

CONSULTANT RESOURCES

for nonprofit boards on racial diversity, equity and inclusion



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Before searching for a consultant

Despite high levels of discussion about racial diversity, inclusion and equity in the nonprofit sector, [a 2017 study by BoardSource](#) found that 90% of board CEOs and board chairs are white. Both CEOs and board chairs find racial diversity as the area of diversity that most troubles them about their board, yet the demographics of board leadership showed no change from 2015 to 2017. Clearly, awareness is not the only barrier to racial diversity on nonprofit boards.

Even boards that are concerned about their lack of racial diversity often fail to prioritize taking action to address this concern. Creating a more diverse governing body requires meaningful action on the part of the board chair, and in partnership with the CEO. Many boards mistake hiring a consultant for board training as such an action. Consultants can support board members in understanding what actions they need to take and why, but cannot replace action on the part of the board.

What does “action” for diversity and inclusion look like?

There are many actions boards can take to ensure diverse and inclusive leadership, including:

- Creating an infographic that compares the racial demographics of the population your organization seeks to serve, and comparing it to the demographics of the staff and board of the nonprofit. This can make racial gaps in fiduciary representation clear. It can also make the presence of over-represented groups evident.
- Making a clear case statement for diversity as one of the highest priorities for the board, emphasizing ways that lack of racial diversity in governance threatens the ability of the organization to fulfill its mission.

- Articulating the ways that a commitment to racial diversity is required by your organization's vision and values. Consider making this an outward-facing public statement, not just an internal document.
- Designing a board recruitment plan that prioritizes cultivating new members from the communities, voices, and perspectives that are currently under-represented or missing from the board.
- Recruiting prospects from under-represented racial groups who bring the skills, relationships, and perspectives that the board needs. A racially diverse board must strengthen governance, not just improve optics.
- Placing a [moratorium on engaging new board members](#) from over-represented racial groups.
- Identifying elements of board culture that work against inclusion, and changing them. These may be formal or informal practices. These might include changing meeting settings or language. It may be creating planned or informal social relationship-building opportunities. It always includes attending to hearing thoughts from members who do not have long tenure or positions of authority within the board.

How can a consultant help?

Many board leaders seek the help of an outside consultant to guide and support this work. Before choosing a consultant, board leaders should be clear about what kind of consultative help they seek.

- **Training consultants** can help your board to understand why a focus on racial diversity is necessary; what the practices of inclusion look like; and why there is a relationship between your board composition and your organization's capacity to produce racially equitable outcomes. Many boards have one or more sessions of training to create a shared language for planning their diversity and inclusion actions.
- **Assessment and project management consultants** can document the current state of diversity on your board, and the opportunities and

challenges for inclusion. They can help the board to create an action plan, and support them in following through on those actions. This kind of consulting keeps the board focused and accountable for making concrete progress on diversity and inclusion.

- A **facilitator** who specializes in working on racial justice can help your board have productive, challenging conversations. Such conversations inevitably arise in organizations that are committed to becoming racially equitable and inclusive. Facilitation is often helpful when diversity and inclusion work moves beyond a set of tasks you must do, and becomes a shared expression of the kind of organization you want to become.

Your board may need a combination of training, assessment, project management and facilitation. Understanding your board's priorities, and what kind of support you need to achieve them, will help you to choose the consultant that is best for you.

Finding the right DEI consultant

There is a broad field of consultants who consult with groups working to value racial diversity and cultivate a culture of inclusion. How can you find the right one for you and your board?

What qualities should we look for?

You should select a consultant who has experience tailored to your organization's needs. This experience might include:

- A client list of nonprofits that are of similar size and structure to yours. Your needs and capacity will be different if you are a community-based grassroots nonprofit, a national membership organization, or a community foundation.
- A track record of consulting with nonprofits on other kinds of issues, and understanding the diversity, equity, and inclusion issues that nonprofit boards face.
- Black, Indigenous and/or other People of Color as lead trainers, facilitators and assessment consultants. Diversity, equity and inclusion work is best led by multi-racial teams that can model what practices of inclusion and accountability look like.
- Interest in meeting your organization where it is. If your board is struggling to have a beginning conversation about racial diversity, a consultant who helps multiracial groups build accountability for equitable program outcomes might not be the right fit for your group. Likewise, if you have identified a pattern of anti-black racism in your board's self-selection and priority-setting, a trainer who focuses on Introduction to Diversity may not be the right consultant for you.
- Experience working with your issue area or organizational type. There are consultants who specialize in racial diversity, equity, and inclusion work with all kinds of nonprofits: faith-based organizations, economic justice groups, environmental nonprofits, international NGOs, health

advocacy groups, community organizers, national networks, foundations and intermediary organizations, or educational institutions.

