from an Asian-American who came as a refugee. The Latino experience in New York is different from growing up in Texas.”

The bottom line, Davidson says, is that “it’s a mistake to mindlessly recruit people.” When there’s no clear understanding of why an organization is hiring people who represent different demographics, it can make old employees feel insecure and resentful and new employees feel like disempowered tokens.

### **How to Find, Attract, and Hire Diverse Talent**

If your charity’s staff doesn’t possess all of the traits necessary for the organization’s success, it’s time to start the sometimes-uncomfortable process of discerning why it hasn’t previously hired people with those qualifications, Schillinger says. That requires a “real, honest discussion” about race, gender, or other identities.

Only after your nonprofit has done the hard work of acknowledging its shortcomings is it ready to find, attract, and hire diverse talent, Schillinger says.

### **Here’s How to Start:**

#### **1. Rethink your job descriptions.**

To attract people different from those your nonprofit historically has hired, you need to create different job requirements, Schillinger says. Simply adding a line that encourages applications from people of color, or women, or people with disabilities, or any other underrepresented group isn’t



enough if you're looking to hire employees with different backgrounds, perspectives, and skills.

That might mean explicitly asking for fluency in another language or experience working with disadvantaged communities. Or it may mean accepting work or life experience instead of a college degree.

**2. Make your job postings accessible to people with disabilities.** Ensuring that people with disabilities can find and process job ads is important, as is providing reasonable accommodations to help people apply, says Kathy Bernhardt, director of business resourcing at Tangram, a nonprofit that supports people with disabilities.

Find guidelines from the World Wide Web Consortium for making your website accessible [here](#).

**3. Advertise jobs outside of your nonprofit's typical networks — and be creative.**

People have a natural tendency to socialize with others who are like themselves, Schillinger says. That means organizational leaders who want to hire different kinds of people often must search beyond their own networks and comfort zones. There are professional associations and online job boards for people of all demographics, which can be useful places to start.

But be creative in your search, Davidson advises. For example, he says, don't assume that the best black candidates attend historically black colleges and universities; plenty of qualified black students attend historically white institutions, too.

**4. Rethink your interview process.**

The traditional interview process may accidentally screen out qualified candidates who don't fit your nonprofit's existing mold.

Interviewers should be aware of potential differences in how candidates present themselves. For example, women tend to emphasize their collaboration skills while men emphasize their individual accomplishments, a difference that can hurt women during the interview process, according to Veda Banerjee, Johanna Bates, Michelle Chaplin, and Tracy Kronzak, who led a "women in nonprofit technology" session at the 2015 Nonprofit Technology Enterprise Conference.

And weighing the interpersonal exchanges in an interview too heavily in hiring decisions can put people who have disabilities at a disadvantage, says Bernhardt. They may be fully capable of performing job duties but uncomfortable in an interview setting.

**5. Be open about your efforts to improve.** As discussed above, nonprofit leaders can be especially reluctant to acknowledge organizational shortcomings related to race, gender, and other demographic traits. But during job interviews, they should be transparent about their goals to make the staff more diverse and the work environment more inclusive, Davidson says.

"The person looking for a job often is relatively sophisticated about diversity," he says. "They can walk into the office and see there's not much diversity here. The capacity of the hiring entity to be upfront about why diversity is important and what they're doing to try to create diversity is usually a

very strong selling point.”

Schillinger agrees that an open conversation conveys authenticity. Because it’s also important to make sure candidates don’t feel that you’re considering them just because of their ethnicity or gender, she recommends this kind of phrasing:

“We’re hiring for skill, and also we recognize that you would be one of a handful of people of color working in this environment. Here’s what we’re trying to do to support people of color in our organization.”

**6. Hire cohorts, not individuals.** It can be tough to be a pioneer in an organization, so Davidson recommends hiring people in cohorts rather than singly. The practice allows employees who are different from their co-workers to create a community of support, and it also balances the office demographics.

“If I want to increase gender diversity, I don’t want to just hire one woman, I want to hire two or three at the same time,” he says.

# 7 Pitfalls to Avoid When Building a Diverse Nonprofit Staff

By REBECCA KOENIG

ONCE YOU'VE determined that your nonprofit and the people it serves would benefit from a more diverse staff, you may be tempted to hire the first person you find who seems to represent the demographic you're seeking.

But hiring to increase workplace diversity is a delicate process, experts say. They advise managers at nonprofits to treat diversifying as an ongoing effort, not a finite task, and to realize that it will affect the way the nonprofit approaches its work.

