

A New Way to Diversify Nonprofit Boards

10.12.17 | Linda J. Rosenthal, JD



A frequent criticism of the nonprofit world is that boards of directors are primarily populated with people far removed in wealth, background, circumstances, and experience from the people these organizations are formed to serve.

There's talk, of course, that this should change, but discussions about increasing board diversity often lead to little action.

Now the City Attorney of Chattanooga, Tennessee, Wade Hinton, has created a model that may work well not only in that city but can also be used as a prototype in other regions. A new nonprofit website called Board Connector has been created: Its purpose is to connect people – especially women and people of color (and those who are both) – to nonprofit boards.

Diversity on Nonprofit Boards

“The [ethnic] disparity continues in governance, where nonprofit policies and programs are set,” according to the author of a 2014 article in “The Nonprofit Quarterly” titled *The Nonprofit Sector Has a Ferguson Problem*:

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BoardSource’s most recent survey reports that only eight percent of nonprofit board members are minorities, and 30 percent of boards lack a single member of color. Despite diversity rhetoric, nonprofits have made no progress in recruiting racial and ethnic minorities. The BoardSource survey found that while 63 percent of organizations say that diversity is a core value, the percentage of people of color on nonprofit boards has not changed in 18 years.

Board Connector is designed to meet head-on the all-too-familiar “excuses of ‘can’t find candidates’ or ‘candidates don’t have leadership and governance experience.’”

How Does it Work?

Board Connector uses a “headhunter” model similar to that used by businesses to reach out and find talent.

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The site catalogues expertise and recommends individuals whose skillset will enhance a given nonprofit. Candidates are asked to indicate their areas of interest, career status, and goals and upload a resume.

It’s a win-win: A nonprofit has easy access to a pool of diverse individuals that will enhance the accomplishment of the mission; the board candidate has a more targeted opportunity to give back to the community, use important skill sets, and gain valuable connections.

“Participating nonprofits register their interest in candidates” by indicating their organizational interest-areas and also agreeing to the following:

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By checking the box below, you are representing that your organization is committed to having an intentionally inclusive board of directors. Further, you are stating your commitment to diversity as an organization.

In addition to this key function of connecting candidates with organizations, Board Connector has important strategic partners including BoardSource, Executive Leadership Council, and African American Leadership Council, all of which are resources for board training and preparation.

Conclusion

Wade Hinton and Board Connector “plan to introduce and launch the web platform in cities throughout the United States” and are interested in getting input from other interested city officials.