Places to find consultants

In many communities, your statewide or regional nonprofit support organization offers trainings about diversity and inclusion. Attending such a session together might be a good first step for a CEO and their board chair. Your community may be served by a regional support center like

- [Awaken](#) (California)
- [Center for Equity and Inclusion](#) (Pacific Northwest)
- [CompassPoint](#) (California)
- [Every Level Leads](#) (Raleigh, NC)
- [Forefront](#) (Illinois)
- [Third Sector New England /MissionWorks](#)
- [National Diversity Council](#) (Mississippi, Texas, Louisiana, additional regional chapters)
- [Visions, Inc.](#) (California, Massachusetts, North Carolina)

Or you may be a member of a national organization, like [the Alliance for Nonprofit Management](#), which regularly offers conference sessions, and virtual or online training about diversity, equity and inclusion. If you are a foundation or grantmaking intermediary, the [National Network of Consultants to Grantmakers](#) can help you to identify experienced consultants.

Your organization's funders may have relationships with consultants whose experiences and values align with your organization; some funders even have a small pool of resources to help their grantees retain consulting support to address the critical issue of racial diversity on nonprofit boards. Check with your local community foundation or with United Way, which often have a roster of vetted nonprofit consultants who work in your geographic region.

There are also independent consultants and consulting practices whose work focuses on diversity, equity and inclusion in social change organizations. Some leading national consultants in this field include:

- [AORTA: Anti-Oppression Resource and Training Alliance](#)
- [Bari Katz Inc. & Authentic Seeds](#)
- [Center for Urban and Racial Equity, LLC at ChangeElemental](#)
- [CompassPoint Nonprofit Services](#)
- [Crossroads Antiracism Training](#)
- Makani Themba of [Higher Ground Strategies](#)
- [Inca Mohammed of IAM Consulting](#)
- [The Luminaire Group](#)
- Maggie Potapchuk at [MP Associates](#)
- Mistinguette Smith at [M Smith Consulting](#)
- Gita Gulati-Partee at [Open Source Leadership Strategies](#)
- [ProInspire](#)
- [RoadMap Consulting](#)
- [Western States Center](#)
- [WhiteAwake](#)

Do Your Homework

Leading a board on the path toward racial justice and inclusion requires more than engaging a consultant or attending a training. You will need to be well informed about how to support a group in having discussions about racial diversity. Your board will look to you for leadership in addressing both new and familiar issues as you begin to see them through a racial equity lens. Your board books should regularly include educational materials to remind members why racial inclusion on the board is essential to achieving your mission.

The following is a brief list of resources to support you in cultivating a board that values racial diversity and practices inclusion as part of its work to make a more just world.

- [Race Forward](#) publishes the online journal [Colorlines](#) which provides in-depth reporting on race and social policy or social movement issues. They also sponsor the biennial national conference Facing Race.
- [Racial Equity Tools](#) is a searchable online library of tools, articles and resources to support individuals and groups working to achieve racial equity.
- Ijeoma Oluo's [So You Want To Talk About Race](#) is an excellent book for a group to read together, as is Ibram X Kendi's [How To Be An Anti-Racist](#). These books can provide a shared starting point for contemporary conversations about race and racial equity.
- White people are often unaccustomed to talking about themselves as a racial group. Robin DiAngelo's book [White Fragility: Why It's So Hard for White People To Talk About Racism](#) helps white people to understand, and change, the many ways they avoid talking about race. Not up to reading a whole book? It's in [article form](#), too.
- [Nonprofit Quarterly \(NPQ\)](#) has a regular section on [board governance](#), and does all of its reporting with a racial justice lens.

- [Grantmaking with a Racial Equity Lens](#) is an article written for an audience of grantmakers. However, nonprofit leaders may find it useful for understanding how their funders are beginning to think about racial equity. This points to why the racial diversity of your board, and racially equitable outcomes from your programs, are becoming important considerations when seeking grant dollars.
- Looking for a lighter take on the nonprofit sector? Executive Director Vu Le's [Nonprofit AF](#) is an irreverent blog about the scrappy, committed work of local nonprofits, while bringing a race-forward analysis to nearly every issue executive directors and board chairs face. He even has an (in)famous post about [addressing board diversity](#).
- If your board has the basics of diversity, but needs to move from talk to action, the [Fakequity blog](#) has a series of useful essays and think pieces on the gap between working for racial equity and "fakequity."
- [Race to Lead](#) is a series of papers on confronting the nonprofit racial leadership gap. Its most recent reports explore the role boards play in failing to hire women executives of color.

You Are Not Alone

You are taking the next steps in making your board a more powerful engine fulfillment of your organization's mission. Don't forget to talk with your program officer about what you are learning, and what knowledge, resources and connections you need to keep moving forward. We are your partners, working to make a more just world together.