



Top 10 Dos and Don'ts When Bringing a BIPOC Intern onto Your Nonprofit Fundraising Team

--- *Birgit Smith Burton, African American Development Officers Network*

Over the past year, many organizations and consulting firms have recruited BIPOC fundraising interns in an effort to bring diversity to their organizations and serve as examples of how to be more inclusive in the nonprofit workplace. These organizations have not been shy about sharing the news in their blogs, email announcements, and social media posts. Often they've included a picture of the intern or a statement about how great it is to have someone who brings a "diverse perspective to our organization." Many aren't as aware that it's not just about identifying and recruiting diverse interns, it's about retention as well. BIPOC interns who don't feel they "belong" will often leave.

The African American Development Officers Network (AADO) receives phone calls and emails every week from nonprofit BIPOC staff members and interns who confide that they aren't being treated fairly but they don't know what to do or who to tell. They share experiences ranging from tokenism and micro aggressions to being on the receiving end of flat-out racially-charged comments. As a result, a group of us who are heavily steeped in diversity and inclusion work, put together what we hope is a helpful list of the top 10 dos and don'ts when bringing a diverse intern onto a nonprofit fundraising team. This is not an exhaustive list but hopefully it will be helpful to organizations that want nothing more than to provide an amazing and equitable experience for BIPOC interns who join their organization's fundraising team.

- 1.) Bring in more than one intern at the same time. If this isn't possible, then make sure they have a mentor of color on the team or from outside the organization. Someone they can speak with in confidence.
- 2.) Have the intern meet regularly with senior leadership so they can hear how the intern's experience is going and make changes where needed. This support must come from the top down.
- 3.) Ensure that "dress codes" are not onerous or restrict cultural traditions. Traditional dress codes are often based on very "white" expectations of what's acceptable or appropriate.
- 4.) Embrace the intern as a member of the team and do not "show off" that you have a BIPOC intern. Do not separate them out or create an "us" and "them" atmosphere. **DO NOT** send out a picture of

the intern. Include them in a group photo to show they belong as a member of the team. Ask the intern how they want to be a part of the work collective.

5.) Do not ask your Black intern if you can touch their hair. There is a history behind understanding how asking to touch a Black person's hair is likely to conjure up feelings of otherness and make them feel like they are on display, with their body being seen as entertainment.

6.) Have a conversation with the intern to learn what they hope to gain out of the experience. This is about their experience, not how the organization can be performative in diversity. Make it a meaningful and engaging experience they can take with them into their career and future in the workplace.

7.) Create a culture for your intern where learning is multidirectional. Seek to learn. As you warmly welcome a BIPOC intern, express a willingness to learn from their lived experience. To shift the power consider language such as, "you too can teach me", "we will try it your way", or "this is your decision".

8.) Create a meaningful opportunity for the intern to problem solve for your organization. They should never have to speak as a token, but should be encouraged to use their voice to create meaningful change and opportunity (both during their experience and afterwards).

9.) In addition to a mentor the intern should have a coach and a sponsor. Keep in mind a coach provides guidance and a sponsor is an advocate. You may need to reach out to colleagues at other organizations to fill these vital roles.

10.) Pay the intern! Do not hire a Black intern if the focus is not on them and what they will gain through the internship. The goal is not to improve your organization's public image but for the intern to have a meaningful experience that will lead them towards a successful career.

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