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If you're a part of a nonprofit board, you probably know that diversity and inclusion have been at the forefront of recent conversations about board development. Yet most boards still lack diversity and have a hard time finding diverse board members. So what can you do?

Diversity is important because it helps your organization reflect and understand the communities that you serve. A diverse board offers a wider range of perspectives, expertise, and experiences that can lead to better decision making. That's one of the reasons why nonprofits prioritize diversity when recruiting new board members. Unfortunately, most boards are still not diverse. In fact, diverse talent represents only a fraction of total nonprofit board membership. If this applies to your organization, here are a few ways that you can build a diverse board member pipeline.

Start by creating a board member matrix. This means auditing your current board composition to identify any gaps in diversity. Look for patterns among demographics, skills, and life experiences. For instance, if you're a higher education organization, are all of your board members also alumni, or did it come from a variety of private, public, and technical colleges and universities? Your board member matrix should inform your objectives and your recruiting strategies.

After you gather this information, the next step is to define your board composition goals so that you can measure progress. This also helps create accountability. You might choose to increase representation of different ethnicities, genders, ages, abilities, socioeconomic backgrounds, or professions among other demographics. You also want to create a board member profile. Think of this as a written job description for a board member position that outlines the skills, experiences, and qualities that you are looking for in a board member.

Then as you begin your search for new board members, ensure that you're looking for candidates in new ways. Expand your network by attending events and conferences that tap into specific demographic groups. Build partnerships with other nonprofits and with your local historically black college or university, and look for board member candidates within the communities that you serve. The more you engage with diverse communities, the more you'll have the opportunity to identify potential board members.

You can also reach out to professional associations like the Association of Latina Professionals for America, or the National Gay and Lesbian Chamber of Commerce. Some boards also choose to engage board accelerators. These are organizations that specialize in training and connecting diverse professionals with boards. Throughout this process, make sure you're creating an inclusive environment for your existing board. Diverse members won't stay long if they don't feel welcomed, respected, and included.

Bias training and inclusive language classes for all board members and employees are two first steps that you can take. Additionally, it's a good idea to provide training in governance, fundraising, and other necessary skills. And finally, consider auditing your current board member application and interview process. Look for areas where biases may be sneaking in. This way, you can feel confident that each board member candidate is being evaluated solely on the strength of their skills and qualifications. Building a diverse board is an ongoing commitment, and the journey is as important as the destination. If you want help along the way, call CAPTRUST. We're invested in you and your team.

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