

# BoardSource Wants You For New “Leading With Intent” Survey

05.23.19 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



**BoardSource**, whose mission “is to inspire and support excellence in nonprofit governance and board and staff leadership,” has been in the forefront of the movement to collect and analyze data on U.S. charities’ governance practices. The organization launched its first effort in 1994 and followed up the next year with a comprehensive report on and analysis of the responses by board CEOs and chairs around the nation.

“*Leading with Intent*” is BoardSource’s signature research study, repeated every two or three years. It is the only survey that gathers information from both chief executives and board chairs on their experiences in nonprofit boardrooms. It provides the raw data for BoardSource to “(1) track important information on current board composition, practices, and performance, (2) identify important trends and changes in board leadership over time, and (3) use this information to determine where and how it can best support the sector.”

BoardSource has just announced its newest survey that will be published in 2020. They invite and encourage “all CEOs and board chairs to participate in this survey and to share it with their networks.” But the window of opportunity is short: just one month ending May 24, 2019.

## ***The 2017 Survey***

In Evaluating Nonprofit Board Practices (November 7, 2017), we reported on the last triennial report, Leading with Intent: 2017 National Index of Nonprofit Board Practices.

According to BoardSource, the information on emerging trends is one of the most important results of each *Leading with Intent* survey. Some of it is “encouraging”; for instance, the information in 2017 that “there’s been a significant expansion of board engagement in advocacy” with over half “educating” policymakers about key issues of concern to their organizations. This is a significant

jump from 2015, when only 33 percent of board members engaged in this type of vital activity.

Some trends are “disturbing,” though: in 2017, “27 percent of all participating organizations reported that their boards include zero people of color.” That’s worse than in 2015, when that figure was lower: 25 percent. The results show that “current recruitment priorities indicate this is unlikely to change” for the better.

In addition to these two trends, the other significant findings from the 2017 survey include:

- “Strong understanding of programs is linked to stronger engagement, strategy, and external leadership — including fundraising.
- Boards that assess their performance regularly perform better on core responsibilities.
- Chief executives and board chairs agree that the board has an impact on organizational performance, and that two particular board characteristics matter most: the board’s understanding of its roles and responsibilities, and the board’s ability to work as a collaborative team toward shared goals.”

Here is a [link to download the 2017 study](#).

#### ***Springboard to New Projects***

BoardSource also takes the data that “signals ... a need for **additional focus or prioritized action**” and uses it to create new programs and initiatives. For example, in the 2017 *Leading with Intent* report included alarming data about CEO turnover and retirement coupled with a lack of planning for a succession. Almost a quarter of responding chief executive officers plan to leave in the next three years (i.e., by 2020) and only 46 percent of respondents reported being “extremely satisfied” with their jobs. But only 27 percent of participating nonprofits have a written plan for the CEO succession.

BoardSource then partnered with the Community Foundation of Greater Atlanta (which had found through its own survey that Atlanta nonprofits were similarly unprepared) to create a “cohort program, **Embrace the Future: Succession Planning for Nonprofit Organizations**,” to provide research-based instruction and guidance to its leaders.” The results of this venture were excellent: “100 percent of participating organizations developed a succession plan policy, an emergency succession plan, and departure-defined succession plan.”

Similarly, the data about lack of diversity on nonprofit boards also spurred BoardSource to “make an organizational commitment to supporting and encouraging boards as they work to **become more diverse, inclusive, and equitable** — and [they] are paying attention to this issue [themselves].”

#### ***New Survey***

On April 24, 2017, BoardSource issued a call for participation by “all chief executives and board chairs” in its newest survey that will be reported in 2020. The details are at [Leading with Intent: Your Participation Matters!](#). The deadline for participation is May 24, 2019. “This year’s *Leading with Intent* study will be the tenth iteration of the survey, which has shared data and insights from **more than 13,000 CEO and board leaders** within the sector across its history.”

#### ***Conclusion***

The deadline for participation is May 24, 2019. CEOs can [link here](#) to directly connect to the CEO survey; board chairs can [link here](#).

And there are prizes for joining in this important data search. If you ***complete the core survey***, you'll get a free PDF of a BoardSource book; your choice among seven titles. And if you take on an additional set of questions, your name will be entered in a raffle for two free registrations (CEO and board chair team) and lodging to the 2020 BoardSource Leadership Forum.