**Here are seven pitfalls to avoid when trying to add new people and perspectives to your charity.**

## 1. Using a “check the box” mentality

For workplace diversity to be truly meaningful, it requires nonprofits to undertake transformative change, says Heidi Schillinger, founder and principal of Equity Matters, a consulting firm that specializes

in workplace diversity.

That means nonprofits can't think about diversity as a box to check once, says Erin Okuno, executive director at the Southeast Seattle Education Coalition. Instead, they should redesign their procedures and shift their cultures to embrace and require diversity, she says: “At the end of the day, if you're not fixing systems, you're going to re-have this conversation in two years.”

## 2. Talking without acting

Naming workplace diversity as a priority is a good step in the right direction, but making it a reality requires concrete work, Okuno says.

It's easier to talk than to act. For example, Okuno once advised a group that, despite having created a strong equity statement, didn't refer to it at all while developing a new strategic plan. The group would have demonstrated a much stronger commitment to diversity if it had incorpo-

rated its equity statement throughout the new plan, she says.

Nonprofits, she says, “continually have to think about [diversity], work on it,” and ask “how are we doing things differently?”

### **3. Singling out people who are different**

Employees who come from backgrounds that are underrepresented at a nonprofit may not appreciate having that fact publicly highlighted, says Kathy Bernhardt, director of business resourcing at Tangram, a nonprofit that supports people with disabilities.

“The last thing people with disabilities want is to be singled out or treated differently,” she says.

That means nonprofits shouldn’t assume that employees who have disabilities need extra assistance and shouldn’t inquire about job modification in a public setting. Employees who require accommodations will most likely address those in private conversations with appropriate managers, Bernhardt says.

### **4. Expecting all “diverse” people to be the same**

Hiring someone because of race or gender will not necessarily bring your nonprofit the new perspective it needs to thrive. That’s because all individuals have their own unique experiences, Okuno says. For example, she explains, a Chinese-American will bring something different to the table than a Japanese-American or a Vietnamese-American.

“Within race, you can’t just say we have to check the box of an Asian, an

African-American, and a Latino,” she says. “Even within those race categories, there are so many differences.”

So a nonprofit hoping to reach more Spanish speakers of Guatemalan descent shouldn’t necessarily hire a Spanish speaker of Chilean descent who may not understand the cultural specifics of the target population.

### **5. Expecting individual minorities to speak for whole groups**

Because everyone has his or her own perspective, it’s unwise and unfair to expect an employee from a minority group to speak on behalf of all other members of his or her group, Okuno says.

For example, that means nonprofits shouldn’t expect a black employee to be able to intuit how all black community members will react to a new program. It’s important to respect employees as individuals and not expect someone to speak for an entire demographic.

### **6. Not compensating minority employees for their skills**

Hiring employees who can connect with specific minority communities may make your nonprofit better suited to carry out its mission. But charities that expect employees to serve as liaisons or perform outreach duties should specify those duties in their job descriptions and pay for the time and effort that kind of work takes, Okuno says.

She hears often from people who happen to be bilingual that they’re called upon to provide translation services without any advance warning



or acknowledgement, which detracts from their actual job responsibilities.

“Are you paying them to do the outreach plus their job?” she asks.

### **7. Overlooking the value of diverse partners**

Even if nonprofits are willing and able to hire more diverse employees, not all nonprofits are well suited to work with diverse communities, Okuno says. She encourages charities that want to connect with minority populations to consider supporting grassroots nonprofits that already work closely with them.

If you don’t have ties to the commu-

nity, ask yourself, “Can you support another organization that does have the relationships?” she says. “Are they the better organization to get the work done?”

It can be more effective and respectful to support a grassroots program than to impose a new one from the outside, Okuno says.

“Communities often know the solutions to our own problems, but we don’t always have the resources, access, and funding to solve it right away,” she says. “People in positions of power can really support them and become good allies.”

# THE ROAD TO **DIVERSITY** STARTS AT THE **FINISH LINE.**

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Candidates for your Board of Directors, your C suite, and your staff are assessing their long-term prospects with you as much as you are assessing what they bring to your organization. And the details of the hiring process – everything from the way diversity is discussed to the initial job offer – can tell them a great deal about the workplace culture they will encounter when they are on the job:

- Will they receive individualized support that respects different employees' distinct needs?
- Will they be invested in as potential leaders, not just fill a demographic slot?
- Will they find that diversity is integrated into every hire, not just their own?
- Will they find you an ally in actively resisting identity-based pay and benefit gaps?

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